

The Religious Policies of the Sassanid Sovereigns and its Reflection on the Stone Reliefs of Persepolis

Abstract

Religion had its peaks and valleys during the Sassanid period from its foundation to extinction; which lasted more than four centuries. The role of Ardeshir Babakan, the founder of the Sassanid dynasty is prominent. Through interaction with Zoroastrian clerics, Babakan used their fire temples and agents as a political tool and a key factor in consolidating the foundations of his government. After Ardeshir's death, his successors continued this method. During the reign of Bahram, I (271 AD), Carter, an influential Zoroastrian cleric, was able to make Zoroastrianism the official religion of the country. Also, the cultural view of the kings, according to which the legitimacy of the monarchy was justified, was of great importance as a strong religious concept for the Sassanid kings and Ardeshir himself. Meanwhile, Tensor's letter and Cartier's works played the most important role in the formalization of Zoroastrianism during the Sassanid period. Persepolis was also considered as a ritual center and as a symbol of the glory of the Achaemenid Empire, where the uprising of Iranian families, particularly the Sassanids, took place. The reflection of the religious policies of the Sassanid period in parts of Persepolis such as Tachara Palace, Naghsh-e Rostam, Naghsh-e Rajab and the Kaaba of Zoroaster in the form of embossed stone and inscription is clearly visible. The method used in this research is descriptive-analytical and the researcher has used library method to study the religious policies of the Sassanid period and its reflection in the Persepolis complex.

Research objectives:

1. To study the process of formalization of Zoroastrian religion in the Sassanid period.
2. To study the reflection of the connection between political and religious factors in the Sassanid period in the relief stones of Persepolis.

Research questions:

1. What are the contexts and grounds for the formalization of religion in the Sassanid period and the factors affecting it?
- 2 How are the religious policies of the Sassanid period reflected in the reliefs of Persepolis?

Introduction

Embossing or carving on a rock is one of the most ancient Iranian traditions. The kings of the time applied this method to enchant their desires and thoughts, as well as to celebrate important events or to show symbolic scenes. These valuable historical monuments, often erected along roads, passages, springs or rivers, not only provide researchers with valuable information about the artistic styles of the time, but also valuable data that can be used to help historical events, political and religious situations. And rebuilt the social systems of the time. Embossments are very important in research and recognizing and interpreting embossed scenes has always been a topic of discussion and research. With the coming to power of the Sassanid Empire, the creation of embossed stone and stone was flourished and the Sassanids

were able to bring the art of sculpture to its peak. The Sassanid kings' approach was more prominent in commemorating important political and religious events during their reign, including coronation and victory in war. These carvings celebrate the victories of the Sassanid kings over their enemies, show the confirmation of their kingdom by the Iranian gods and reflect the pride and greatness of a new and powerful dynasty (Rezaeinia, 1387: 35).

The Sassanid dynasty, which dreamed of renewing the glory and grandeur of the Achaemenid period and establishing a strong government in the history of ancient Iran, pursued the realization of this ideal in the light of political and religious unity. Although Ardashir Babakan, the founder of the Sassanid government, united Iranshahr after his victory over the last Parthian emperor and monarchy, the consolidation of the new system was possible only in the shadow of a centralized administrative and political organization and the recognition of national religion. Hence, religion in the Sassanid system enjoyed important functions in various areas of Iranian society. However, Zoroastrianism, as the national religion with which the Sassanids began their political endeavors, did not initially have the necessary capacity to be recognized. The lack of a single religious text and the dispersion of the bases of the Zoroastrian religion, which is introduced as a consequence of the invasion of Alexander the Great and the monarchy, were the most important obstacles to the formalization of the Zoroastrian religion. Therefore, the first Sassanid kings, with the support of the Zoroastrian clergy, began an important endeavor in this direction and, in the valley of the ups and downs process, formalized the Zoroastrian religion in Iran (Al-Hayari, 2007: 76-59).

According to documentation, the relationship between religion and politics has been consistent throughout the monarchy. What distinguishes this study from other studies is the connection between Sassanid religion, politics and art in the Naghsh-e Rajab region, on which less extensive research has been done. In the above study, by studying a case of several Sassanid lithographs near Shiraz called Naghsh Rajab, an attempt has been made to analyze the political and religious relations of the Zoroastrian kings and clerics of that time to describe the works and express religious reflections on the rocks. According to the narration of Sassanid rock paintings in Fars region, the political and religious purpose and vision of the kings who tried to unite religion and politics were evident and they were always accompanied by Zoroastrian priests for the realization and legitimacy of their kingdoms. Kings and clerics considered themselves the promoters and preachers of the Zoroastrian religion. This policy led to the establishment of Zoroastrian clergy foundations, symbols and organizations in different parts of Iran. The regular administrative organization of the Sassanid clergy was a function of the political, religious and social events of this kingdom. This organization and its mechanism were based on the pattern of monarchical power and formed and grew in parallel. Hence, the documentary and historical reports of the Sassanids on the relief stones are a proof of national and religious unity and also the legitimacy of the Sassanid king by Ahura Mazd, as the representative of God.

Conclusion

The findings of this study, which aims to explain the relationship between religion and government and the thinking of the religious rule of the Sassanid kings and its manifestation in the lithographs of this period show that the use of lithography to show the bright and sensitive moments of Sassanid kings, in addition The expression of aesthetic concepts and values and the degree of its elevation is a diagram of history, culture, ideals, beliefs, religion and political system that is best reflected and immortalized in the art of stone carving. The relationship between art and religion in Iran has always been an important issue in the history of culture. Religion is known as the inspiring force of art and art is the essential servant of religion.

The history of Iranian art proves the correlation between art and religion. After ascending the throne, the Sassanids made the Zoroastrian religion the official religion of Iran, and the basis of their domestic policy was the harmony and unity of religion and government. Therefore, the link between religion and government has always been one of the fundamental components of political culture in Iran. In many prominent Sassanid influences, kings are taking the divine from Ahuramazda. The connection of the monarchy with the Zoroastrian religion at the beginning of the formation of the Sassanid power in the unification of Iranian society and social and historical awareness was effective in better recognizing the Iranian identity and integrated the Iranian identity.

In the Iranian worldview in the Sassanid period, the Shah is the representative of God on earth and is approved and supported by God, and his main duty as a symbol of government and sovereignty is to spread religion. The reciprocal duties of religion and government are to increase each other's power and something that has been considered by Zoroastrian clerics and the Shah. Religion and government were two brothers who had to support each other and guarantee each other's survival and growth. The purpose of creating the reliefs was historical, ritual and propaganda purposes. One group of reliefs was written to record and immortalize events and show the glory of the kingdom, and another group was written to promote political and religious power. The theme and purpose of the reliefs studied, showing the divine kingship of the king that led to the consolidation of the pillars of the monarchy and expressing its greatness and legitimacy, and reliefs with religious themes such as giving power and worship have the largest share of designs.

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