

The Parthian Mehran Family, Key to the Collapse of Sassanid Empire

Nadereh Nafisi

Assistant Professor at Islamic Azad University, Abhar Branch, Abhar, Iran

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at gaining familiarity with the role of Mehran family in the collapsing of Sassanid Empire. In order to gather the data library research method was used. The data was gathered in 2011 and was analyzed inferentially. The researchers incorporated instrument such as note taking. Inscriptions left from the early Sassanid monarchs are suggestive of the fact that noble and influential Parthian era families did in fact constitute the ruling structure of the Sassanid Empire from the very onset. The Sassanid Empire permanently experienced two areas of contradiction i.e. contrast between the central authority or the King on the one side and tycoon estate owners and generals on the other who represented noble families and intended to impede monopoly of authority by the King. Amidst these contradictions, the Parthian Mehran family which, supported by two noble generals who had served during the reign of Khosro-Parviz namely Bahram Chobin and Shahr Boraz, seized power in an unprecedented and of course unparalleled manner and led the struggle that was aimed at overthrowing the Sassanid monarchy through a host of means such as triggering local skirmishes and concluding alliance with the Roman Empire.

KEY WORDS: Parthian, Mehran Family, Collapse, Sassanid Empire, Noble families, Roman Empire.

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of Five hundred years dynasty of Sassanid Empire depended on various factors. Historians such as Christensen, Wolsky, Shipman, Mashkor, Pourshariati and Yarshater have achieved great results about these factors, but paid less attention to Partian family which was the most effective factor. The most important source for identifying Sassanid Dynasty, the first inscriptions of the kings of this dynasty, showed the represent of important Parthian families between Sassanid nobility.

Furthermore, using the script and language of Parthian with Greek and Middle Persian in the first scripts of Sassanid kings gave information about Parthian nobles in the structure of Sasanian government. Within five hundred years, the influence of Parthian expanded in some cases to the point where Sassanid kings were sometimes stooges of these nobles and priests. The marriage of Sassanid dynasty nobles to the family of Parthia Spahbod, a noble family of Parthian, might be governmental policy to stabilize government.

In some cases, Parthian nobility who was looking for an opportunity to return to the government, was facing King due to lack of adequate policy of Khosro II Parviz and made a presentation on the collapse of the regime. The Parthian Mehran family seized power in an unprecedented and of course unparalleled manner and led the struggle that was aimed at overthrowing the Sassanid monarchy.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this paper is to become familiar with:

1. The role of Parthian in collapsing of Sassanid Empire.
2. The most important Parthian family in Sassanid Court.

Based on the above mentioned questions the paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What was the role of Parthians in collapsing of Sassanid Empire?
2. Which family of Parthians had the greatest role in Collapsing?

Our knowledge about the Parthians and the structure of their state is confined to inscriptions left from the early Sassanid kings due to shortage of sources available. The short span of time i.e. 16 years which begins from the demise of Ardavan 4, last Parthian king to the stabilization of the pillars of Sassanid Empire during the reign of Shapur 1, is illustrative of the fact that the structure of state demonstrated on early inscriptions definitely unveils the impact of the Parthians' state structure on the formation of the Sassanid Empire.

The names of a good number of Parthian families can be seen on the list residing on these inscriptions.

Mehran is one of these families which maintains a frequent and effective presence all throughout 500 years of the Sassanid rule and ultimately acts as an instrumental factor in the collapse of this dynasty. Mention has been made of Parsava Satrapy for the first time on the Bisotun inscription which once comprised major portion of the

present day Khorasan and Gorgan provinces of Iran. Strabon says Parthia paid tribute to Persians (Achaemenians) (Strabon,2003,36).

Making reference to Strabon's report, Barthold believes that Parthia province during the Achaemenians was inhabited by the poor but brave people who resisted against invasions by the northern immigrants (Barthold,1929,142). However, results of researches conducted recently make reference to the presence of elements of separatist movements both in this province and the western borders that were home to small autonomy seeking dynasties during the Achaemenians.

These movements, particularly those in Parthia date back to the era of Darius 1. The same movements later betrayed Darius 3, the last of the Achaemenian dynasty and murdered him (Wolski,2004, 31). Perhaps the reason why Alexander chose to conquer the northeastern territories was these same autonomy seeking tendencies and resistance against northeastern tribes and ultimately advancement towards China, unlike Achaemenians whose conquests mostly included western territories. Successors of Alexander, the Seleucids, neglected his policy and this led to the collapse of their rule and coming to power of Parthians.

Arrianus, in 2 A.C. narrates for Arashk and his brother Tirdad, the story of sitting on the throne by Darius. Tyrannized and downplayed by the Seleucid Satrap, Arashk and Tirdad join a coalition with five friends who have probably been from the leaders of the Parthian families and overthrow Satrap (Frye,2007, 334). Our knowledge about Parthian nobles, in addition to the Aryan reports, also benefits from reports by Strabon, Plutark, Ammianus Marcellinus and then Khorenatsi. Strabon quotes Posidonius and reports of two councils; one comprising the relatives of the King and the other comprising the Mobeds (Zoroastrian priests) and the wise. Ammianus Marcellinus, similar to Tacitus, distinguishes between the nobles and the commons. The commons, as subjects of the nobles fought as archers in the war, whereas, the nobles fought as armored riders. Of the nobles, the most senior and prominent ones were those who enjoyed exclusive authority due to their ancestors, wealth and certain privileges and maintained special relationship with the King. According to Trugus, mention can be made of Surena and Monases as members of the Parthian council. The latter fled to the Roman Empire out of fear of Parthian Farhad 4's threat.

Some prominent and large families such as Surena, Qaren and Geve preserved their influence and privileges until the Sassanid era. Although Qarens appeared to be the only Parthian family who initially rose up against Sassanids (Lukonin,2005, 198), however, in the court of Ardashir 1 and Shapur 1, they were ranked first class nobles. We have come to know Qaren family from the era of Mehrdad the Parthian and that is the period of time when one of the members of this family serves as commander of Parthian forces and who assists Mehrdad in his battle against Goodarz 2. Commenting on Surens, Plutark writes: "Surena was ranked second following the King in terms of credit, wealth, prominence and a rich family background. At least, ten thousand horses and riders, servants and subjects were at his service and his family had the honor to crown the kings (Plutarc, 2008, v.3, 85-86).

Khorenatsi traces the origins of Surena, Qaren and Spahbad families in the Parthian family. Khorenatsi believes that Surena, Qaren, Artashes and Koshm are children of Arshavir (Parthian Farhad 4, 2-38 A.C.). He writes: "Artashes and his children were granted the title of prince by the King. Surena and Qaren were entitled Pahlav and appointed to rule eastern and northeastern estates. Not only titles, but the extensive territories of the Surena and Qaren families who served as semi-independent rules remaining from the Parthian era, are illustrative of the Parthian background of these families and their clear-cut political role and influence within the Sassanid dynasty. These families constituted one of the significant pillars of the Council of the Nobles which had itself taken shape as a duplicate of the Parthian Council of the Nobles and in case necessary had a role in crowning kings or rulers who were selected from amongst the relatives of the king or viceroys of the nobles.

The special status of the nobles in these nominations gave them the kind of authority that approximated that of the king. Extensive estates and lands ruled by the nobles brought them financial power while integration of the dependent peasants into an army turned the nobles into a military power in such a manner that at times these armies did worry the ruling clique. More power and authority gave way to escalated skirmishes and rivalry among families. The scope of such rivalries that had root in the reliance of Mehrdad 2 on the armies of big families for the recapture of already lost conquests of the Parthians extended on a daily basis.

Simultaneous with the unparalleled extension of the Parthian kingdom from Balkh to Mesopotamia, trade experienced bloom and gave way to the establishment of the renowned Silk Road. Since then, the Parthian territory served as a bridge linking the east and west in terms of trade and for that matter it became exposed to frequent invasions by the Roman Empire. Meantime, Armenia, the headquarters of the Parthian Mehran kings won a high status due to its geographical location and sharing borders with Rome and the invading northern tribes. Expansion of trade required the King to magnify the role of large families whose territories were located along the Silk Road in those regions. This resulted in the dependence of the state on the military and economic power of families and dynasties and ended up in the diminishing power of the emperor. Such a dependence on dynasties that kept on rivaling over authority and triggered local chaos in pursuit of the Roman policies reached its peak during the reign of Farhad 4 and continued until the era of Balash 1. Even Balash's 30 yearlong mighty rule failed to bring an end to these skirmishes and therefore rivalries were resumed after him and finally led to the uprising of Ardavan 4 about 150 years later (213 A.C.) who was supported by Parsian and Median noble families. His crowning came at a

time when the Parthian empire relying on Ardavan 4, succeeded to defeat Romans (218 A.C.) and received 50 million Dinars in cash indemnification. These same interferences and disputes among the nobles and their being mercenaries of the Roman Empire prepared the bedrock for the defeat of Ardavan 4 in the face of ArdashirPakan (Ardaxšīr-ī Pābagān) hence bringing into existence a local client king in Pars.

During the Sassanid dynasty and until before introduction of reforms by Khosrau 1 (Anushiravan) and setting up of the four armies under the leadership of Spahbadans, the military power of the large families subsided with the formation of regular state army, however, after his reforms, the military power of Spahbadans together with their economic power which stemmed from collection of tax and tributes in their territories, once again posed the nobles as factors that could cause collapse of the King.

The skirmishes resulting from the power and authority of the large families with the central government, dominated not only the era of Parthians who held a Feudalistic rule but the entire era of the Sassanid as well. Large noble families which had a Parthian origin viewed the Sassanids as people with shepherd background who had taken the throne of Arashk by force (Ferdowsi, V:2, 2008, 1686-1687). This claim is evident in the disputation between BahramChobin from the Parthian Mehran dynasty who braced for throne and Khosrau, the Sassanid king. The disputation centers on restoration of throne to the Parthians and transfer of power from Pars to Rey;

Unto Rey I will bring back power from Pars
And justice I will promote in the entire world
And I will celebrate this new birth
(Ferdowsi, V: 2, 2008, 1684)

From the very beginning, influence of large families at times ended up in their involvement in the crowning or overthrowing of kings. For instance, assisted by the powerful Qaren family, Mehrdad set out for Mesopotamia, however, in the course of a war which erupted with Goudarz, some of his companions joined Goudarz and Mehrdad was taken captive and handed over to Goudarz.

We learn about the influential presence of Parthian nobles in the Sassanid courts from the very start of the Sassanid dynasty. The names of these nobles are contained on the list of the courtiers of Ardashir 1 and Shapur 1 on inscriptions in Zoroaster's Kabah. Varaz, Suren, Qaren and Andigan families are considered to be the highest ranking nobles of the Sassanid era and probably the late Parthian era. Older references and sources mention the names of EspandYad and Mehran noble families whose ancestors are believed to be Parthians (Ferdowsi, V:2, 2008, 1683). In his studies, Parikhaniyan has concluded that attributing these two families to the Parthians is feigned and holds that they belong to more recent periods and have forged a biography for themselves. However, more recent researches conducted particularly those conducted by Gyselen who has examined the coins and seals of the Sassanid era, suggest that these evidences are in complete compliance with Shahname (Ferdowsi,V:2, 2008, 2004) and testify to the ancient background of Mehrens in northeastern Iran and that they were Parthian. Additionally, in the inscription of Shapur 1 in the Zoroaster's Kabah clear reference has been made to one of the members of Mehran family i.e. Oshtad, a scribe from Rey which speaks of the antiquity of this family. In the presence of BahramChobin in the era of Hormoz 4, Mehran family becomes more prominent. However, no clear-cut comment can be made on EspandYad family who ruled Rey unless more documents and evidences are available. All we know is that the prominence of this family is indebted to MehrNarses, the renowned Vizier of Yazdgerd 2. Our information concerning SpahbadFamily who ruled in Gorgan, except for what was narrated from Khorenatsi, takes shape following the four divisions made by KhosroAnushiravan. On the list of nobles contained on Shapur 1 inscription in Zoroaster's Kabah, reference has been made to over 20 high ranking courtier families. In other references however, these numbers are reduced to the extent that the seven families whose names are mentioned every now and then are confined to Suren, Qaren, Mehran and Spahbad families all having Parthian root. Have other roles performed by families and decline of their powers been reasons underlying omission of their names? Or the reason why many powerful families within the court realm were restricted was Sassanid dynasty's tendency for centralization particularly during the era of Ardashir 1, Shapur 1 and Shapur 2 as well as KhosrauAnushiravan? Or was it the daily increasing influence of ancient Parthian dynasties that downplayed the role of other dynasties? The likelihood exists that some of the families lost their power when their extensive estates were restricted or lost and sank into oblivion. The comprehensive history of Sassanid era is illustrative of permanent contradictions between the Monarch and the noble families.

Contradiction between the King and the nobles particularly those affiliated with the Parthian dynasty who claimed to be heir to throne (Ferdowsi, V:2, 2004, 2008) was to the extent the impacts of which can be traced in the Sassanid urban architecture which is illustrative of the concentration of Sassanid cities in the central, western and southwestern corners of the country. Early inscriptions of the Sassanid kings and Tabari's report (Tabari, v 2, 1983, 584-585) testify to the fact that restoration of the names of old cities or setting up of new cities that were conquered by the Sassanid army took place mainly in the western, southwestern and central parts of the country. In this manner, the Sassanid kings in addition to setting up a strong barrier in the west against frequent penetration of the Roman Empire, also prevented concentration of power in the eastern and northeastern regions which were inhabited by the Parthian families. Annihilation of city-states of the Parthian era in the north and east and expansion of the

monarch's Dastkerts were reasons why these cities became one of the King's power pillars. However, it seems that, extensive territories of the Parthian Suren, Qaren and Mehran families in the east and northeast have impeded the Sassanid King's control and influence in those regions even after reforms that were enforced by Khosrau Anushiravan. For instance, despite all the developments that were brought about by Khosrau Anushiravan as a mighty king, the Sassanid dynasty scarcely managed to maintain its domination on all the royal territories against the deep influence of the Parthian families who at times posed to be the allies and brothers of the Sassanids (Tabari, v 2, 1983, 586-587). In the end, interference and skirmishes by the large Parthian families over power and throne served to be the substantial reason for the overthrow of the Sassanid rule similar to what happened to the Parthian rule. According to Khorenatsi's report, the reason underlying the victory of Ardashir Babakan over Ardavan 4 has been the rivalry between Pahlav Suren and Spahbad families in which one entered into alliance with the Sassanid family in order to annihilate the other one (Khorenatsi, 1984, 171).

The order or deletion of families on the inscriptions of early Sassanid kings is by itself illustrative of family rivalries. On the 67 man list of the court of Shapur, the large and noble family of Veraz stands on top, followed by Suren, Andigan and Qaren families. On the Narses inscription, the Suren family is ranked first while Qaren family which is present in the carvings of the era of Ardashir in Firouzabad and Naghshe Rajab has been deleted from the list, for Narses son of Shapur 1 who had been appointed to Armenia's kingdom revolted against Bahram 3 (293 A.C.) and brought an end not only to the latter's rule but also removed the power of Kartir, the spiritual figure in his court. Of course, he was supported by a number of the nobles who were against the influence of Mobeds. The Qaren family who served to be opposition to Narses, was suppressed by this king. This is evident in the carvings on Naghshe-e-Rostam. In this carving, you can see the scene of a fight between Hormoz, son of Narses and a heavily armed fighter on the horse who is wearing a Roman galea furnished with the badge of Qaren family on the forehead. This fighter is falling off the horse and Hormoz's lance has penetrated into his body (Lukonin, 2005, 198).

We don't know about Mehran family nothing more than what is contained on the inscription of Shapur 1 in Kabah of Zoroaster which refers to the presence of grand Mehr Narses, advisor to Yazdgerd 1 who is believed by some to be from Mehran family. Nor we know much about Pirag from Mehran family who was a member of the Council of Nobles during the reign of Yazdgerd 1. Following doubtful death of Yazdgerd 1, the council of nobles deprived his heirs of throne. Of the nobles who had a share of this decision, reference has been made to Pirag of Mehran family (Christensen, 1989, 374-375). Mehr Narses, son of Borazeh (Noldke relates the name of MehrNarses' father and the city of Borazjan in Fars, close to Shapur city). Historians attribute one of the most prominent nobles residing during the reign of Yazdgerd 1 to Espandyad, Suren and Mehran families. Christensen and Noldke quote Tabari and attribute him to Espanyad family from Abruva county located in Ardashir Khore Barin Mohal plains in Shapur, Fars province (Christensen, 1989, 160, Noldke, 1999, 467). Parikhanian, according to a report by Madikan Hezar Dastan attributes Mehr Narses to Mohtasham Mehran family (Parikhanian, 2008, 26). Khorenatsi (Khorenatsi, 1984, 282) and Parpeci (Parpeci, 1991, 75) attribute him to Suren family. Tabari relates him to GoshtasbKiani and names the positions of his three sons namely Zarvandan, Mahgoshnasb and Kardar as Hirbodan Hirbod, Vastrioshansalar (minister of agriculture), and Arteshtaran-Salar (chief of warriors) (Tabari, 1983, 625). Due to Zoroastrian prejudice, MehrNarses set up numerous fire temples particularly for himself and his three sons. And when he was appointed Vizier, the moderate policies of Yazdgerd 1 towards Christians were changed and he started to persecute the Christians. Premiership of Mehr Narses continued with some interruptions until the era of BahramGur. The senior positions of his three sons pertain to BahramGur monarchy. The three sons of MehrNarses represent three Indo-European social classes i.e. clerics, arteshtars or warriors and peasants. The duties of these three sons are similar to those of the three sons of Zoroaster namely Isatvasrta, Urvatnara and Hvare-chithra. Meantime, MehrNarses attributes himself to the family of Goshtasb Kiani, an ally of Zoroaster. Similarities are to the extent that can give rise to many ambiguities. The certain point however, is that under mighty presence of MehrNarses, the interrelation of faith and politics and control of three main classes of the Sassanid society by his sons and in other words, direct influence of the nobles in all affairs of the state reached its peak.

During the one hundred years beginning from Ardashir 2 to Qobad 1 when the nobles selected the king, the all out influence of a family in all affairs of state is unique in its kind. At any rate, proving the point that MehrNarses belongs to either Mehran or Suren families, is a proof of that family's exclusive status, for in no period of the rule of Sassanid kings, a family has appeared that interferes in the then political, military and religious affairs so mightily and so extensively. The interesting point is that after the demise of Yazdgerd 1, there is no mention of MehrNarses and his three sons in the Council of Nobles which prevented coming to throne by the children of Yazdgerd, whereas, from Mehran family, mention has been made of Pirak. On this basis, there is doubt about the Mehran background of these nobles.

As of this point, we know little about MehrNarses and his three sons as well as other noble families due to shortage of sources. All we know is that after the demise of Yazdgerd 2 (457 A.C.) a grave skirmish began between his two sons i.e. Hormuz 3 and Piruz over throne and although Hormuz managed to coerce throne for two years (457-459 A.C.) Piruz overcame Hormuz with the assistance of Roham from Mehran family and took over the throne (Ferdowsi, V:2, 2008, 1285). The reign of Piruz coincides with the peak of power of Mehran family out of the seven

large Sassanid families, for Piruz who had taken the throne with the assistance of a Mehrani noble married the daughter of Eshtad from Mehran family and this marriage further added to the authority and influence of Mehrans not only in this period but also until the reign of Khosrau Parviz. Piruz's 25 year long rule (459-484 A.C.) coincided with the emergence of the seven yearlong draught and famine, frequent wars with the northern tribes particularly Haftalians and rebellions in Armenia. The penniless treasury of the government and captivity and killing of Piruz in the hands of Haftalians could lead to the collapse of the state had Sokhra from the Qaren family assisted by ShapurRazi from Mehran family failed to overcome chaos. By taking back the treasures of Sassanid dynasty, Sokhra injected them into the Qaren family. More power of the Qaren family caused eruption of clashes between them and Mehran family which reached their peak ever since Piruz won victory. Although these hostilities faded during the short reign of Blash (484-488) and even went further and led to the alliance of these two families, however, their impacts were unveiled during the reign of Ghobad. The role of Mehran family in the transition of power from Blash to Ghobad (488-496, 492-531 A.C.) has not been less significant than the role Qarens played in this regard, for ShapurRazi, Spahbod of Jabal territory (Ibn-AlAthir, 2005,479) who, according to Prokopious, was father in law of Qobad and took best advantage of this relationship. Such a claim by Prokopious is not that unfounded, for although Shapur, after assisting Ghobad aimed at eradicating Sukrai of Qarni, uncle of Ghobad (EbnMeskavayh, 1981, 156) who after overthrow of Blash, had brought Ghobad to throne and was considered superior to the king in terms of power, was appointed as army general and set out to fight the Khazrans but all of a sudden there was no longer any mention of his name in the court of the king. The likelihood exists that, the king viewed him as a threat and therefore annihilated him. That could be true since Ghobad named the younger son whose mother was the sister of Spahbad as his prince instead of his eldest son, Kavus who was the grandson of Shapur from Mehran family and raised by Mazdakis (Ferdowsi, V:2, 2008, 1427-1429; Dinawari, 2007, 93). Four centuries before Dinwari, Farabi attributes ShapurRazi to Mehran family. He introduces Shapur as viceroy of Ghobad in Babylon and Khatarnia (Yaghut, 2004, 301). He writes: during the reign of Piruz, Blash and Ghobad, Shapur acted as Spahbad. Shapur was the marquis of the Georgian border during the reign of Piruz under influence of Armenian Kamsarkans (Pourshariati, 2001, 71-75). Perhaps his inclination toward Armenian nobles was the reason underlying creation of a free space for Nestorian religion as the exclusive religion of Iran's Christian Church and independence of the Iranian church as opposed to Bizantin church during the reign of Piruz. That could be the reason why the Christians in their writings nicely mention the name of Blash, successor to Piruz.

We now know the oldest member of Mehran family relying on Amianus Marcellinus during the reign of Shapur 2. Roham from Mehran family is yet another noble who according to Elizeous brings Piruz to the throne and Izad Goshnasb from Mehran family is named as Piruz's foster brother (Noldke, 1999, 168). Shapur Razi from this same dynasty, is a figure who prior to the presence of PirakMehran during the reign of BahramGur and BahramChobin, was the most prominent figure of this family all throughout the Sassanid dynasty and played a key role in political currents during the reign of three kings namely; Piruz, Blash and Ghobad. Izad Goshnasb, the foster brother of Piruz from Mehran family plays an effective role in bringing together Armenian nobles for the purpose of forming the cavalry army. His special position as marquis of Bloom City, the northernmost border city between Iran and Armenia which used to be rich in gold mines reveals the strategic role Mehrans played along the borders of Armenia (Pourshariati, 2001, 74). One can conclude that, up until 5th Century A.C. the scope of influence of Mehrans gradually stretched from the northern territories to the northwestern territories and shortly after they seized southern territories under the title of Sepahbadans (Pourshariati, 2001, 101-102). In addition to the above mentioned regions, emergence of ShapurRazi from a hamlet known as Mehran adjacent to Mehran Pars river (Bal'ami, 2006, 671) can be another reason testifying to the presence of Mehran family in Pars. The significant point about this region is that Pars was home to the vassals of large families and birthplace of three superior figures namely MehrNarses from Suren family, Sokhra from Qaren family and ShapurRazi from Mehran family.

Fifth century coincided with the reign of Ghobad and entailed severe rivalries by these three families particularly powerful Mehran and Gharen families which can by itself underlie emergence of Mazdak as social reformer. Ghobad who according to Dinawari took throne at age 15, (Dinawari, 2007, 93) was first in charge of executing the policies of the said dynasties, however, shortly after, he joined an alliance with Mehran family and removed Qaren family and after having secured control over the chaotic situation in the country, removed Mehrans as well. Pursuant to this policy, Ghobad initiated tax reforms and extended support for Mazdak who had emerged on the tenth year of his rule and cut short the hands of nobles who were in conflict with one another and the king since the reign of Piruz in pursuit of further privileges and interests. Alliance with the movement of Mazdak which has been a religious movement with social tendencies (Yarshater, 2008, 447-449; Altheim, 2003, 22-224) could serve to be the best means for the eradication of the influence of the Zoroastrian priests and nobles as well as distribution of their extensive lands and assets and as a result breaking of their authority and placing a ban on occupation of important hereditary state positions. None of these measures was favored by large feudal families. Ghobad was arrested and jailed. However, that did not take long. Once again, Qaren family proved its direct role in the fate of kingdom. Ghobad's second term of monarchy became possible with the assistance of ZarMehr, son of Sukhra from

Qaren family. Zarmehr who overlooking murder of his father by Ghobad, reinstated him in throne and annihilated Mazdakis received no prize for his services and was instead murdered by Ghobad shortly after his coming to the throne (Ibn -AlAthir, v2, 481,2005). Qaren family along with Suren family have proved their influence not only in political spheres but in other spheres of life during the reign of Ghobad. That is to say, one prime reason why Ghobad suppressed Mazdaki faith at a time when he himself still believed in them (Yarshater, 2008, 479) besides political incentives, has been opposition expressed by influential Qaren and Suren families against this movement the traces of which can be found in the opposition of QareniZarMehr and Sureni Mahbod against Siavash Arteshtaran Salar who had Mazdaki tendencies and served to be their prime supporters. In fact, murder of Siavash (528 A.C.) was an end to the Mazdakis. With the elimination of Siavash and extension of support by him for Ghobad's eldest son, Kavous who had Mazdaki tendencies not only lost his position as a prince but under support from the side of large families, after demise of Ghobad, his other son i.e. Khosrau took throne.

Reforms introduced by Khosrau Anushiravan particularly in the area of tax, formation of administrative nobles class, peasants class and division of the country into four Spahbad regions is the second period of historical developments within the Sassanid Feudalist system following the first such period (reign of Ardashir 1 to Shapur 2). Anushiravan's reforms not only were an innovative method for subsidizing the influence of large families, but acted dual purpose concurrent with the empowerment of the four Spahbadan meaning that setting up a fixed army at the beginning would add to the authority of the king contrary to the Feudal army, but with the empowerment of the four Spahbadan who were selected from amongst large families, rivalries among them were intensified leading to partitioning of the country into four rules. Sokhra is a clear example. At the beginning of the fifth century, his powers exceeded those of the king and Bahram Chobin from Mehran family managed, one century after him and with the support of his army, to come to throne for a few months. Sokhranmad was a feudal lord and BahramChobin, an army commander (Christensen, 1989,129). In addition to their command of the army, other authorities such as collecting tax and tributes from the regions under control of Spahbadans seduced them to seek more authority. According to Dinwari, Qaren Jebeli Nahavandi who was an aged war lord and in charge of collecting tax and tributes in Khorasan had also been assigned the task of taking care of collection of tribute and tax in Komes and Gorgan during Bahram Chobin's short rule, however, he resisted BahramChobin when the latter landed in Komes and for that reason, he preferred to flee. This is indicative of the ongoing rivalry between the two large families of Qaren and Mehran over power and which has root in skirmishes of the era of Ghobad. Although KhosrauAnushiravan impeded the power of nobles and Zoroastrian priests, he favored involvement of all large families in the affairs of the country in a bid to preserve his sovereignty and isolate the power of the nobles. Although Mehrens inevitably won a high status in this period, involvement of Qaren, Mehran, Suren, Spandyad, Spahbad and even Nakhvirgan families of whom no mention had been made in the preceding periods is quite evident here. For instance, NakhvirakZadvieh is a Padgospan from the Nakhvirgan family and the letter of Khosrau to him has been captured by Tabari (Nafisi, 2005, 290-291).

Spahbadan who, according to Parikhanian, had their tribe name taken after their hereditary position (Parikhanian, ,2008,31) had mainly been selected from Mehran family. Three seals out of eight seals pertaining to Spahbadan which have been examined by Gilen belong to Mehran family of which two seals pertain to northern Spahbad and one to the southern Spahbad. One of the seals belonging to the northern Spahbadan probably belongs to MehranVandad, ancestor of BahramChobin. Gyselen attributes one of the stamps to Pirag Shahrvaraz, southern Spahbad from Mehran family (Pourshariati, 2001, 101-102). IzadGoshnasb is another member of Mehran family who served as a senior Vizier in the court of Khosrau Anushiravan and at the beginning of the rule of Hormoz 4. In the diplomatic dialogues between the Iranian and Roman courts, he served as a high status ambassador whose role proved to be quite effective and was highly respected by the Roman court (Garsvenian, 2008, 689).

Ferdowsi as well introduces him as one of the highest ranking courtiers during Khosrau 1. Wolff names two Izadgoshnasbs. One of them is the Vizier of the court of Khosrau Anushiravan and the other a general during the reign of BahramChobin (Wolff, 1965, 92). Noldke writes; "Izadgoshnasb (Izat Woshnasb) was close to and trusted by BahramChobin and this was the name of one of the members of Mehran family preceding him".

One assumption is that perhaps, he as well has been one of the relatives of BahramChobin because his name is shared by a large number of the members of Mehran family (Noldke, 1999, 169). Prokopios names Izadgoshnasb and his brother Fabrizos (Fariborz) as two high ranking Iranian ambassadors. The first one was apparently appointed by Khosrau 1 to attend negotiations with Roman emperor Justinin under a predesigned plan, however, his aim is to penetrate into the Roman government and inflict a blow on it from inside. For some unclear reasons, he presents Khosrau's gifts to Justinin and stays in the latter's court for ten months under full respect (Prokopios, 1959, 216-219). MehranSotad, is another member of Mehran family who together with his son played a key role in the court, during the rules of Khosrau Anushiravan and Khosrau Parviz. Shahnameh is the only source which mentions his name clearly (Ferdowsi, V:2, 2008, 1517, 1542). Of the old times historians, only Bal'ami mentions him as one of the colonels of Hormoz 4 under the title of MehranShenan and somewhere else as Mehran Setad. He is a commander under whose guidelines Bahram Chobin sets out to fight with Sabeh Shah (Shabeh Shah) (Bal'ami,

2004, 76-77). MehranSetad plays the key role in the marriage of Khosrau 1 and the daughter of Khagan of China and his son Nastuh is one of the generals of Khosrau 1 in the east.

Although Mehrans lost their power during the reigns of Hormoz 4 and Khosrau 2, however, they regained their influence particularly in the army during the reign of KhosrauAnushiravan, a trend which prepared the bedrock for the emergence of BahramChobin in quest of throne during the reign of KhosrauParviz which finally led to the collapse of the last ancient monarchy after several hundred years of rule by the Sassanians. That may have been the reason underlying the reason why Hormoz 4 slaughtered the nobles. Hormoz who had no noble background from the side of his mother on the one hand and was concerned about his shaky position and feared the strong status of the nobles particularly members of Pahlav (Parthian) families on the other, became more pessimistic following the four divisions enforced by KhosrauAnushiravan.

Following Khosrau, it did not take long that the all out influence of the nobles was unveiled. Insurgence by two nobles belonging to Mehran and Spahbad families namely BahramChobin and Bastam (Wistham) testify to the concerns of Hormoz. This rebellion which, for the first time in the history of Sassanid dynasty, led to BahramChobin's claim for throne is believed to be the most deadly blow dealt at the structure of Sassanid dynasty. Meantime, relying on their Parthian background, Mehrans held that they deserved throne more than Sassanids.

With the lapse of 500 years
The Sassanids gradually lost throne
And now the throne is ours
We are the prosperous victors
Grandeur belongs to Parthians only
This is what every wise man is aware of
(Ferdowsi, V:2, 2008, 1683)

Unlike what was expected, not only other Pahlav families did not join an alliance with Mehrans, but they rose in revolt against Mehrans out of fear of losing their family interests. PahlavSpahbad family who enjoyed a high status at the Sassanid courts due to their kinship with Sassanids, initiated to confront Mehrans and supported Sassanids similar to what Qarensdid during the reign of Hormoz 4 when Mehrans officially confronted Sassanids over throne. When BahramChobin and his army set out for Ctesiphon in order to punish Hormoz 4 for his insults, Bastam and Banduyeh, brothers in law of Hormoz who were from Spahbad families and beyond bars, removed Hormoz and blinded him (Tabari, 1983, 727). But since they were aware of the power and popularity of BahramChobin, they took the upper hand and crowned Parviz as king apparently in support of Sassanid dynasty, for Parviz was related to Spahbadan from the side of his mother and once again the state was practically administered by this family.

Khosrau 2 Parviz (590-628 A.C.) who had embraced defeat in the face of BahramChobin and taken refuge with the Roman court, won victory over BahramChobin with the assistance of the Roman military in fall of 591 A.C. Bahram had come to the throne as Bahram 6. One of Khosrau Parviz's wise policies after restoration of throne was recognition of Armenia aimed at causing rift in the unity of the northern and northeastern Parthian, Mehran and Spahbadan families. Spahbadan who after murder of Banduyeh, uncle of KhosrauParviz by his cousin and getaway of Bastam, the other uncle to Tabarestan, had pledged alliance with the aids and the remaining army of BahramChobin and appointed Bastam as ruler of Tabarestan region for seven years (590-596 A.C.) were considered a grave threat to the rule of KhosrauParviz. By dispatching Bagratuni Sambat as marquis of borders stretching from Armenia to the east Khosrau not only created a barrier against Hephthalites and Turks but brought under his control the regions under influence of noble Parthian families to some extent. Such a measure by Khosrau Parviz served just as an aspirin for the collapsing Sassanid dynasty. Despite all measures and policies that Khosrau Parviz adopted during his glorious reign of power, he made a host of irreparable mistakes such as levying of heavy taxes, massacre of commanders and murdering of some subservient rulers who acted as a shield against invasion of other governments and tribes and in this manner paved the grounds for the collapse of the Sassanid dynasty and himself of course. At the onset, KhosrauParviz started his reign quite wisely and conservatively, however, he engaged in confronting his mother's Spahbadan and Mehran families, diminished prominent Sepahbadan of these families and gradually lost his military power and accepted defeat in the face of local and overseas invasions.

ShahrBoraz, the southern Spahbad, is yet another member of Mehran family who rioted against Khosrau Parviz shortly after Bahram Chobin and took the throne. Tabari considers Shahr Boraz as a status for Farhan (Farkhan) (Tabari, v:2, 1983, 735). Mashkour makes reference to Tabari and states that ShahrBoraz is the title of his family and introduces him to be the prominent commander of Remiozan who conquered Jerusalem (Mashkour, 2005, 2009). According to Tabari, however, Shahr Boraz and Remiozan are two separate commanders (Tabari, v: 2, 1983, 734, v2). Dinwari has called him Shahryar (Dinawari,2007, 136) and in case Dinwari and other historians including Thaalibi (Thaalibi, 1989, 467) had not named the reason for the dethronement of ShahrBoraz to be his being alien with the Shahi family, comparing him with Shahryar, the other son of Hormoz who was but a little child at the time when BahramChobin took throne would not seem unlikely. However, examination of the stamps and seals of the southern Sepahbad, ShahrBoraz by Gyselen and confirmation of the fact that he belonged to Mehran family

(Gyselen, 2001, 11) unveils the ambiguous corners of ShahrBoraz's life whom Ferdowsi calls Goraz (Ferdowsi, V:2, 2008, 1814). After BahramChobin, Sepahbad of the north, this was the second individual from Mehran family who, in the course of the Sassanid history, took the throne this time as Sepahbad of the south. The uprising of Sepahbadan against the king which was a result of the authority that they had gained pursuant to KhosrauAnushiravan's reforms and division of the country into four regions under domination of the noble military went to the extent that even measures taken and massacre of nobles by Hormoz 4 and his son KhosrauParviz failed to reduce concentration of power in the hands of large families who were now military representatives of the country.

Conclusion

Amidst this, Mehrans, who according to Ferdowsi attributed themselves to the Parthian monarchical family, claimed they deserved to take the throne more than other families. Riot by Shahr Boraz and his alliance with Heraclius played a major role in Iran's defeat in the face of the Romans and recapture of the occupied lands by the latter. In fact, this was the third time that noble families of the northeast concluded alliance with the alien enemy forces and caused collapse of monarchy and conquest of the country by aliens. As Ferdowsi says, the first time, treason practiced by these families during the reign of Alexander ended up in the collapse of Achaemenian Empire. And at another time during the reign of Parthians who were based in the northeastern territories, union of nobles and the Roman government, weakened this dynasty at the peak of a power that had been gained by Ardavan 4. And in conclusion, crowning by two individuals from Mehran family and union with the Romans dealt a blow to the glory of the Sassanids. Murder of Khosrau Parviz by the military nobles relying on whom Khosrau had come to power, put an end to the power of the last ancient kingdom which was followed by chaos and downfall of a dynasty that Ardashir Babakan from Pars had founded quite mightily.

REFERENCES

1. Altheim, Franz ,(2003), The history of Economy of Sassanid Government. Translator: Hoshang, Sadeqi. Tehran, Elmiva Farhangi.
2. Barthold , (1958). Civilization and Culture of Muslims. Translator: Ali Akbar, Diyanat. Tabriz, EbneSina
3. Bal'ami, Mohammad, (2006), The History of Bal'ami . Tehran, Zavar.
4. Christensen, Arture, (1989). Iran in Sassanid era. Translator: Rashid,Yasemi. Tehran, Donyaye Ketab.
5. Dinawari, Abo Hanife Ahmad Ibne David, (2007).Akhbar Al- Teval, Translator: Mahmood, Dameqani, Tehran, Ney.
6. Ferdowsi, Abu 'l-Qasim, (2008), Shahnameh. Tehran.
7. Frye, Richard, (2007), The history of Ancient Iran. Translator: Masoud, Rajab Niya. Tehran, ElmiFarhangi.
8. Gyselen,Rika, (2001) , The four Generals of the Sasanian Empire: Some siglographic Evidence vol. 14 of conferenze Rome.
9. Ibn-AlAthir, Ezadin,(2003), “ Complet History”. Translator: Seyed Mohammad Hossein, Rohani. Tehran, Asatir.
10. Khorenatsi, Movses,(1984), The History of Armenia. Translator: George, Nalbandiyan. Armenia, Yerevan University.
11. Lukonin ,V.G, (2005). political,social and administrative institution. Translator: Hassan, Anoooshe. Tehran, Amir Kabir.
12. Mashkour, Mohammad Javad, (1983). Sassanid Political History. Third edition, Tehran,DonyayeKetab .
13. IbnMeskavayh,Abu 'Ali Ahmad,(1990), Tajarib al- umam, Translator: Abolqasim, Emami. Tehran
14. Nafisi, Saeed, (2005). The History of Civilization of Sassanid Iran.Tehran, Asatir.
15. Noldke, Theodor, (1999), The History of Iranian and Arabian in Sassanid Times. Translator: Abbas, ZryabKhoyi, Tehran.
16. Parikhaniyan, A. G, (2008). Iranian Society and Law. Tehran, Amirkabir.
17. Parpeci,L, (1991) .History of Lazar Parpeci,Col-4 of Columbia University program in Armenian studies, Atlanta, edited by R.W.Thomson.
18. Plutarc, (2008), The life of Famous Men. Translator: Hoshang, Sadeqi. Fifth edite, Tehran, Qoqnoos.
19. Prokopios, (1959).The Wars Between Iran and Rom.Translator: Mohammad, Saeedi. Tehran, Ketab Publisher.
20. Purshariati, P,(2009) , Decline and fall of the Sasanian Empire. Tehran.
21. Strabon, (2003), Geography of Strabo. Translator: Homayoun, SanatiZade. Tehran, MahmoodAfshar Foundation.
22. Tabari, MohammadebneJarir, (1981).The History of Tabari, Translator:, Abolqasem, Payende. Tehran, Farhange Iran.
23. Tha'alibi ,MahommedibnIsma'il, (1987), The History of Tha'alibi. Tehran, Noqre.
24. Wolski, Yousef, (2004). Parthian kingdom. Translator: Morteza, Saqeb Far. Tehran, Qoqnoos.
25. Wolff, F,(1965). Golossarzufirdosis Shahnameh.
26. Yaghot, Hemavi, (2004), MojemAlbeldan. Translator: Alinaqi, Monzavi. Tehran, MiraseFarhangi.
27. Yarshater, Ehsan, (2008), The history of Iran, Tehran, Amir Kabir.