

The Role of Ardalan's dynasty in Iran's Political Structure

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at studying the role of Ardalan's dynasty in the political system of Iran. Going through a brief overview of the political situation of Kurdistan during Ardalan supremacy, this study is primarily focused on describing Ardalan's situation in political structure of Iran. Similar with governors in other parts of Iran, Ardalan authorities were considered as the political elites of Iran and possessed a special and unique political status among the states of Iran from Safavid to Qajar periods. Also, they were always, or at least most of the times, were among the topmost states of Iran attained the high authority and power. Ardalans had always benefited from the most prominent epithets and titles including Sultan, Khan, Baig, governor, and Biglar Baigy and they ruled their kingdom in much of the historical period covered in this study. Since Ardalans were the ruler of Kurdistan region before the Safavid dynasty, both Safavid and Qajar kings maintained them as rulers over their inherited and inborn region.

Keywords: Political structure of Iran; Ardalan dynasty; Governor; Biglar Baigy; Kurdistan

1. INTRODUCTION

The first Historical referring to the Ardalan's dynasty can be found in the sixth century A.H. However, almost all historical insinuations to Ardalans before the sixth century are mostly based on the myths and legends rather than historical documents. Based on these myths and according to an old tradition of Iranian after the conquest of Islam, Ardalan's ruling and their dynasty is attributed to Sassanid dynasty and ancient figures and heroes in order to legitimizing their ruling system. Ardalans firstly lived in Mosul- a city in Iraq- and later moved to Shahrazur in 564 AH. Later, they added other such other cities as Saqqez, Siahkoo and Ali-Shakar to their territory. Ardalan's territory was often stretched beyond the scope of Kurdistan province and sometimes it was also covered all Kurdistan areas including some parts of the Kurdistan region in contemporary Iraq. The emergence of this dynasty in the west of the Iran contributed a lot to the political movements in the history of Iran. Emerge of Safavid dynasty in Iran and Ottoman Empires in Anatolia put Ardalans in the cross section between these two great empires and led to a commencement of a new section in the Ardalans' realm. Ardalans remained independent and gained their autonomy till Hallo khan reigning and had no reliance on Safavid or Ottomans. They had affinity with both Iran and Ottoman Empires but they never accepted their full supremacy. Active participation of Kurds in wars and the continuing hostility between Iran and Ottoman Empire engrossed the political significance of Kurds for both governments. Therefore, Ardalans' deal with Persian and Ottoman government was determined based on an

identified pattern. In general, competition and conflict between Ottoman governors and Ardalans made them to respect the Safavids, apart from some exceptions. The hostility between Ardalans and Ottomans moved them to link with the Safavid rulers and this link was further strengthened for some reasons.

Deterioration of the Safavid dynasty and political turmoil in Iran led to succession of Baban dynasty until the rise of Nader Shah Afshar. Later, Nader Shah Afshar helped Ardalans to regain the lost power. During the Zand's reign (apart from the early period of Karim Khan Zand ruling) Ardalans were obedient to the central government. They had influential contributions to Karim Khan Zand in his war with Baghdad's Pasha (governor). Death of Karim Khan warned Ardalans that the chief of the Qajar tribe, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, sooner or later would seize the power. Although Ardalans could challenge the Qajar, Khosrow Khan, the governor, decided to support Qajars and consolidate his power.

2. SITUATION OF ARDALAN'S DYNASTY IN THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF IRAN

Thirty seven men of Ardalan family ruled over their territory from the early beginning of Baba Ardalan supremacy until the elimination of this dynasty. Their authority can be divided into three sections in terms of independency or dependency:

- 1- Ardalans were completely independent rulers and maintained their authorities from Baba Ardalan's era until the end of Hallo khan reign.
- 2- From the beginning of Ahmad Khan, the first, until the reign of Amanollah Khan, the great, Ardalan were semi-independent rulers and, according to the requirements of each period, recognized either Iranian authority and dominance or Ottomans.
- 3- Ardalans were fully under the political influence of Iran's government from reign of Amanollah Khan, the great, until their decline.

Badlisy in his second part of his book, Sharafname, asserts that: "although great and noted rulers of Kurdistan never claimed for the throne and decided not to disobey, sometimes preached the sermon and made coins in their own name". He also names some of the Ardalan's rulers and put their names among the rulers in this category. Based on historical evidence, Ardalan's period of independency must have begun from quite beginning of Ardalan's dynasty to the reign of Hallo Khan which was continued for two centuries.

After the historical period of independency, Ardalan's reign turned to a semi-independent state under the supremacy and influence of the Safavid rulers. During this period Ardalan's rulers enjoyed this opportunity to choose the subservient to either Iran or Ottoman Empires based on reason and significance. They were looking for the utmost autonomy and maximum freedom in their internal affairs. Because of the geographical proximity, Iran was their final choice. Qajar government was involved in all aspects of the Kurdish government and the governors were fully obeyed him from the beginning of the reign of the Amanollah Khan, the great, till the end of the Ardalan's dynasty. Ardalan rulers were entitled as Sultan, Khan or Baig during the reign of the first king of Safavid, Shah Abbas Safavi. Later, they were referred as governor and Baiglar Baigy.

The above mentioned titles had no difference in rank during the Safavid dynasty. At the beginning of the reign of Shah Ismail I the governors of the big states or provinces were called as governor or Baiglar Baigy; (Ilyas Baig, Manzar Baig, Timur Khan, Hallo khan) and the rank of Sultan and Khan was almost identical and equal till the death of Shah Tahmasp I. The

hierarchy of government from the time of Shah Abbas I, authorities of states and the most influential rulers of the states were ranked as a “Khan” (e.g. Hallaw Khan, or Khan Ahmed Khan) and less important rulers ranked in the second position as a “Sultan”. “Baig” was referred to those who were supposed to receive the reign and, later, governors of large states entitled as “Baiglar Baigy”. Iskandar Baig stated that Kurdistan secretary was among the governors who were called Baiglar Baigy at the reign of Shah Abbas.

According to the administrative and political structure of Iran in the Safavid period, governors who were not a member of assembly or governors of borders were divided into four types: Guardians, Baiglar Baigies, tribal chiefs and Sultans were ranked as the most prominent governors. Only four governors possessed this position in entire country including: Arabia, Lorestan Phailies, Georgia and Kurdistan. Sanandaj, the capital of Kurdistan, was run by the Ardalan ruler and the title of governor (Walley) was dedicated to him by the Safavid king Shah Ardalan. This title continued almost until the end of the Ardalan’s dynasty. Historical documents show that dedication of this title to a local government requires a certain administrative requirements, as well as power and authority which can be found only in the principal government system.

Governors had noticeable powers and authority in their territory which the most notable ones are as follows:

2. 1. Military Authorities

The main feature of this authority or power was taking command of military forces and thus empowering command (Commandant or Ruler) always preceded the awarding of government. That's why the most sources use the term “commander” instead of “governor” for the person who is in charge of a state. Thus, there are a lot of sources which regard Ardalans as “commandments or ruling of Ardalans”, indicating their great military powers in Kurdistan. Because of the great military authority, Chardin asserts that: “Khans have all their state power at their disposal, and there are considered as a minor king in retrospect.” However, measures were taken to counter the military power of the state governors. So, central government sent or determined agents to the realm of governors to balance the weights and control the local governors. For example, a group of tribal population, accompanied Suleyman Khan Ardalan, the governor of Kurdistan, visited the King of Iran in the court of the Safavid and informed the king that Suleyman Khan Ardalan was about to flee to the Ottoman territory with all his properties but they could prevent his escape. Later, Suleyman Khan Ardalan was dismissed when his decision to leave was confirmed. One of the important functions of the military rulers of Ardalans was to collect and send cavalry and infantry to the capital when it was needed. Protecting the territory, Ardalan governors were always relied on skillful cavalry and infantry forces to maintain their territory due to its strategic position. These forces were gathered from residence of local communities, towns, villages and even local tribes. Each of local tribes and communities chiefs were obliged to deliver a certain number of troops at their own expense when there was a call of the military duty. The main task of governors was defending the borders against the invasion of Ottomans. They should remain loyal to the king and provided him with troops at his military royal expeditions. Kurdistan governor would send about two thousand soldiers when King decided to march to Baghdad or the border regions of neighboring Iran, Saudi Arabia or Azerbaijan. This is how the Khan Ahmed Khan conquered Mosul and Baghdad for Shah Abbas. However, in far military expeditions only two hundred to five hundred soldiers were sent by the governor.

2. 2. Financial Authorities

Although financial affairs were somehow relied on the power of the central government, the local governors were independent in the financial issues of their territory. So, when the power of the central government was weak, local governors, who did not obey the central government commands fully, did not permit anyone to intervene with financial affairs. Governors did their financial business under supervision of a finance minister and the minister's family (Vaziri) was of crucial importance in the Ardalan's government system. The large states, which were considered to be the largest country units in the Safavid period, were considered as "public or governmental lands" that, unlike private lands, were governors' properties. Governors kept a part of the income of their state for personal use and the rest of it was assigned for paying the pensions and salary of soldiers and employees. King did not own land in the states but the toll of these areas called "customs" were sent to the King. The toll consisted of the special amount of each state's best products and some cash, in terms of wealth and affordability, which was called tribute "Barkhane". Ardalan, the governor, was the representative of the central government and connected the court with the people of his territory. Also, one of the most important tasks of Ardalan governors was to collect taxes of their territory and send it to the central government or court annually in due time.

2. 3. Jurisdiction

The governor, as the highest state authority, had the right to supervise over the public and jurisdictional bodies of his government. The governor was personally involved in the trials when the qualification of the court was not considered fine enough to handle the case. Also, the lawsuits which only could be handled by clerics and the clergymen were undertaken in his presence. If the governors were among Shiite followers, this could strengthen the relations with the central government. If governors believed in religions other than Shiite, they were forced to convert to Shiism, in one way or another. Khan Ahmad Khan Ardalan the fourth governor of Kurdistan in Safavid dynasty converted to Shiism in 1025 AH. Later, he married the Royal sister to remain among the four main governors of Iran. Governors benefited from a very broad power in the monarchy system of Iran. Tistinov in his report to Prince Czartoryski writes: "Four governors accompanied the King of Iran in his coronation in Ardabil. The Arab governor keeps the Paisley or rush. Georgia governor take a sword in his hand, Lorestan governor takes the Crown and the governor of Kurdistan keeps the ornaments consisting of two bands which were wreathed with diamond. Each of governors sent a son or brother as a deputy to the king's court to show their loyalty to the King. The deputies were dignified and were considered as the king's confidential attends. They, also, attended in public ceremonies of the royal court and had their annual salary. Safavid successors maintained this tradition and the governor's brother or son always attended at the court of the King of Iran till the decline of Ardalan dynasty in 1284 AH. Since the region of Shah Abbas II until the fall of the Safavid the attendance of four governors declined. But unlike other Iranian provinces, their territories didn't join the list of royal lands. During the reign of Sultan Hussein Shah, governor of Kurdistan lost his position and his title declined to Baiglar Baigy.

In general, Ardalan's local government gained a special status from the Safavid to Qajar periods and had always been, or at least most often, among the top authorities that had a considerable power. Ardalan had always benefited from the most prominent epithets and titles and they ruled their kingdom in much of the studied historical period. Since Ardalan were the rulers of Kurdistan region before the Safavid dynasty, both Safavid and Qajar kings maintained them as rulers over their inherited and inborn region. Non-local rulers in Kurdistan had power

for a short period of time from Safavid to Qajar period, and Ardalan dynasty rulers were in power most of the time. Also, they played a major role in political affairs of Iran. For example, Khosrow Khan, the second, after the defeat of Zand competitors captured a large part of Iran and he was able to reign over Iran, but for some reason he conveyed the power to Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar. Ardalan's political status remained unravel during the Qajar dynasty and they served as governors until their dismissal. One of the greatest and most powerful of them are r Amanollah Khan Ardalan, the Great, was the governor of Kurdistan during this period. Ardalan dynasty rulers gained such power and high political position that were considered and noted even by foreign countries. The author of Hadyghe Amanollahy describes the political and military power of Amanollah Khan Ardalan, the Great, and mentions a letter sent to him by the king of India in 1235 AH. The letter contains Indian's plea of help to stop the destruction of Islam and to counter the British military forces in India. Acknowledging the letter, Ali Akbar, a historian of the Kurdistan, claims that he has seen the letter personally. Zolgharnain history announces the presence of Amanollah Khan Ardalan, the Great, in a ceremony prepared to welcome the Russian ambassador, Permolve. He writes: "Amanollah Khan Ardalan, the Great, governor of Kurdistan who was accompanied with five thousands mount soldiers paved five miles to welcome the Russian ambassador, Alexander Permolve". He also writes that Khosrow Khan, governor of Kurdistan, welcomed the Russian ambassador Kiniaz Bokhoskov. These occasions demonstrate the importance of Ardalan governors in foreign policy of Iran. Since political, administrative and spiritual power of Kurdistan is directed by Ardalan dynasty, which inherited in their family for generations and centuries, it is clear that political stability in Ardalan dynasty is the main reason for this long authority.

The most important families who gained the political and administrative authority or moral ascendancy during the Ardalan dynasty are as follows:

- **Vakili Dynasty**

The Vakili family was successors of Ardalan dynasty over many generations. Ali Akbar, a historian of Kurdistan writes: "Other Kurd families are Vakilis. This family has served as attorney in department and offices of Krdistan for more than four hundred years. There are a number of brave and well-knowm people born in this family". The most famous people in this family are: Ibrahim Baig Vakil, contemporary to Nadir Shah Afsahr, Haji Mohammad Rashid Baig, Amanollah Khan Vakil, and Asadullah Khan Vakil, to name a few. Each of them had major political and administrative responsibilities at different periods of time.

- **Baraz Dynasty**

This dynasty is one of the most important tribes of Ardalani Kurdistan. As the audacity of this tribe has been known to everyone, they were said to attack the enemies like boars. This is the reason why this tribe is referred to as "Baraz" which means boar in Kurdish. History reads that "there have been many handsome, brave and hardworking men in this tribe. And their great grandfather has been the well-known Kahya Saleh who was driven away by Amir Teimour Gorkani along with two, or three thousand families to Osmani territory and then to Kurdistan. Some have been settled in Hobatoo and Gharatoureh Block and some in Mariwan Block. Two eminent figures on this dynasty are Haji Yaghoub Beig Baraz and Mohammad Bagher Beig Baraz.

- **Vaziri Daynasty**

The members of this family have been appointed as the ministers and counselors of Ardalan emirs. The founder of this dynasty has been Khajeh Ebrahim, the son of Khajeh Yousef, the fabrics merchant in Isfahan. In 1022, while Khan Ahmad, the first Ardalini Khan

was in Isfahan living with King Abbas, Khajeh Ebrahim was brought to his service and taken to Kurdistan. Towards the end of Ardalán's dynasty, we could notice an increase in the power of the Vaziris and a decrease in the power of the Vakilis. The most important figures of this dynasty include Mirza Abdollah and Mirza Ahmad Vazir who have been father and son, Mirza Farajollah and Mirza Hedayatollah Vazir who have been brothers.

- Ghaderi Dynasty

This dynasty also belonged to the royal class of Kurdistan which moved from the Dargazin region in Hamedan and entered Kurdistan in 1120. This dynasty became one of the most influential dynasties in Ardalani Kurdistan. Mohammad Agha, the grandfather of Mastoureh Kurdistani, was the treasurer of the second Khosro Khane Ardalán. He arranged her daughter's, Khorde Khanom, marriage with the first Amanollah Khan, and her granddaughter, also married the third Khosro Khan.

- Mawali Dynasty

This dynasty has been Judges and Islamic scholars in Sanandaj and the Kurdistani historians introduce them as follows: "The first member of this family is Molla Yaghoub Nami, who accumulated many credits for himself in Palangan Castle in 1008 Hijri, during the government of Halo Khan. Many eminent scholars have been educated and trained in this family." The eminent figures of this dynasty are Molla Mehdi Sheikholeslam, Molla Ahmad Sheikholeslam, Mollah Mohammad saleh Fakhrololama, Mollah Mohammad Mehdi Sheikholeslam, Molla Mohammad Amin Aminoleslam, Molla Lotfollah Sheikholeslam, Molla Hedayatollah Sheikholeslam. These scholars are introduced in the section dedicated to the introduction of scholars.

- Mardukh Dynasty

This family has been Imams and Sheikhs (religious leader) for generations in Kurdistan province. They have been brilliant not only in theology but also in literature, science and calligraphy. There is a statement in Hadyqhe Nasereh book about them: "Marduk is a village near the Damascus and Pir Mohammad is a name of one of the ancestors of this family migrated to the Kurdistan". There are such scholars and persons with high dignity in this family who cannot be described simply. Famous scholars like Sheikh Waseem, Sheikh Abdul II, Sheikh Jassim Sadrall-ollama', Sheikh Nasim, Sheikh Mohammed Fakhroal-ollama', Sheikh Hasan and noted Sadrall-ollama are among noted scholar, to name a few, born in this family.

3. CONCLUSION

Similar with governors in other parts of Iran, Ardalán authorities were considered as the political elites of Iran and from Safavid to Qajar periods possessed a special and unique political status among the states of Iran. Also, they were always, or at least most of the times, were among the topmost states of Iran attained the high authority and power. Ardalans had always benefited from the most prominent epithets and titles and they ruled their kingdom in much of the studied historical period. Since Ardalans were the ruler of Kurdistan region before the Safavid dynasty, both Safavid and Qajar kings maintained them as rulers over their inherited and inborn region. Non-local rulers in Kurdistan had power for a short period of time from Safavid to Qajar period, and Ardalán dynasty rulers were in power most of the time. The rulers of this dynasty played a major role in high political level of the country and there was at least a possibility for them to gain the kingship and monarchy. Ardalán's political status

remained unravel during the Qajar dynasty and they served as governors until their dismissal. One of the greatest and most powerful of them are Amanollah Khan Ardalan, the Great, was the governor of Kurdistan during this period.

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