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SASANID MUSIC (FROM HISTORICAL TEXTS TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE)

The Sasanid government is the last government before the arrival of Islam to Iran. The great kings of this government including Khosrow Parviz and Bahram Gure were fond of music. These kings helped the growth and advancement of music a lot with the support of musicians so that music reached its peak, and musicians such as Nikissa and Barbad reached the court's rank in addition to perform music. The reports of historians, existing books, and the ancient texts of Sasanid era indicate the richness of music in this period. This paper was compiled by library method and field survey and it has a descriptive-analytical approach. The purpose of this article is to identify musical instruments and instrumentalities in Sasanid era based on historical texts and evidence obtained from archaeological excavations or smuggling and cultural materials remained from Sasanid period.

Keywords: *Musical instruments, Sasanian, Historical texts, Archaeological findings.*

Introduction

Music is a spectrum of art. To do this, we first define art, and then, we turn to the music history. Various views have been presented for the definition of art. Tolstoy considers art to be the expression of feeling [1. P. 53]. Some considered it as the creation of beauty [2. P. 30]. Art is an expression of beauty, human feeling, emotions, and thoughts [3. P. 7]. Attributes such as fit and balance, creativity, feeling, affection, and thought are used in art [4. P. 160].

In the definition of music, it has been said that “music refers to a group of notes, successive melodies of a certain order, and sometimes a group of notes that were combined to express a particular meaning and purpose on the basis of the current rules of language in order to keep pace with letters, words, and words of a poem [5. P. 5]. The music can be composed of melody and melody to songs and notes with rhythm or harmonious melodies [6. P. 88]. From ancient times, music has been considered as human phenomena, national arts, and human's social and individual needs that have had a great impact on life. It is certain that music is a phenomenon and essence of every nation that exists in the world, and it is a part of national identity and the basis of the culture of every society, so that each nation and culture are known and introduced with their own music. Every nation has a special music that has long been reminiscent of a past, and it is this feature that distinguishes that nation from other nations in terms of cultural point of view [7. P. 293].

It can be said that music is the first tool to express the inner feelings of human. It is an art that can excite human or fill him with grief. Music has been common in Iran since ancient times. In the history of civilization and culture of Iran before Islam about the art of Iranian music, it has been argued that the Aryan tribes have become familiar with the art of music and they have played a significant role in various instruments and the arrangement of songs and lyrics.

Nowadays music is on the top of the seven arches of mankind due to its importance. Some believe that the term “music” has been entered into the Arabic language after the translation of Greek scientific books into Arabic, and then entered from Arabic into Persian.

Sasanian music

Music was one of the manifestations of Iranian civilization in this era. In other words, Sasanid era has been the golden age of Iranian music. In the description of Sasanid community in the letter of Nansar, khonyagaran (minstrel) referred to the third classes of the community as founded by Ardeshir. In this class, teachers, physicians, scholars, and astronomers have been regarded as mighty people in the worldly life. In another description about the division of society into seven categories, which is also attributed to Ardeshir, a category belonged to singers, minstrel, and musicians. According to the book of Baha'm Gur, the al-Taq would boost everyone who was pleased with him, and lowered everyone who could not do it to a second degree. According to al-taj book, the book of Baham gur, everyone who pleased him promoted to first degree and anyone who could not please him reduced to second degree. At the time of Khosro anushirovan, first-class musicians and singers belonged to the highest court class, and it seems that the court's minstrel in the king's court were in the presence of king and they presented poetry to the king every year at the ceremonies of Mehregan and Nowruz.

Historical texts In remaining Pahlavi's texts, there are also some tips about good tune on which we will talk here: One of these writings is Khosro qobadan and Reedek, the subject of which is the question and answer between Khosrow Anushirvan and a young boy. The author explains the educational subjects in the form of this text for a young Iranian who would have to pass at the time. These educational subjects include teaching religious and scientific books, graphology, astronomy, minstrelsy, dancing, botany, cooking, and, etc. The young boy has appropriate response to all king's questions, and then Khosrow Anoushirvan asks him about the good tune in 9th question: he says “which minstrelsy is better?”. Reedek says: be immortal. All these minstrels including playing harp, playing Van, playing konar, playing tanbour, playing Barbat, playing ney, playing tombak [8. P. 77]. are good. Here are some instruments such as Tannour, Barbat, Ney or Tombak which are still used in Iranian music. According to the writings of Ibn Khardadbeh, Van also was one of the most popular Iranian instruments that had seven tars and it is as like as playing a harp. The “konar” saz is another kind of harp.

There is also another narration of Khosroqbadan and Reedak, from Abu Mansour Sa'ali (between the 4th and 5th centuries AD), which has four additional questions on the preceding text. “Which song is better?” Khosrow asks Reedek. He replied: “The tune of a saz that the melody of its tar sounds like a song and the song that its melody sounds like the voice of saz”. Parviz said: how is what you said? The young man added: “a barbat that has four tar, build of harp, harmonious tambour, a ney with hands of Isfahan, Nahavand's song, and Nishapur's cricket, and every voice that comes out of the simple and beautiful mouthes and lips.”

In this text, in addition to paying attention to soundness and harmony of reader and musician who should not play and read without harmony, it is also pointed out

that the musicians should play instrument (saz) for playing hands or instruments with the proper tunes of the same instrument in order to be in harmony with each other. Also, here are the names that are now available in Iranian devices or instruments. At the end of the text, we also read that the reader should be handsome [8. P. 88].

There is another text named “Yadgar Zariran” in Pahlavi texts that show the status of goodness in the general times: “Then, for every man who was send informed courier or messenger, and come to the door of Goshtasb Shah, Tonbak and Gavdamb was called” [8. P. 51]. This means that a musical group composed of instruments such as Tonbak, Ney, and Gavdamb informed those who wanted to visit king by playing.

There is some evidence from the time of minstrels during Sasanid era. The Middle Persian term used for this artist was “Henig” and “Hinvaz”, but the term “Navagar” was replaced with it in the texts referring to Sasanid minstrels. However, the term “bard” (Rameshgar in Persian) is more commonly used. In some texts, the word “chamegau” has also been seen. As the old texts show, the middle Persian minstrel like Persian Gosan had been used for both musicians and singers [9. P. 51–52].

Generally, Pahlavi’s texts did not show minstrels as wandering and itinerant elements but as a member of court. On the other hand, Pahlavi’s texts show that professional minstrel was not exclusive to the court during Sasanid era. His range of activities was very extensive like Ashkani period.

Haniagar, like Gaussian, composed a series of traditional artistic themes and at the same time added his composed poems to it.

Evidence shows that the number of clergymen gathered at the feasts and ceremonies of the poor people had increased since the time of Bahram Gore through the entrance of Indian Gosan tribes. The Shahnameh is mentioned as an important document about minstrels or Ramshgharan, and there are many references to minstrels, and that minstrel for hobby was prevalent not only by professionals, but also by the worshipers or courtiers such as Khosroupviz’s courtier and women. Shahnameh has many references to minstrelsy of Women in the story of the life of Bahram Gore.

Barbed is a well-known minstrel who has been a music theorist. His songs were alive or new and performed even until tenth century in Marv. Some believe that there were seven titles or ranks before Barbed, and this number reaches to twelve in his time, and he himself had 300 special songs [10. P. 225]. Several names of the songs of old times are found in Divan and Masnavi of Persian Poets, especially in Manochehri’s Divan. From them, you can find interest topics of Sasanid poets. Some of the songs were composed on the praising of kings and his treasures, such as Shahriar’s garden, Shirin’s garden, Orangi, Shabdiiz, haft Ganj (the seven treasures), Ganj bad avardeh (the treasure was taken by wind), and Ganjgah. Some others are about the ancient heroes such as Jamshid’s traditions (Aene Jamshid), Iraj’s enemies (keen e Iraj), Nowruz Kayghobad, and some of them are about admiring the spring, the beauty of nature, and the admiration of wind, luxury, and pleasure such as spring odors, Nowruz Leaf, Nowruz flute, green in green, sun’s makeup, happiness or joyance of the world and so on. Among the collection of names of songs and tunes which remained of that period, some of them were gradually eliminated, and some were included in music after Islam.

Also, by looking at the survival of the names of some of the composers and musicians of that era such as Barbad, Jahromi, Nikisa, Ramtin, Bamashad, Sarkesh, Sarkab, and etc, we can understand the importance of music in this period, especially in Khosro Parviz era. As some say, Khosro Parviz divided his daily program into four parts. In the second part, he spent his time happily with minstrels [11. P. 8 an 36].

Archaeological evidences

In addition to the above mentioned, the evidence of documentary works that shows the prevalence of music and its position in this period, has been obtained based on archaeological excavations. One of these works is Kermanshah's Tagh Bostan carving that was carved by Khosrowpavis on the wall Tagh Bostan in the fifth century and it is one of the important sources of recognition of instruments and a documentary evidence of the flourishing music in this era. This prominent figure shows two royal hunting grounds. In the left wall, there is a crowd of hunting boar, and the wall to the right of the cave shows a scene of hunting deer. In this figure or picture, the first person on the right is the musician who plays Ney or Sorenay.

The invention of Ney has been attributed to Iranians since ancient times. Ney is a kind of flute from the family of windy musical instruments and it is a hollow cylinder of different sizes with some holes on it and a hole under it [12. P. 211]. The second music player on the carving of Taq Bostan has a square device in the form of Daf in his hand. There are three people above on the right of the assembly. The first from the left is koos (drum or tambour), the second one is one or two small timpani (kettledrum). And the third one in the lower row is a special drum instrument, which is probably called "Tabir" or "Tabireh". It is a cylinder that is narrow in the middle and wide on both sides. In the sight of hunting boat, the king and his entourage are seen with singers and several harp and, and others are clapping in the boat (Fig. 1) [13. P. 14–16–83]. The harp is one of the first Iranian instruments, and its name can be seen more than any other instrument among ancient books and figures. Sumerians, Elamites and Assyrians had this instrument Before Iranians [7. P. 302]. Other examples of harp belonging to this period include a piece of mosaic of the second half of the third century which was discovered in Bishapur (pict. 2), and now is being kept at the Louvre Museum in Paris. At Bishapur Palace, there are wall paintings or pictures and floorings that represent dancers and musicians. These figures and pictures show that the artists were very respectful to the king. Another example of the harp can be seen on the wall of the palace belonging to this period with a very interesting wall painting in Punjab, located in Transoxania (60 km from Samarkand). Also, a silver vase come from the Saga area in Russia. The painting on this shows musicians in playing mode of various instruments such as harp (Cheng) (Fig. 3).

Figure of a man is the works considered as Iranian music charts in Sasanian era which is kept at the National Museum of Iran. It is considered as the explorations of Shoosh. It constructed in simple and primitive form. The man with a hat, sitting on his two legs, plays the special drum instrument which is probably called "Tabireh".



Fig. 1. The scenes of hunting in Taq Bostan and the accompaniment of different music groups and playing music alongside them (painters)



Fig. 2. The painting of harp player woman painting of party on the Bishapoor's



Fig. 3. Silver vase with mosaics musicians [14. P. 90]

Sasanid silver is one of the most important things to look for. They are considered as the most beautiful series of Sasanid works. On some of them, there are some figures or paintings that give evidence of flourishing music and the form of its instruments in this era. Some of these dishes are kept at the National Museum of Ancient Iran and some other in private collections and museums abroad. One of these objects is the Silver Cup kept in the National Museum of Iran which is

obtained from the Kelardasht district of Mazandaran (Fig. 4–6). On the outer surface of that sculpture, the prominent figure of the faces of a female musician can be seen, one of whom is playing Oud or Barbat. According to the narrations, Iran was called the origin of this kind of saz. This instrument was originally called a river and entered into Arabic language with the same name, and then, it was called Oud or Al- ūd. The other musician is playing a saz which is called Mosighar (pan flute). Europeans call it “Pan flute” and today it is known as harmonica (mouth organ). These neys are connected with a broad band which is called syrinx in Greek language.



Fig. 4–6. Various views of the Silver Cup of Kelardasht, Mazandaran, National Museum of Ancient Iran, Tehran

In the exploration of Hetra, we see a prominent figure of pan (music god) playing the musicals (pan flute) on the limestone. Another musician is playing Serena (horn). The next person has two teaspoons in his hand, made up of two pieces of wood which joined together at the end and whose tip is like a thick and cupped spoon. Another silver cup at the National Museum of Iran also obtained from Kelardasht. It shows that each of the musicians is playing a type of instrument such as Barbat and wind musical instrument. One of the two bards (Rameshgar in Persian) has a ring in his hand that is probably a kind of musical instrument. There is a golden decanter of Kelardasht in Mazandaran whose body is decorated with the figure of four bards. One of them is playing with the rope and the other one is playing a cordophone which is probably called “Barbat or Lutes”. There are numerous silver dishes in collections and museums abroad, some of which are somehow painted with the pictures of musicians and bards. There is a silver decanter of the eighth and ninth centuries which is kept at the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon. This pitcher depicts pictures of musicians playing musical instruments

such as Cheng, a type of wind musical instrument (serna), lutes (Barbat), and probably pan flute (Mosighar in Persian), two-sided drums, and Tabireh. There is another golden decanter of this period kept in Freer Gallery. It shows that female musicians are playing different musical instruments such as pan flute, castanet and flutes (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Golden decanter with the figure of woman musician having castanet in her hand, Sasanid, Freer Gallery

Animals orchestras or orchestras with animal shapes can be seen on many Sasanid golden dishes and many other works such as stamp from older periods that are often portrayed with instruments. The belief that lower creatures are aware of the charm of music has a long history. The figure on a stamp shows a shepherd who is playing a musical instrument, or it shows animals such as wolves, lions, dogs, cats, bears and monkeys were playing musical instruments such as Oud, Tambourine, Ney, and other kinds of musical instruments. The origin and principle of such thinking may be explained in this way that mankind has a close relationship with nature in prehistoric times; in his view, animals with the gift of knowledge, intelligence, and cunning, have more power than humans, also Because of their superstitions, they have more abilities than they did on their own. This made humans to use animals at the highest level of music. Meanwhile, it can be said that animal orchestra, with the ritual worship, is mixed with demonstration purposes and human being uses the mask to mimic the shape of animals and birds [15. P. 74].

An oval-shaped silver dish of seven-sixth century (AD) of Sasanid period is a sample of the works decorated with the figure of animal's music player in Los Angeles Museum. There is a design of curved figure of a monkey in the inner part of the container or dish that is playing a simple flute. Another example is a golden dish in Hermitage Museum, which shows the figure of a monkey playing a simple

flute. There is another monkey behind him playing a two-way drum. The musician's monkeys have had a long history since the mid-third millennium BC, and some of them have been excavated from Susa.

In the Hermitage museum, there are other silver dishes with the musicians' figure, one of which is the golden plate from the eighth to tenth centuries. This plate shows the image of a siege surrounded with soldiers. In this image or figure, musicians are playing trumpet or horn [16. P. 74]. Another silver plate in this museum shows the king sitting on the bed (Fig. 8). The third plate from the Hermitage Museum of 6th to 8th century shows the image of a goddess sitting on a legendary animal playing straw or ney (Fig. 9).

Among the other scenes in which music, singing and many other stories about Sasanid had been shown is related to noble musician lady and Bahram Gur who have been painted on a single plate (Fig. 10).



Fig. 8. The musicians on the plate of Sasanid



Fig. 9. The musician Goddess sitting period, Hermitage Museum legendary animal, Hermitage Museum



Fig. 10. The figure of noble musician lady and Bahram Gur on golden plate of Sasanid era, Metropolitan Museum

The impact of Sasanid music on the neighboring countries, from Armenia to Saudi Arabia, has been directly and clearly evident for centuries. After the advent of Islam and Arab's domination over Iran, Iranian music has been developed in a new format adapted to the conditions of its historical time. Arabs who had deprived of music improved their precious taste by having been influenced by the enormous culture of Iranian music.

Conclusion

In Sasanid period, we are witnessing the culmination of the development of music art. Musicians in this period had a great place in Achaemenid court and they were respected by the kings of this dynasty. Sasanid kings, especially Khosro Parviz and Bahram Gore, had been greatly contributed to the development of artistic music and they supported musicians. Given the archaeological evidence obtained from the Sasanid period, it could be assumed that music played a special role in the court. The form of a variety of musical groups of Sasanid period had been painted on golden dishes which represent the credibility and authority of this group of people and their social status. According to the obtained documents, it should be noted that musical instruments such as harp, Ney, Barbat, Tabireh, pan flute, membranophones or percussion instruments, Dafs, and Naghare had been available in this period, and the musicians used them in different ceremonies. The variety of musical instrument, in turn, indicates the progress of music art. Also, the range of musical designs and musical instruments in different scenes illustrates the importance of this art among the Sasanid kings. The existence of musicians and harp musicians during their hunt in Taq Bostan which is an important religious area, represents the tradition of hunting, music, and singing, as well as the position of this group of artists in the Sasanid court.

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