

Yaqoub Saffari and the Revival of Iranian Royalty Pattern

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Abstract

Islam in Iran temporarily break Iranian royalty pattern but soon the Arabs also were modeled and Iranian dynasties who came to power from the tenth century AD peak reached. Saffarids were one of dynasties that had prominent role in revival of Iranian royalty pattern. When Yaqoub came to power, a big territorial section of Iran was released from Abbasid's dominion. Yaqoub who dreamt about reestablishing the Iranian Royalty pattern undertook some of the royal functions and proved that he is capable of requirements them. He claimed that he belonged to ancient royal dynasties and acted the same by holding royal reverence. His effort to revival of Iranian royalty pattern caused a war with the Caliph. Therefore, he went to war with the Caliph but failed and returned to JondiShapour. Up to his last breath he wanted to take his revenge on Caliph but his life did not suffice. This article seeks with analytical method to Yaqoub attempts regarding the revival of Iranian royal pattern and the change in his inclination from regional to national manner of ruling and his relation with the caliph.

Keywords: Saffarids, Yaqoub, Sistan, Abbasid caliphate, Iranian royal pattern.

1. Introduction

In order to reveal the desire to reestablish the ancient Iranian royalty among the rulers of Islamic period, we should determine their ability and capacity of beholding such a royal procedure among the kings. The public opinion during Saffarids was for and supported such a procedure. The Islamic Caliphate ruling format in Iran made a lot of changes in the format of the royal procedures. The uprising of Yaqoub against the Caliph showed that he preferred the royal procedures in ruling.

Baghdad oriented historians introduce Yaqoub as a low esteemed ruler who ruled on parts of Iran by force. But sources like the History of Sistan and the Ehya Olmolk do criticize the Baghdad oriented mentality; therefore all available sources should be studied in order to identify some of the interests and the motives of Yaqoub.

The establishment of royal procedures and conditions in ancient Iran and the changes they faced in the Islamic period, the lineage promotion of Saffarids, coming to power of Yaqoub and the changes in the concept of national ruling instead if regional ruling, Yaqoub's efforts in reestablishing the royalty governing pattern and his conflicts with the Caliph are of concern in this article.

2. The Procedures and Conditions of Royal Structure and their Transition to Islamic Ruling Period

In ancient Iran there were some characteristic and conditions that had to be contained, met and possessed by the person who wanted to occupy the throne. The race was one of the main factors; Iranians always have considered a ruler as such based on his racial authenticity. Procopius, who lived in the Khosro Anushirvan era, writes "It was established as a norm and a rule among Iranians that no layman could be elected into a royal capacity, unless the last ruling dynasty was completely overthrown" (Procopius: 1968:28). Belonging to the same race was a must and all the ancient dynasties and kings relied and emphasized on this issue.

Farr was another major factor for the candidate, followed by being healthy, polite and appealing. Iranians considered the mental and physical health of the king to be very important and any candidate who lacked these characteristics could not become as king. Physical, political and religious education was necessary to achieve the power.

Ethical and religious learning of the princes were the other factors involved in training a prince to become a king. In a report regarding Ardashir, they talk about a place called "Culture house" (Karnameh Ardashir: 1980:35). Were the elite and princes were being trained. Here is a poetic verse in this respect by Firdausi:

You trusted your child to the knowledge since you know he could be cultured in any quarter you see a school where you know they worshiped fire (Firdausi: 2007: v2:1222).

At a point in time, in order to feel the administrative aspect of ruling, the princes were assigned to govern a province. This was considered as a test for succession given by the kings and taken by the princes.

Kings were seeking holiness and reverence among their coters. Without these two traits the coters would become impudent. A one of the measures to increase the reverence was to keep face from the king's gesture and consorts. Ardashir had a curtain hanging at his court (Masoudi: 1979: v2:241).

In ancient Iran the kings undertook functions since they considered themselves as the agent of the Ormuzd on earth that have to follow the ASA steps and fight with the principle and in cleanness. They considered that serving Ormuzd is their main task in order to introduce fairness and kindness and get rid of Ahriman.

The ancient kings of Iran were effort to development of the state. The concept of development and cultivate was shaped during the establishment of royal structure and reached their heights during Sasanian dynasty. In ancient Iran the kings undertook projects since they considered themselves as the agents of the Ormuzd on earth that have to follow the ASA steps and fight with the principle and in cleanness. They considered that serving Ormuzd is their main task in order to introduce fairness and kindness and get rid of evil. The ancient kings of Iran were endowed by the good office of development of the state. The concept of development and cultivate was shaped during the establishment of royal structure and reached their heights during Sasanian dynasty. Sasanian were skilled in urban development and many ancient cities were ascribed to them. Most of the cities were named after the period's ruling king as a symbol of immortality, the likes of which are the cities of JondiShapour, Bishapour, Ardashir Khoreh and Qobad Khoreh.

Development and cultivation were related to the justice of the king. The kings considered development and cultivation as the manifestation of justice and Ardashir recommended his successors (Ahde Ardashir: 1969:112). The basis of righteousness is related to the divisions in the social stratum. The major interpretation of the term righteousness used in the ancient times was the concept of having respect towards the social stratum and preventing aggression among them while keeping everyone and everything in their order. Also the kings considered themselves as the guardian of the border lines and this was very costly. Patron of religion in the royal structure was of essence among ancient Iranian kings. This concept was introduced by Goshtasb with the beginning of Zoroastrian belief.

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The royal procedures sometimes did not agree with the Caliph who considered this conduct as a struggle to bring back the royal system as if there was not a third approach and any conduct that did not fit with Caliph ruling format meant return to royal system. Having been endowed with a royal ancestor was another condition for becoming a king.

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Iranians believed that kingship is exclusive right exercised by a dynasty and the rulers were considered themselves as if they were next of kin to ancient kings. During the Islamic ruling period the rules tried to train and educate their male children to become their successors. Some of the Iranian rulers tried to increase their reverence and some did not even associate with the regular people.

The Iranian rulers were cautious about calling themselves as the agents of the God on earth. The Abbasid Caliphs was the representative of God on earth who legitimized the other rulers. Justice and righteousness, as mentioned before related to the divisions in the social stratum, but under Islamic rule at least, theoretically, there was no divisions in the social stratum.

In the Islamic period the major definition of justice was fair judgment towards presented cases and extending the helping hand to the needy. Iranian rules after Islam attempted to be benevolent like the ancient kings; therefore, they developed and cultivated. Defending the boundary lines faced changes in this period as well. The racial borders were transformed into belief boarders where protection of Muslims and their possession seemed more important for the Muslim rules. Being pious was the same as during the Zoroastrian period. Iranian rulers waged war on infidel neutrality and used their reverence to expand Islam and report the results to the Caliph.

3. Originating of the Safarian Royal Family

For Iranians the ancestral race was very essential factor and Iranians do not recognized anyone other than Fereydoon's descendants (Tabari: 1984:v1:288). The dynasties in Iran had some ancestral relation with the kings and rulers. Keyanids related themselves to Pishdadids and Arshakids dynasties while Sasanians relate themselves to Keyanids. The exclusivity of the concept of king in a dynasty caused the pretenders of ruling, even after Muslims occupation of Iran, to claim ancestral right. With no doubt the assumed limitation on becoming a king in a dynasty, even in Islamic Iran, was accepted by the people and this issue led to the generation of Iranian race royal families.

Saffarids were not exception to the rule regarding above mentioned fact in the beginning centuries of Islam. In history of Sistan relates Yaqoub to Khosro Parviz whose ancestry goes back to Keyomars (History of Sistan: 2002:207-209). Khosro Parviz's successors they went on living as regular people. One of them was Leyss father of Yaqoub (Sistani: 1965: 55-56).

Unlike Tahirids and Samanid, Saffarids connected themselves directly to the kings before Islam to show that they have independent ruling in mind. There are some writings in this regard, with Baghdadian story's, that degrades the race of Saffarids and discredit them. The stories about the Saffarids are so many that after centuries still there is confusion about Yaqoub race (Khandmir: 1974:v2:345).

Safarians were not exception to the rule regarding above mentioned fact in the beginning centuries of Islam. An unknown historian in Sistan relates YAQOUB to Khosro Parviz whose lineage goes back to Keyomars (History of Sistan: 2002:207-209). The story continuous as when Islam entered Iran and disarmed Khosro Parviz's successors they went on living as regular people. One of them was Leyss father (Shah Hossein Sistani: 1965: 55-56). Yet another story from Sasanian era: King Bahman awarded his kingdom to his daughter. His son Sasan left the palace and lived as a shepherd for a while, then become a king and established the Sasanian dynasty.

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4. Coming to Power of Yaqoub

Yaqoub was one of manly commanders who gathered forces to go to war with the Khavarej (Ibn Khaldoon: 1978: v3:459). Under Saleh Ibn Nasr's command he was able to expel the Taherid governor of Sistan and occupy his place. The opposing interests between Bost and Drangiana resulted in an uprising against Saleh and Sistan's government by some of manly lead by Dirham Ibn Nasr. Yaqoub was one of the most renowned chief warriors of Dirham who was able to take possession of power (History of Sistan: 2002:207). Some of the historians were trying to show the coming to power of Yaqoub as an accident (Jozjani: 1984:198), but in reality he has gained that status by the credit he earned for himself. Therefore, not all stories by the historians have to be accepted by the people. Hamzeh Isfahani, a historian, claims that Yaqoub was an expert in politics and governing; therefore, he was superior to Dirham (Isfahani: 1988:207).

Local bias were motives that pushed Yaqoub to his heights at the beginning. The conflict between Yaqoub and Saleh Ibn Nasr was due to the traditional race for power between Bost and Drangiana. When Yaqoub became ruler of Sistan, he sent a message to one of the Khavarej rulers who was titled caliph that "Forget about your title and join us with good faith to save Sistan" (History of Sistan: 2002:209). But later he became national attitudes.

Most probably, at the beginning Yaqoub was under the supremacy of Tahirids (Yaqubi: 1999:v2:526). It seems that after the first attack to Kerman and Fars Yaqoub, he did not intend to annex these two to his territories since after he defeated Fars rulers, he returned to Sistan and caliph send his governors to Kerman and Fars. In the second round of attacks made to Kerman and Fars he annexed them to his territories. He sent many gifts with fifty golden and silver idols to the caliph accompanied with the decrees and charters of ruling on the states of Balkh, Thokharestan, Fars, Sistan, Kerman(History of Sistan:2002:220). The caliph hated the fact that Yaqoub had to take Kerman and Fars and the gifts were due to extreme fear.

5. Yaqoub and the Revival of Iranian Royal Pattern

In his attempts to restore the ancient Iranian royal pattern of ruling he annexed Khorasan to his territories. Some sources have it as giving refuge to Mohammad Ibn Tahir by Abdullah Sagzi, who was an opponent of Yaqoub led to Yaqoub attack to Khurasan. While the fact was the retro gradation of Mohammad Ibn Tahir's power and the flourishing Yaqoub's

administration lead to annexation of Khorasan inevitable. Yaqoub made Neishapour his capital and by following the ancient Iranian royal tradition took the thorns (Masoudi: 1978:v2:602).

Saffarids were more continuity to Iran loyal than the Tahirids (Fray: 1979:216). It is narrated that one of the aspects of revealing Iranian identity was the first poem written in Yaqoub's court. After occupying Herat and defeating Khavarej the court poets wrote Arabic poems. His court poets wrote Arabic poetry as well. Yaqoub did not know the Arabic language and told Mohammad Ibn Vosaif, his poet of poets that "Why say things that I don't understand?" After that Mohammad Ibn Vosaif composed Persian poems (History of Sistan: 2002:214-215).

Yaqoub committed himself to promote ancient Iranian royal functions and it seemed that the public respected that. With respect to pietism, he tried but according to some historians his actions lead into doubt. It seems that for Yaqoub the priority was with the politics then religion although he enjoyed the clergies respect (Offi: 2005:45-46).

He called himself as the guardian of the life and property of Muslims and a martyr on Islam's path and a soldier of the holy war against non-believers. He attacked Kabul and other states that were considered to be non-believers and brought back loot. He even sends some of this loot to the Caliph. The purposes of such attacks were to enrich his treasure while he made it count as expansion of Islam and fight against non-believers. He claimed that the Khalife has given the right to eradicate the Khavarej and expand the security in the region (Ibn Asir: 1972:v12:50). But he mixed some of the Khavarej into his forces that were called the army of Alsherat. This was another gesture showing his interest in expanding Islam.

Justice was another one of his major royal tasks. Some of his opponents considered him as a ruler who collected tax by force (Ibn Esfandiari: no date: 245). While some historians, on the other hand, praised his justice. It is said that he was liked by people for his being justice and him was famous for having this treat (History of Sistan: 2002:232-234). It is even said that he paid extra to his agents so they not be consumed by greed for money from peasants (Sistani: 1965:58). Yaqoub had told the elite of the Neishapour that: I am raised to power to stop the miscarriage of justice and keep people from corruption and if I hadn't behaved as such God would not have helped me to triumph (History of Sistan: 2002:225). He used to seat exposed to public and granted peoples needs.

Since he was busy raging war he did not provide enough time for development and cultivation but some how the city of Gardiz and a palace in Drangianaes ascribed to him (Estakhri: 1994:255).

His grandeur was similar to that of ancient kings. It is told that his policy towards his army personal and their mutual loyalty regarding obedience is never heard of, or recorded neither on his ancestors nor his successor sides (Masoudi:1978:v2:601). It seems that he tried not to lose his grandeur. His army was so disciplined and organized that when Hassan Ibn Zeyd left money and weapons after his defeat, Yaqoub's soldiers did not touch them (Masoudi: 1978:v2:603).

His Iranian patriotic fillings were evident in his conduct. It is written in the history of Sistan (history of Sistan :2002:261) that he had monthly plan for his duties since he considered himself as a successor of Sasanian dynasty for whom time schedule and planning were major factors in governing the state. The translation of the history of Iranian kingd that belonged to the Anushirvan era is ascribed to him (Momtahan: 2006:316) and he is entitled to be the "Renovator of Iranian kings statehood". (Sistani: 1965:59).

Yaqoub's relation with the Caliph have never been friendly. Regardless of the decrees issued by the Caliph to Yaqoub and the presents send by Yaqoub to the Caliph, both were on deceitful bases. Bosworth believes that the sentiment of Saffarids dynasty in the eastern region of Islamic world was the first fissure created in the entirety of Abbasid Caliphate territories (Bosworth: 1998:227). The issue that made the fissure between Caliph and Yaqoub irreconcilable was Yaqoub's occupation of Khorasan and overthrowing of Tahirids.

Yaqoub tried to satisfy the needs of the caliph without believing in his acts, for the benefit of the people. When people of Neishapour began talking about non existence of a charter of caliph. He drew his sword and waged it. They thought he wanted to kill them, but then Yaqoub said "This is not kill anyone, but you have claimed that Yaqoub does not have a charter from the Caliph" he added "Isn't that true that the sword put him, the Caliph, on the throne in Baghdad?" they all said, "yes", then he added "The same sword put me to throne here, so, aren't my and his charter the same?" (History of Sistan: 2002:225).

The obscured enmity between Yaqoub and Caliph was revealed after Tahirids fall. The Caliph revealed his atrocity against Yaqoub and in 261 A.H/871 A.D he gathered all the pilgrims of Khorasan, Rey, Tabarestan and Gorgan and read a decree to them announcing that "The Caliph has not appointed Yaqoub to govern Khorasan and you should estrange him" (Tabari: 1984:v15:6445-6446) Yaqoub "Many have said the Abbasids state is based on treachery, don't you see what happened with Abosalameh, Abomoslem, Baramakeh and Fazl Ibn Sahl with all their good deeds?" The Caliphate is not trustworthy (History of Sistan: 2002:261-262).

Yaqoub organized a military expedition to Baghdad. He wanted to take a revenge from Arabs and to reestablish

the ancient Iranian governance. Ibrahim Ibn Memshad of Isfahan surnamed as the trustee of Caliph visited Yaqoub as a messenger. Ibrahim wrote a piece of poetry in Arabic and send it to the Caliph:

I am a person of noble birth from the lineage of Yama and the throne of Iranians. I am the reviver of that lost glory of the past. I have the right and a desire for revenge in taking vengeance from whom that has abolished that glory. I do not care if others renounce this right. I carry Kavian banner by which I wish to lead all nations. Tel Bany Hashm, before you regret disarm yourself. Don't forget that our spears swords. Our fathers' efforts brought you governance. You did not acknowledge their services and not even thanked them. Now, return to your main Arabian Patrai lands and eat lizards and graze ship since very soon I will be on throne with the power of sword (Momtahn: 2006:246-247).

This piece of poetry engulfs all of Leiss and the majority of Iranians intention regarding the revival of royal procedure with serious implementation aspects of the conduct against Abbasid and Arabs in general.

The motives of this attack to Baghdad are interpreted differently by the historians. Gardizi writes that Yaqoub went to Baghdad to de throne Motamed and recognizes Movafagh (Gardizi: 1984:310-311). Torkamani Azar believed that Yaqoub knew that Motamed doe's not thrust him; therefore he decided to replace him with Movafagh (Torkamani Azar: 2001:39). Khajeh Nizamolmolk believed that since Yaqoub had diverted to Assassin and he went to war with Caliph (Nizamolmolk: 2005:17-18). Maghdesi writes that Abdullah Ibn Vasegh went to Yaqoub laics and asked protection against Motamed and this intrigued the greed in Yaqoub to attack Baghdad (Maghdesi: 1995:981). Yaqoub's army progressed up to Ramhormouz and this feared Caliph. At this point in time, the Caliph released all the apostle that were jailed after Tahirids fall and the covenants and the charter of ruling Khorasan, Tabarestan, Gorgan, Fars, Kerman and Indus to Yaqoub who did not accept them and said that "I have to meet Caliph in person"(Tabari: 1984:v15:6449). He justified this act against the Caliph on religious grounds. It seems that Yaqoub intended to against Caliph and not against Caliphate. Yaqoub, with no doubt, was aware of the legitimacy and acceptance of Caliph among Muslims and even knew that some of his own companions would not stand against Caliph. Most probably Yaqoub intended to disarm Motamed and appoint another Caliph instead. It seems that this was not the sole intention of him. Anyhow, Yaqoub advanced up to Deyrolaqol but he lost the battle and retreated. One of the reasons of this retreat was that there existed a contention between him and some of his companions. But the Caliph was still afraid of Yaqoub, therefore, the Caliph triad to gain his trust by sending the chatters of the states that were under Yaqoub's control to him as token of peace. Yaqoub did not accept the peace accord and was preparing another attack but his death put a stop to his plans.

The endings years of Yaqoub are full of ambiguity. Most of the historians write that after his defeat in Deirolahol he went to JondiShapour and died there as if they tried to say this was his punishment for his rebellion against Caliph. The Deirolahol battle took place in 262 A-H and Yaqoub died in 265 A-H. Not much is known about these three years, but that he chose JondiShapour as his capital. All Sasanian kings up to Hormouz, son of Nersi have settled in JondiShapour Khuzestan and Yaqoub wanted to resemble them (Masoudi: 1978:v2:248). Up to the last minute of his life he did not give away the idea of reviving the ancient royal procedure. The Caliph declared peace, but Yaqoub response was "There will be sword between us and either will defeat the Caliph or will survive on barley bread, fish and onion" (nezamol molk: 2005:18). The selection of JondiShapour had its strategic advantage that is its closeness to Baghdad. Here he wanted to recover and make another attack on Baghdad. It seems that his reverence even in the last years of his life turned out to enhance his stronghold in different regions of Iran and rule like ancient kings did. An unknown historian exaggerates a tale that in this three years period the Turkmen, Indian, China, Zang, Rome, Sham and Yemen send consuls to Y and announced their obedience(History of Sistan:2002:231).

6. The Result

Yaqoub thought regional at the beginning, but after his second victory on Fars and Kerman he began to think national. In contrast to the Baghdad oriented writings that degraded him and his uprising, he ascribed himself to Sasanian dynasty. He, who came to power by the assistant of his comrades, exposed an Iranian king's reverence. Justice, development cultivation and pietism were his main concerns and he saw that they were exercised in compliance with his guidance's. His intention was to revive the Iranian royal procedure; therefore he acted as an ancient Iranian king. In this challenge he had to oppose the Caliph. The legitimacy of Abbasid's did not allow Yaqoub to dismantle that system and he chose supremacy instead. After his defeat in Deyrolaqol he chose JondiShapour as the capital in order to be close to Baghdad and reestablish forces for a second attack for one reason and resembling the Sasanian royal procedure for the other.

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