

The Ancestry of Iranian Women in the Sassanid Court based on Illustrated and Written Historical Sources

Abstract

An overall study on the extended periods of Iranian history indicates that the subject of ancestry is one of the significant political and social concerns which was closely related to legitimacy. For more than four centuries, the Sassanids ruled over a large territory of Iran and established an empire that was concerned with matters of purity of blood and originality of lineage. This matter was imperative both regarding paternal and maternal lineages. In order to maintain the purity of blood and ancestry, they recommended incestuous marriages. It seems that in the Sassanid dynasty, kings adopted Iranian and Aneiran wives, who are mentioned both in written sources and historical monuments related to the Sassanid era, such as the inscription of the Kaaba of Zoroaster. The dispute in this study is how this approach affects the status of women and their lineage in the Sassanid period. Hence, the goal of this research is to investigate the racial origin and lineage of Iranian women based on written and illustrated historical sources. The method of this research is analytical-descriptive and based on library data. The findings of this study show that during this period, the wives of Sassanid kings were selected more compared to the noble Parthian families, and it can be stated that in the Sassanid dynasty, at least at its commencement, the family title of these women, truly or as propaganda was used to legitimize the kingdom. In addition to these cases, examples of incestuous marriages are mentioned.

Research aims:

1. Examining the lineage of women in the Sassanid court based on written and illustrated historical sources.
2. Investigating the role of marriage in authority relations in the Sassanid period.

Research questions:

1. What effect did the issue of women's lineage have on political relations in the Sassanid period?
2. Can evidence of intermarriage be found in written and illustrated historical sources?

Keywords: Sassanids, court women, lineage, family, written sources and historical illustrations.

Introduction

The society of the Sassanid period had unique characteristics in terms of social status. The most significant of these characteristics was adherence to class and racial conditions. During the Sassanid period, there were large families of Karen, Soren, Espahbaz, Mehran, Espanyad and Zik along with the Sassanid family; But in the meantime, it was the Sassanid dynasty that had the right to rule for of its race. In fact, the Sassanids tried to maintain power in the Sassanid dynasty and property in large dynasties under the guise of the class system of Sassanid society, relying on the purity of blood and the originality of lineage and preventing the spread of property by the homeless. The recommendations of Tensor's letter are proof of this. Therefore, the Sassanid kings continually attempted to preserve this race and prevent the contamination of their lineage in the issue of marriage; even if they were engaged in inner marriage and incest. Sassanid kings also married women from neighboring countries, and there were many Iranian women in the harem of the Sassanid kings. According to the available evidence, the issue of race and the lineage of women in the Sassanid court was even involved in the struggles between the princes for power; An example of this can be seen in the succession of Shapur I (270 / 272-239 AD).

Considering the standing of the present subject of this research, by examining the lineage of the Sassanid Persian queens, it is strongminded to determine which families the Sassanid kings were most related to and the political goals of these marriages and its expected results. For this purpose, written and illustrated sources of Sassanid history have been used; Moreover, there is no book about Islamic-Iranian sources from the first and second centuries AH and we have limited sources from the third century AH, so the sources of this research are often related to the 4th century onwards and cover the 10th century AH.

Regarding the background of the present study, it should be said that no independent work has been written as such so far. However, articles have been written about women in the Sassanid period. An article entitled "Non-Zoroastrian women in the Sassanid court and their impact on policies related to religious minorities in Iran" has been written by Mitra Mirbakhsh et al. (2020). In this article, the authors discuss how non-Zoroastrian women became queens in the Sassanid court and the extent of their influence in political affairs, and in this work, there is no mention of the importance of racial issues for Sassanid court women. In another study entitled "Women in Sassanid coins" by Nasrin Sadat Shojaei and Effat Sadat Afzal Tusi (2016), has been written. In this work, based on the coins left from this period, women are analyzed and covered.

In conducting this research, inductive method (part to whole) is used and the method of writing and compiling materials is analytical-descriptive. Also, the sources and materials cited and used in this research have been collected in the form of libraries and archives.

Conclusion

With the coming to power of each dynasty, the connection of the leaders of this dynasty with women from the previous dynasty is a phenomenon recurrent in history; If in the reign of Darius I, he married the daughters of Cyrus the Great (the wives of Cambyses) and the daughter of Berdia. Also, Alexander married the daughter of Darius III and the daughter of an aristocrat from Sughd; also Seleucus I married Apame. These marriages both increased the legitimacy of the new dynasty and removed potential claimants to the monarchy for the connection it established with the previous dynasty. By examining the written and illustrated sources of Sassanid history, it becomes clear that the Sassanid dynasty also used this rule to legitimize, strengthen and reinforce their dynasty. If one of the first steps in the formation of this dynasty of marriage of Sasan with Ram Behesht, a girl from the dynasty of local kings of Persia, was Bazrangian and the continuation of this in the marriage of other leaders of this dynasty such as Ardashir with the

daughter of Ardavan and union with Parthian family and Shapur I with the daughter of Mehrkushah, we see local kings and Parthian survivors. Thus, by establishing a relative connection with the previous dynasty, the local kings, in addition to legitimizing their monarchy, closed the way to the candidates to the monarchy. Of course, the validity of these marriages can be doubted and these legitimacies can be considered related to the time of writing the Goddess letter or it can be considered as an indication of the continuing power of Parthian families in the Sassanid period. In Sassanid society, where race was characteristic of Sassanid kings and other families were deprived of power, and lineage and blood ties played an important role in the ideology of the purity of blood and race among the Sassanids; women of large families, including the Parthians, played a significant role in court politics throughout the Sassanid rule as court ladies and perhaps surrogate mothers. On the other hand, we find evidence of marriage in written sources that can be found along with confirmation from historical monuments such as the Kaaba of Zoroaster and examples such as the marriage of Ardashir and his sister Dink and the marriage of Shapoor Ravel and his daughter Azaranahid checked. Therefore, it seems that the two main issues of gaining legitimacy and protection of political power in the royal family have been the main reason for the prevalence of these marriages among the Sassanid family.

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