

The Royal Institution in Ancient Iran

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Abstract

In the thoughts and beliefs of Iranians, kingdom has had a history of the creation of human beings on the earth. Accordingly, Iranians believe that the first creature and human being on the earth was the first king of Iran. Iranians connects the history of their mythical royal dynasties to the creation of humanity. For Iranians, the mythical kings of Iran are the creators of the royal institution and the functions and duties of the royal institution have been established, developed and transferred to next generations by the measures of these kings. The objective of the present study is to investigate the establishment of the royal institution and the development of royal institution in ancient Iran by a descriptive-analytical method. The findings indicate that Iranians had specific sacredness for their kings and called the first creature of Ahura Mazda as the King. In addition, they believed that kings should perform particular tasks whose formation was attributed to the mythical kings of Iran. Further, they believed that only those persons had the right of being a king who were from the race of kings and were approved by Ahura Mazda.

Keywords: royal institution, ancient Iran, royal functions, royal requirements, Ahura Mazda

1. Introduction

In the thoughts and beliefs of Iranians, kingdom has had a history of the creation of human beings on the earth. The king was a sacred person who was appointed by Ahura Mazda as the king to organize the earth and people. Since the ancient, there had been a halo of sanctity around the head of kings. The king was the axis and basis of Iranians' political thoughts and he was both organization and organizer. Kings' functions are considered as the most important part of political discourses in ancient Iran. A king was an axis around which all the universe revolved; therefore, propriety and calamities of Iranians depended utterly on kings and their actions and intentions. Ancient Iranian determined certain tasks for their own kings and believed that each of these tasks were the results of the performance and heir of mythical Iranian kings who provided the grounds of the establishment of those tasks and then, they transferred them to their successors. Therefore, each king had a series of tasks to be conducted and obeyed. Along with royal functions, an important part of political thoughts of Iranians about the characteristics of the king himself. The king, in addition to having some responsibilities, should have a series of unique and royal characteristics in order that Ahura Mazda knew him as being qualified for becoming a king and Iranian people can obey his commands. Among the most important characteristics, one can refer to having the divine light (Far-e-Izadi). In this thought, if a person became a king, he should have had royal characteristics and enjoyed the divine light, and if a king became overthrown, it could have meant his violation of the royal functions, losing royal characteristics, and getting far from the divine light.

So far, no independent and specific research has been conducted on the establishment of the royal institution, kings' functions, and requirements of the royal status in ancient Iran. This issue is an encouragement for research on the desired subject matter. Regarding the unique status of the royal institution in ancient Iranians' thoughts and the individuality of power in ancient Iran as well as its turn on the basis of the royal institution, when a historical analysis of ancient Iran is based on a solid and firm foundation that we can access a comprehensive and complete knowledge of the royal institution in ancient Iran. In fact, this issue indicates the significance of the present study.

2. The Formation of the Royal Institution in the Mythical Era in Iran

In ancient Iranians' thought, the advent of the royal institution is connected with the creation of the universe and

the battle of Ahura Mazda with Ahriman (the devil). Ahura Mazda created the first human being. In a battle which was clear for Ahura Mazda, "He created the pious man for removing and defeating Ahriman and all devils" (Bundahishn, 2006). The first human being, after his creation, was considered as the privileged broker of piety and started to fight against Ahriman and his brokers. Based on Zoroastrian teachings, kingdom of the world belongs to Ahura Mazda and give everyone He wants the status of His agency in the world: "kingdom of the universe belongs only to Ahura, it is Ahura who appointed Zoroaster as the guardian of the poor" (Avesta, 1991). In Iranians' beliefs and thoughts, kingdom has a history as old as the creation of human beings on the earth. Accordingly, Iranians consider Kiomarsh as the first human being on the earth and know him as the first king of the world. In fact, Ahura Mazda named him as His agency on the (Birouni, 1984). After Kiomarsh, Houshang with the title of "Pishdad" attained the thrown of kingdom. He gave his title to the mythical kings after himself. Pishdad in Persian means the first judge who codifies the first laws and regulations, the first one who summons people to pray God, and etc. among his most important measures, like Kiomarsh, was to fight with devils. One of the royal functions formed in Houshang's era was to perform construction and development in the world. He taught a lot of living skills to humanity. Since his era, paying attention to peoples' social life and helping their lives are among the king's functions. Even, exploring fire is attributed to him and theSadeh Celebrationis thememorial of this important exploration (Sa'alebi, 1988; Birouni, 1984).

Among Iranian Pishdadi kings, Jamnshid, due to his measures, is more reflected in resources. In Iranian myths, Nowrouz is Jamshid's memorial which coincided with his sitting on the throne. At the time of Jamshid, for the first time, social classes were formed by him and since that, keeping the status of each of the classes was considered as the King's tasks. The king had the responsibility to keep the classes separate from each other and provide the necessary grounds for development and growth of people in a certain classes. Each king who could attain this issue, he was called a just king. According to Zoroastrian narrations, Ahura Mazda firstly suggested Jamshid to promote Zoroastrianism in the world, but Jamshid did not accept this suggestion, but promised to develop His world and safeguard it. To perform such a task, Ahura Mazda gave Jamshid a golden ring andlash which were signs of his kingdom and leadership (Avesta, 1991; Sa'alebi, 1988). Jamshid due to having had pride and boasting, claimed to be a god; therefore, the divine light got far from him and he was killed by the broker of Ahriman. As a result, the one-thousand era of Zahhak which was without the divine light (Ferdowsi, 2007). Zahhak took steps for devastating the royal institution and its functions and provided grounds for the fall of Iranian society, but at last, he was killed by Freydoun who was from the blood of kings. Then, Freydoun took the throne (Gardizi, 1984).

Freydoun revived royal functions devastated and forgotten in Zahhak's era. One of the functions which was formed in the time of Freydoun was his support from the fellow of art and knowledge as the main forerunners of culture (IbnBalkhi, 1965). The most important event in Freydoun's reign was the formation of Iranshahr with historical borders. This event had great influence on Iranian royal legacy and its royal functions. Before this event, Iranian kings had the kingdom of all the world, but Freydoun divided the seven lands among his three children. In this arena, Iranshahr was the share of the youngest child, Iraj. But, his other brothers who were dissatisfied of the way of division of the realm, killed the youngest brother and this issue caused enmity among the two parties. Since this period, the fight between kings and devils changed into the fight between the king and Turanians and being a warrior is among the necessities of a king (Haidarinia, 2007). The king should protect Iranian borders and prevent the invasion of enemies. He also should prepare his army for fighting and defending the invasion of enemies to the realm of ancient Iran.

When Kay Ghobad came to the throne, the period of Kianian government started in Iran. Kianian, as Pishadian, took steps in completing the functions of the royal institution in Iran. The most important measure done by Kay Ghobad was to determine the amount of water for lands and identify the name and areas of states and provinces. Kiani kings, as Pishdadi kings, were forerunners of fighting with Ahriman. In this era, there were severe fights between Iran and Turan as the Ahriman's broker and heroes had key roles in them. The most important event in the period of Kiani kings was the advent of Zoroaster. Zoroaster represented his religion to Goshtasb and he opened his arms towards this religion. By accepting Zoroastrianism by the King, protecting religion appeared as one of the royal functions. In eras before Goshtasb, protecting religion and kingdom were not simultaneous and even Jamshid did not accept both religion and protection of religion of Ahura Mazda. But, since the era of Goshtasb, kings exerted great efforts to indicate their own true belief and do their actions as accepted by religion. They tried to promote and protect Zoroastrianism and its followers (Tabari, 1984). At this time, in fact, by the marriage of Zoroastrianism with Iranian nationality and borders of Iran, the invasion to historical realm of Iran was considered as the fight with Zoroastrianism and caused that the fight of kings with enemies be considered religious.

3. The Royal Institution in the Parthian and Sassanid Eras

With the death of Dara, the son of Darab at the battle with Alexander, the period of the rule of Kianians ended. In Iranian's myths and history which have come to us from the window of the resources of the Sassanid era, there is no name of Achaemenid kings of their dynasty, and historians of Iran, after Islam which sometimes observed this dynasty in Hebrew texts, considered it not as Achaemenid but as a local dynasty. It seems that the Sassanids deliberately tried to remove the name and memory of Achaemenids from the historical minds of Iranian people. In Zoroastrian religious narrations, Alexander is considered as a "criminal" who devastated temples and transferred a version of Avesta to Rome and burnt the rest. In these narrations, Alexander is a broker who invaded Iran for removing religion (Bundahishn, 2006). On the other hand, due to deliberate measures of the Sassanid for removing the memory of Parthians, Parthians were introduced as the immediate successors of Alexander and there is no trace of Seleucids. The duration of their ruling over Iran has mentioned to be more than 200 years old in some not so valid resources. Ferdowsi states in this regard that:

I have never heard of them but a names/I have never seen their traces in manuscripts about kings (Ferdowsi, 2007).

Parthians who ruled Iran in 250 BC, considered themselves to be from the blood of Achaemenian Artaxerxes II and took themselves to be his successor (Mashkour, 1995; Yarshater, 2002) in spite of the negative attitude about them in the Sassanid era (The Letter of Tansar to Goshansap, 1976). The Sassanids considered themselves as the followers and revivers of Iranian Kings' traditions and known themselves as the survivors of the royal institution in ancient Iran. Since the time of Mehrdad II, Parthian kings called themselves great kings which indicates their familiarity with the royal institution and kings before themselves. At the time of the King, Iranian laws were codified. But, Sassanid resources tried to show Parthians as feudalists who devastated royal rituals. The objective of these narrations was to introduce Artaxerxes I Sassanid as the reviver of devastated traditions (the history of Artaxerxes Babakan, 1990; Colledge, 2001).

According to Sassanid resources, Artaxerxes was from the blood of kings and he was from the family of Dara the son of Darab; therefore, because he was from the blood of kings and the divine light was with him, he could come to throne (the history of Artaxerxes Babakan, 1990). Artaxerxes was the former of new national identity of Iranians for the first time in the history of Iran, in his era, a particularly unity and integrity appeared between religion and government (Christiansen, 1999). This issue gave Iran specific religious and political firmness and characteristics in relation with non-Iranians. Since this period, obedience to the formal religion was considered as the obedience to the Sassanid government. Considering the same both religion and government gave kings more power than their predecessors. "Religion and government both were born from one womb, they never will be departed and the reformation, corruption, trueness and firmness of both are the same" (the Letter of Tansar to Goshansap, 1976). Functions and necessities of the royal institution were completed in the Sassanid era. Sassanid kings considered themselves and brokers of Ahura Mazda who were to fight with devils and evil deeds. They considered their tasks as transferring goods and fighting with evils. In this era, this belief was formed that a good king transfers good deeds to the earth, while a bad king brings poverty and calamities. Oppression was among the affairs which brought a king among bad kings and it brought calamities to Iran (Birouni, 1984). In this era, functions and necessities of the royal institution became finalized and this great legacy transferred to the Islamic era. Constriction and development are among the functions of Iranian kings. The Sassanid kings exerted their efforts in construction and development of states. The function of constriction and development established from the beginning of the royal institution became significant in the Sassanid era. One of the aspects of this function was urbanization. Constructing a lot of cities are assigned to Sassanid kings. The increase in the population of regions and prevention of the ruin of cities as well as promotion of agriculture are in the line of construction (Masoudi, 1982; Farahvashi, 2000). Construction and development utterly depend on justice and fairness of kings. The most important concept interpreted from justice is protecting the realm of social classes and prevention from disturbing disciplines of these classes. Justice results in the firmness of governments, and oppression is the cause of the fall of them. A king should always be careful of his subordinates in order that they cannot oppress the weaker classes (Tabatabaei, 1989; Tabatabaei, 1996). Protecting borders is among other functions of a king in the thought of ruling Iran. In the Sassanid era, Iran was invaded by foreigners. The king was the guardian of the country in this thought and one of the most important tasks of the king was to protect the country. This thought was established since the time of Iraj and concurrent with the formation of historical borders of Iran. At the time of Sassanid kings, this dynasty exerted efforts to realize this thought. To protect the land, having army, establishing border fortifications, and having knowledge of the state of enemies and the bravery of the king himself were necessary. Protecting religion and rituals at the time of the Sassanid government was considered among the most important tasks of kings. These functions were formed since the

time of Gosshasb's tendency towards Zoroastrianism. By declaring Zoroastrianism as the formal religion at the time of the Sassanid government, protecting this religion was considered serious and every kind of action against Zoroastrianism was considered the government. Declaring the formality of Zoroastrianism originated from Artaxerxes I as the priest of the Temple of Anahita in Estakhr. The king was pledged to protect this religion at the time of coronation (the Letter of Tansar to Goshansp, 1976). Accordingly, in addition to protecting Zoroastrianism, the king should fight with deviation and the prevalence of other religions and help priests in this issue. Fighting with religions of Mani, Mazdak and Christianity were at this line. Supporting and constructing temples and coronation in fire temples all indicate kings' protection of religion.

4. Royal Necessities

Along with functions by which kings should survive their kingdom, there are necessities to attain the throne. This issue caused the survival of power in the royal dynasty and prevented the rebellions to attain the throne. Keeping the dynasty as the most important factor of sustainability and firmness of social classes were praised at all levels. One of the most important royal necessities in ancient era was to be from a royal blood (Rezaei Rad, 1999). Iranians accredited only a particular class which were from the blood of kings to be kings. All social classes had accepted that the only one who could be a king should be from the blood of kings. Even heroes and other elites who had high statuses, instead of claiming the throne, protected it. Kianian considered themselves to be from the blood of Pishdadian, and Parthians and Sassanids considered themselves to be from the blood of Kianian and claimed that the government had been within a family or dynasty; "Persians [...] do not consider anybody to be a king except the sons of Freydoun and think that if at the previous time, somebody other than the sons of Freydoun was a king, it is considered illegitimate (Tabari, 1984).

Enjoying the divine light is the most important characteristics of an ideal king in the thought of Iranshahr and is considered as an important factor in being successful and playing the particular role of a king. Far or the divine light is "illumination which is radiated by God on the heart of those who then are sublime. It is from the radiation of this light that somebody can come to the throne and deserves to be a just and fair king who is always prosperous. In addition, it is by the power of this light that somebody is adorned with spiritual perfections and is missioned by God to guide people" (Davood, 1978). In Iranian thought, those can get the throne who enjoy the divine light and those who do not enjoy royal characteristics, the light is avoided from him. When it is stated that somebody has the divine light, attributes such as kingdom, piety, wisdom, magnanimity, and aristocracy are induced in the mind of the hearer (Safa, 1968). In resources, two kinds of divine light have been mentioned. The divine or royal light and Iranian light. The main source of royal light is Avesta which was exclusive to kings and it was the origin of kingdom and prosperity. But, Iranian light was for all Iranians and it bestowed Iranian sheep, prosperity, grandeur, wisdom and knowledge (Tabatabaei, 1996; Soudavar, 2005). To reach kingdom, enjoying the divine light and the support of God were necessary. It should be considered that however the personality of an Iranian king was along with a halo of sacredness and divine light, the king's power depended on visible and invisible power which were in forms of influential dynasty, priests, and heroes present everywhere in the court, and whenever they felt that their benefits are in danger by the king, they got the divine light from the king and give it to another one. This issue indicates that power was absolute only theoretically and in reality, it had a plural and unofficial pattern. Among other royal necessities one can refer to health, education and grandeur. Iranians considered physical and mental health as greatly important and the disabled could not come to thrones. Kings should be healthy to be able to rule. In this line, training princes had great significance (Rajaei, 2006; Knauth, 1976). Training includes learning and exercising traits such as authority, justice, religiosity, and piety which all were the characteristics of an idealized king. Further, kings exerted greatly to keep their authority among people. In fact, not having authority was a barrier to coming to thrones. Accordingly, they usually avoided the public and used a veil in meeting with the public (Masoudi, 1982). Royal authority was a necessity for keeping discipline and performing justice in the society. Power and authority were basics of the discipline of the society and the survival of kings. The main difference of kings with the public was in their power of commanding. Keeping the authority of the king and his ruling depended on his wisdom, rationality and politics. The most important tool for practicing power and keeping the dominance of a king in the realm and land and keeping and protecting borders is the army. The king should be always aware of the state of the public, army and brokers. The king's awareness of the state of ministers and armies is necessary and being unaware of them can be dangerous for the king and his throne.

5. Conclusion

The royal institution has a history as long as the history of the creation of human beings in the thought of Iranians, and Iranians believe that the first human being on the earth was an Iranian king. He was created by Ahura Mazda to praise him and support good deeds. This royal thought belonged to Ahura Mazda, but elites who

had qualifications could be appointed as brokers of Ahura Mazda on the earth and He gave form his grandeur and light to them. An Iranian king, due to being as the agency of Ahura Mazda, in fact shows the grandeur and greatness of the god of ancient Iranians and He has a sacred and unreachable status. The selection of kings by Ahura Mazda is conducted by giving them the divine light; accordingly, the king is obeyed due to his divine selection. In addition to the divine light, a series of other principles and regulations determined a person worthy of the status of kingdom which was having the blood of kings. Further, enjoying physical and mental health, grandeur and authority and other acquired features were among the requirements of becoming a king. Everyone enjoying these characteristics and coming to throne should do a series of specific tasks which were the legacy of mythical kings of Iran. By these tasks were formed by these kings and transferred to other generations. Among the most important tasks one can refer to protecting religion, justice and fairness, protecting historical borders of Iran, and constructing and developing Iran. These functions and requirements continued in ancient Iran and completed, then their legacies were transferred to the Islamic era.

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