

Study the Reasons of Growth and Flourishing of Music During Sassanid Period

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Abstract. With no doubt, from the beginning of creation, man has had a close attachment and affection to music, the emergence of sound which has been considered as the first needs of human. Music has been used in any territories, depending on the type of ideology and ceremonies, and sometimes, in form of other media such as theater, rituals and/or in today form. Iran; too, is one of the countries in which, music has always had its special and prestigious place. Although, it cannot be specified the exact time when academic and advanced music developed in this land, the historical books and archeological documents have testified that music had a great importance during Sassanid era in Iran. By studying the reasons and causes involved in the growth and flourishing of music in that era and the effective factors in it, based on the 29 figures and pieces with music subject, the enthusiasm and passion of the Sassanid kings to music beauties and its performance in all affairs of life, including hunting, travels, religious ceremonies, recreation have been proved. There was another factor that played a role in that passion; that is, the communication between Iran and the Roman and Greek empires that led to the trends to mix the cultures and general combination of Iranian culture in a vast range and the affection of Iranians in that respect which has been recorded. The last factor was the prevalence and the creditability of music in religious rituals and gatherings. In the present research, information has been collected by using literature review, and field survey; and its analysis has been in descriptive- analytical and inferential methods.

1. Introduction

With no doubt, the Arab's invasion to Iran caused an emergence of cultural and arts changes in the path of the cultural civilization of this great land; the culture and art that is rooted in the history and its roots and pillars have survived as strong as the great columns of *Takht-e-Jamshid* after several centuries and bearing frequent invasions. One of the significant cultural and arts examples of the Ancient Iran is its music media and its valuable place. The archeological findings are among the

most important documents that reveal the presence of music in the ancient Iran. They show that the expansion and penetration of cultural geography of ancient Iran had gone way beyond the present ruling geography of Iran and those archeological searches in the neighboring lands surrounding Iran; too, have played important roles in completing researches on the music in the ancient Iran; so that history of music civilization in Plateau of Iran could not go farther than Achaemenides by relying on notes that were found in the historical ancient texts on that subject, prior to the acquisitions of those searches; for instances, the remarks found in the works of Herodotus and Xenophon, the Greek historians that had provided some descriptions on the presence of music in Achaemenides period. Nevertheless, the archeological findings today testify that the history of music and Iranian musical instruments in the Iranian civilizations goes back to millenniums before the Achaemenides period and could be traced back to the Elam (Susiana) civilizations as well as smaller civilization zones in the Plateau of Iran. The figures and frescoes and wall painting carvings remained from the music instruments and music players in the ancient period of Iranian civilization are as old as seven thousand years. The authors of this paper plan to specifically discuss the causes and factors in the growth and flourishing of music during Sassanid period based on the existing sources, including the written works that have survived to this date, frescoes and the artistic pieces remained from Sassanid period, as well as reliable internet sources. The data collection is literature review and written works, the sampling method is non-random and the number of samples is thirty six figures and pieces with the topic of music, as remained from Sassanid period or related to that era. The data was analyzed by using descriptive-analytical and inferential.

2. Research history

The oldest historical evidence on the existence of scientific music in ancient Iran is the paintings found in Cheghamish of Khuzestan (pic no. 1), dating five thousand years ago. The figure shows a music group that is playing string, precaution and wind instruments and a singer/11/. In addition, two small clay sculptures of two music players, found in Shoosh in 2000 BC are evidences of this claim (pic no.2,3). Although from the rise of first imperial kings of Iran, which was by Cyrus in Achaemenides era until the arrival of Islam to Iran, Sassanid period was the peak of music arts, unfortunately, there has been no books that specifically discussing or noting the music in that period with Sarkash and Barbod musicians who shone in the sky of the ancient Iranian arts and there remains no book or writing on many themes, tones and roots of modal music of Iranian land that emerged from that period. These points are only discussed in the books that have been written on the history of Iranian music and there have been only few authors that have written books on the music of that period and even there, only few chapters or sections are dedicated to this subject. So far, no book or paper that specifically discusses the music in that period has been published. Among the existing books and papers, one may note the writing of “Taghi Binesh” and his articles on the history of music; and “Rouhangiz Rahgani” and her book on the history of Iranian music in which, music is not studied from musicology point of view, but rather from the historiography viewpoints. “George Farmer”, the famous orientalist; too, in one of his books made a brief note on the music of Sassanid period. In addition, “Roman Ghirshman” the contemporary French archeologist in some parts of his book on the Iranian arts during Sassanid period has made some remarks on the courtfeasts; dance and music by considering the pieces remained from that period. It must be noted that music in ancient era was not an independent and separate art, but a part of other social ceremonies and rituals, including religious, feasts and battle operations and some of the rituals and ceremonies that are performed in Iran more or less, are remainders and memories of ancient music traditions, and with respect to the frequent evidences and historical documents, in authors’ view, studying music during Sassanid period requires more attention and survey on different aspects; for, Sassanid period in the history of Iran and East was of great importance not only because Iranians had powerful government in that time, but also because the cultural and bureaucratic effects of that

period survived for many centuries after the fall of Sassanid rulers and became the model of future governments.

3. Explaining the problem

Based on the existing sources and studying the frescos in this period, and comparing them with previous periods, it seems that more attention was being paid to science and arts; particularly, to music and the professional singers, instrument players and musicians had found a favorable and popular status in the courts of kings as far as the musicians had found great prestige and status in the royal courts of Sassanid kings. In the process of this research, the causes of music growth and flourishing during Sassanid period have been studied and in this approach, there are some questions that include:

- 1- Did the passion of Sassanid kings towards music, celebrations and feasts, and using them in all affairs of life, including hunting, trips, religious rituals and entertainment lead to the popularity of music in that period?
- 2- Did the communications of Iran with Rome and Greek empires, with respect to the general trends and passion of Iranian culture to mingle and mixing in a large extend, and its affection in that period lead to the propagation, improvement and domination of music in that period?
- 3- Did the propagation, prevalence and creditability of music in the foundations and religious rituals and code act as one of the factors and growth of music during Sassanid period?

4. A brief study of music in Sassanid period

Sassanid (226-651 AD) were Arian people who were habitants of Fars Province. This dynasty took its name from the name of its ancestor, Sassan. The Sassanid was the last and seventh dynasty that ruled Iran prior to the rise of Islam. Sassanid ruled over Iran for more than 400 years. During that period, the centralized power found sovereignty in Iran and succeeded the scattered powers and by gradual absorption of arts and artists to the court, the ground was prepared for the growth, advancement and development of artists, especially musicians. Literature, Manes's paintings, *Khodaynameh*, *Karnameh Ardeshir Babakan (Papakan)* and *One Thousand and One Night* books are among the valuable works in this period. Not only people showed interests to science and arts, but also some kings showed to be supporter of promotion of knowledge and arts; as *Bahram Gur* was famous in composing poems, *Anushirvan* in legislation and *Khosrow Parviz* in identifying artistic pieces and encouraging artists. In the 430- year of Sassanid government, around forty kings rules, among them, four kings were more important than all, *Ardeshir Babakan (226-241 AD)*, *Bahram the fifth* known as *Bahram Gur (430-439 AD)*, *Khosrow the first* or *Anushirvan (531-578 AD)*, *Khosrow* or *Khosrow Parviz (590- 628 AD)*. It was during their time that some changes were made in the country's situation and musicians; a summary of those changes is as follows:

Ardeshir Babakan who was the founder of Sassanid dynasty respected music and musicians extensively and believed them to have special place. He promoted the rank of professional singers and musicians and included them among the royal court members. He divided the court in seven groups and placed the musicians in the fifth rank. In "*Karnameh Ardeshir Babakan*" remarks have been made to the music playing of the *Yong Ardeshir*.

Bahram the fifth was the 15th Sassanid king and during his sovereignty, Iran grew and flourished very much. During his youth, he traveled to Hira to acquire knowledge and science under tutorship of *Na'man Laqmi*, one of the rulers of Hira. *Bahram* acquired various sciences and techniques and taught music. He promoted the musicians' rank in the court from the fifth to the first rank, as during *Khosrow Qauatan (Anushirvan)* the professional musicians had the same rank. Among the important accomplishments of *Bahram*, one may note his settling the conditions and status of the musicians and singers in the court. It is said that *Bahram Gur's* enthusiasm towards music was so much that he would not neglect music even during hunting activities. According to *Shahname*, *Bahram the fifth (Gur)* used to set four treadles on a strong camel (one pairs of gold and one pairs

of silver) and he would ride on the golden treadles and would have a music instrument player sat in the silver treadles to play harp for him during hunting. Bahram Gur's love and fondness to music caused that despite having thousands of music players and singers in his court, he ordered people to work half of the day and have fund and pleasure the other half; therefore, after capturing Sand and Makran from the King of India, asked Shengel or Shanglet (the Indian king) to send for him few thousands music players from India to Iran and sent them to the cities and villages to keep people happy (pic no. 4,5,6,7,8).

Khosrow the first, despite reducing the professional musicians' rank to fifth, according to some narrations, he not only made a full support to music and tried for its progress, he himself was also familiar with music and could play few instruments.

Khosrow the second or *Khosrow Parviz* whose ruling period was the peak of flourishing of art and the golden age of music (particularly feasting music). The importance of music in that period was so high that there was a position in the court as the ministry of music and a person was officially recognized as the minister of music in the royal court. The rise of geniuses in music such as Barbod, Sarkash, Ramtin and Azadovar Changi, in the music of this period, whose names survived in history reveals that he paid more attention to music even more than his predecessors.

The writings of historians such as Herodotus and Xenophon show that in that period, music existed in three forms of military, court ceremonies and popular or folklore. The military music in that period aimed at causing fear and terror in enemies' heart and lifting the spirit, brevity and fearlessness of soldier who used to fight almost without any weapons. This type of music was very important. Among examples that have been given in Middle Farsi of Manes, it could be interfered that Sassanid used music as a trick in war. In that period, the sound of each instrument implied a special concept, for example, trumpet sound meant attack, drum meant following and pursuing and other instruments, in that manner, implied other meanings. Trumpet was the most important battle music instrument which was perhaps made of bronze or copper (pic no.9). In *Shahname*, too, the long trumpet (horn) is described as the musical instrument used for battlefield. The court music was mostly played during hunting or in travels and was a common music in that period. The musicians were accompanying persons of the kings in hunting and trips and music playing or singing during hunting was not only for amusing and entertaining the hunter, but also for tricking and attracting the prey too. The two excavated hunting scenes in *Tagh-e-Bustan* in Kermanshah is a significant attribution of this type of music. In one of the scenes that shows hunting a wild boar (pic no. 10), the Sassanid king are standing on the royal boat, have stretched the arc and are shooting arrow and the musicians are in three simpler and smaller boats. Herzfeld states that the veranda was built during *Khosrow* the second (590-628 AD). In this figure, three boats are accompanying *Khosrow*'s boat and in two of them, women are playing harps ((pic no .11,12) and in the third boat, there are women singers, a group of them are clapping hands (pic no. 13). In another scene that pictures deer hunting, the king is riding a horse and the music players and singers are placed on a platform that views the hunting place to be kept safe from the attack and possible danger of beasts. (pin no.14,15,16). Another type of music application in that period was religious music (pic no.17). Manes, the Iranian prophet "believed the basis and status of singing very high and made a great effort to propagate, improve and expand the religious music in his religion". Mazdak; too, recognized music as one of the Minouvi (heavenly) forces and the chief musicians (head of the music group) was one of the four nobles and respected persons of the king – alongside the highest priest, lower priests (Hirbods) and generals. By studying in Manes's works and the themes remained in their hymns, one may say that temples had their special music and the themes survived from there showed that the music was specifically made for those rituals and ceremonies. The music instruments which were used in the religious ceremonies, one may note drum, harp and long flutes. In addition, chorus was in hymns singings; the procedure was that, an instructor (leader of chorus) would start the hymn and the chorus would repeat it.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Fortunately, there are abundant historical documents and evidences that could be used to study the music in that period. That period was the time of promotion and great leap of music in Iran, as an art which had a great place among the kings. The studies that have been performed by reviewing historical books and the frescoes and walls carvings remained from that period reveal this claim that music was considered as one of the important civilization factors of Iran during Sassanid era. As discussed before, not only people showed passion and enthusiasm towards science and art, but also, some of kings were supporters of promotion of knowledge, science and arts; as Bahram Gur was famous for composing lyrics and poems, Anushirvan in legislation and Khosrow Parviz in identifying the artistic pieces and encouraging artists. In *Karnameh Ardeshir Babakan*, it is written that before founding Sassanid dynasty, he was a lute player, hymn singer and fan of music and singing. The records of historians, figures on cared silver dishes (pic no 18-33), the tiles that were found (pic no.34) in Bishapur, Kazeroun, and the carved and excavated figures of that period (*Tagh-e- Bustan*) too show the enthusiasm of Sassanid kings towards music and singers in their feasts, trips, battle and hunting, not only for entertaining hunter, but also for tricking and attracting the prey. Another sign of enthusiasm and passion of the kings in that period towards music was promoting the social rank of musicians. The attention and interests shown by the noble court people to music led to the improvement and growth of music as far as the religious hymns, the national and local singings and for the first time, the lyrics that sourced from important events were composed and sang in that period.

Art and music of Sassanid period was mostly specified to the court and the folk music moved its social path apart from the penetration and influence of court and kings. In Pahlavi, Arabic and Farsi books, when court music was discussed, it must be said that music was a fixed items of royal feasts, ceremonies, parties and joyful gathering of the ancient Iran (pic no.35,36). Another sign of enthusiasm and passion towards music in this period, in addition to the Zoroaster's hymns, one may recall Schools of Manes and Mazdak. It seems that with respect to the appearance of Mazdak during Sassanid, the daily life was more mixed with religious ceremonies, codes and rituals, because, Sassanid had started their ruling with a culture based on loving Iran, race, blood and return to past traditions with Zoroastrian religion and Mazdisnais core. The religious policy of the Sassanid from its initial political leaps was based on the tie between religion and imperial, the importance of music, was considered among the fundamentals and basis of Mazdak religion too. In this code, music had a special place; for example, in his religion, the joy force which is the representative of music had the same importance as the other three forces (consciousness, mind and memory)/11/. During Manes's time that rose before Mazdak religious teaching was accompanied with music instruments playing and singing. In his view, music had a high rank (pic no.21,22). In Manavi caves that have been found in various part of Shin Zhian (China), there are some paintings that show the musicians that are playing various very ancient Iranian music instruments/6/. During Sassanid, chorus played a religious role. The professional musicians would gather around temple of fire and would sing the Gatha and other religious hymns from Avesta five times a day with rhyme sounds. People; too, used to recite Avesta in form of religious hymns. All these are evidences to prove the claim that music in the religious rituals and codes of that time was a favorable art and since there has always been a close tie between popularity of an issue in a religious ritual of a period and people's affection for that code; in this period too, the popularity of religious music played a significant role in providing grounds for the growth and flourishing of music in the society. Several centuries prior to Sassanid, Iran had once been dominated by the Greek and since Alexander had put the destruction of national culture of Iranian in his top agenda, Greek style life became a common practice and the culture of that period took a Greek theme and color. To achieve this goal, when Alexander selected Babel as the capital of his empire, in order to combine the Iranian and Greek culture, he marriage the daughters of Ardeshir the second and Daruis the third. He ordered that some of his commanders and more than ten thousands of his army to marry Iranian girls. This

was one of the reasons of encouragement and motivation of scholars and scientists to teach and learn in Iran and the lands under Alexander's sovereignty. Although, the Greek's domination did not last long, it needed a long time to clear the impacts of that period from the Iranian culture. After the rise of Ardashir Babakan in 224 AD, the Iranian territory included all Arian lands from Transoxiana to Euphrates that were the place of exchanging various cultures and civilizations. During Anushirvan, the learned men of Alexandria took refuge in Iran and were accepted in Anushirvan court. Those learned men were accepted in philosophical and religious discussions. During this period, efforts were made to translate the results of thoughts and studies of different nations and people into Pahlavi language and use them for completing the Iranian science. During his time, for the first time, Iranians became familiar with the Greek sciences. During the rule of Shapur the second, Nestorian (Gregorian) seek refuge in Iran because of his disputes with other followers of Christianity (Jacobite) and Shapour built a school in Jondi Shapur to replace Odessa school. He invited Theodore (Theodosius), the Greek scientist to Iran to teach in that school. The inter-nations scientific relations existed during Sassanid in a continuous form and in addition to Roman and Iranian sciences, the Jewish and Indian sciences were used. The Roman Emperor, Urukian who ruled for six years, gave the hand of his daughter to Shapur the first during the turmoil in empire (235 to 285 AD) and Shapour build a city for her in Fars and named it Jondi Shapour. That city was similar to Byzantine. By the order of emperor, a group of Greek physicians were sent to Iran to serve his daughter. Plotinus (205-70) showed great emphasis on the moral force of music and believed that its force purifies soul. In view of Proffiro (233-304), one of the biographers of Pythagoras and the pupil of Plotinus, and a non-believe pious man too, by music, it would be possible to get closer to the supreme divinity. Some historians of this era believe that although the Iranian music did not receive many effects from the neighboring countries and nations, in any way, the cultural exchanges and influences of large neighboring empires such as Rome and Greek could not be undermined. As Christianity arrived to Europe (during Sassanid kings), the church leaders accepted the idea of Autos which was a figure of the Greek philosophers in the idea of philosophy of Church music. Saint Agustin (354-430 AD); too, one of the founders of theology and Christianity philosophy has many writings on music. He believed that art and music, and in general, beauty, as the representative of divine arts in physical world. During Anushirvan, who was the age of cultural movement, Iranians recognized the knowledge and sciences of India and Greek with big respects.

To answer the questions asked in template of hypothesis in the beginning of the papers, the important factors in growth and flourishing of music during Sassanid, the author believes their effects briefly as follows:

- The advancement of the country during *Ardashir Babakan* (224-241 AD) and establishment of a central government and promotion of the rank of musicians, the efforts of *Bahram Gur* (420-438 AD) in providing welfare and pleasure for people (he brought 12 thousands music players and singers from India to Iran to make people happy and entertain them), encouragement and attention to music both in materialistic and spiritual terms by Khosrow Parviz (590-628 AD) that led to the appearance of geniuses in music during this period all show the attention and affection of the kings in that period to music.
- Social and sovereignty stability compared to previous dynasties and subsequently, stability of tribes and developing new towns and cities, followed by comfort and rests for taking care of people's joy and entertainment.
- Popularity of military music and marches and consequently, taking along professional musicians in battle scenes and fields
- Prevalence and popularity of music in religious codes and rituals such as Zoroaster, Manes, Mazdak and the impact of religion in the culture and arts of this period
- Enthusiasm to have communication and cultural contacts with neighboring countries and for that purpose, great efforts were made in building roads and bridges.

- Prolongation of the government and its stability compared to the previous times (around 4 centuries).

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Table 1 .Artifacts from the Sasanian period with images of minstrels

no	picture	name	period	size	place	description
1		Mohr Cheghamish	3500 BC	-	Shoosh	The oldest chorus of world, all artists is ladies from Elam, consisting singers, harp players, drum player and wind instrument
2		Sculpture Clay	1500 BC	-	Shoosh	Lute player- clay
3		Sculpture Clay	2 nd millenoum BC	height: 8.6cm	Shoosh	String instrument player
3		Sculpture Clay	2 nd millenoum BC	height: 8.6cm	Shoosh	String instrument player
4		Clay plate	Saljuqid era	Diagonal 25cm	Kashan	Bahram Gur and Azadeh playing harp, in hunting scene "Metropolitan Museum"
6		-	Saljuqid era	-	Kashan	Bahram Gur and Azadeh playing harp, in hunting scene Bahram Gur and the free woman playing harp, in hunting scene "Museum of Islamic Arts in Berlin"
7		silver plate	6-7 AD	Diagonal 21.7cm	-	Bahram Gur and Azadeh playing "Hermitage museum"
8		Clay Relief	-	34x 52.8 cm	-	Bahram Gur and Azadeh story Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
9		Silver plate	Late sassanid era	-	-	Scene of a castle with a group of wind instruments (horns).
10		The carvings on the rocks	6-7 AD	length: 5.70M., width: 4.13M.	Taghe-e-bostan/ Kermanshah	Wild boar hunting scene
11		a part of wild boar hunting scene	6-7 AD	-	Taghe-e-bostan/ Kermanshah	Harp music players in boat

Table 2 .Artifacts from the Sasanian period with images of minstrels

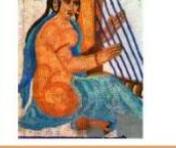
no	picture	name	period	size	place	description
12		a part of wild boar hunting scene	6-7 AD	-	Taghe-e-bostan/ Kermanshah	Harp music players in boat
13		a part of wild boar hunting scene	6-7 AD	-	Taghe-e-bostan/ Kermanshah	Singer women that are clapping hand in group
14		The carvings on the rocks	6-7 AD	length: 5.80M., width: 3.90M.	Taghe-e-bostan/ Kermanshah	Deer hunting scene
15		a part of deer hunting scene	6-7 AD	-	Taghe-e-bostan/ Kermanshah	Music players that are playing wind instruments surrounding the Sassanid king
16		a part of deer hunting scene	6-7 AD	-	Taghe-e-bostan/ Kermanshah	Music players that are playing Harp surrounding the Sassanid king
17		Tile containing figure of harp player woman,	2 nd half of 3 rd century AD.	-	Bishopour / fars	The tile was a part of decorations in the veranda of the palace of Bishopour . Each tile contains hundreds of smaller pieces that are put together like a puzzle. "Louvre Museum"
18		Gold and silver plate	late sasanian	-	-	Pictures of minstrels "Museum Iran Bastan in Tehran, "Iran"
19		Plate with silver& gold cover	7 AD	-	found in Tabarestan	Kingly feast and party with players who are playing music "British museum"
20		Plate with silver& gold cover	4 or 5 AD	-	found In Amu- Darya	feast in tree Shade "Miho museum"
21		METAL PLATE	-	-	-	the Sassanid king in the middle with music players around him BRITISH MUSEUM
22		Plate silver and gold	6-7 AD	5.2 x 23.3 cm	-	Scene of king's fest "Walters Arts Gallery, Baltimore"
23		Gold worked silver pot with jewelry decorations	6-7 AD	8 x 26.2 x 9.5cm	-	dancers & King seated on a throne "Walters Arts Gallery, Baltimore"

Table 3 .Artifacts from the Sasanian period with images of minstrels

no	picture	name	period	size	place	description
24		Metal plate	7 AD	Diameter 22 cm		A picture of wind instrument players hermitage museum "
25		metal cup	Sassanid era	-	-	The Oud player
26		Apart of silver bowl	6 AD	-	Found in Kelardasht/ Mazandaran /Iran	Wind instrument player Museum of Iran
27		Another part of bowl in pic ..no23	-	-	-	-
28		Another part of bowl in 26picture no.	-	-	-	The Oud player
29		Metal boat	AD 7-6	-	-	A part of boat shape jar with the picture of a naked girl in dance "Walters Arts Gallery, Baltimore "
30		Silver Bowl	5-7 AD	height 5 CM Diagonal 13.4 cm	-	Drums player "Cleveland Museum of Art"
31		Metal jar , silver and gold decoration Weight: 6.938 Kg	6 - 7 AD	height: 5.25, diameter: 2.141 opening diameter: 3.6 MC	-	figures of dancing girls "National Museum of Tehran"
32		Metal pot decorated with gold	-	-	-	A dressed up woman in dancing and chanting. This piece is attributed to festivals and glorious religious luxurious ceremonies during Sassanid " Louvre Museum
33		Gold pot	AD 6	Height cm 34	-	A dancing woman
34		Tile containing figure of harp player woman,	2nd half of 3rd century AD.	-	Bishapour / fars	The tile was a part of decorations in the veranda of the palace of Bishapour . Each tile contains hundreds of smaller pieces that are put together like a puzzle . "Louvre Museum"
35		ston	-	-	-	Engraved ston with the figure of party British museum
36		ston	-	-	-	Engraved ston with the figure of party British museum