

General survey on trade of great Khorassan in Sasanian era

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Abstract: Investigations on trade of great Khorassan in Sasanian era show important role of great Khorassan in different domestic and foreign dimensions and also its strategic role. A number of commercial and trade roads of this land in connection with eastern regions including India and China and also western countries including Rome led in importance of this land in political, social and cultural exchanges of Iran with other regions of the world. Therefore, this research tends to investigate and introduce important commercial markets and centers, different Iranian handmade artifacts and domestic products to show importance and role of this great part of Iran.

Key words: Sasanian; Khorassan; Trade; Good; Market; India; China

1. Introduction

Great Khorassan was one of major commercial centers of the world in Sasanian era. There may be a question that what reasons caused in growth and glory of great Khorassan and its important role in commerce? It sounds that this question may be answered with a bit of study and look after commercial roads in Sasanian era and its strategic geographical status. It is to be noted that Iranian governments did their bests to secure commercial roads from the times of Achaemenian and especially Darius the great up to Sasanian era and this security owed its nature to powerful governments.

From ancient times, Khorassan played important role in commerce of east and west and its governors had to secure roads to keep this status. Sasanian controlled different import and export goods and received taxes and dues in order to optimize their economy and they exploited from this status in its best way. Therefore, this research tends to have a closer look on society of Khorassan and its economy and commerce upon using main sources and researches.

2. Roads of great Khorassan

Since ancient times, the great Khorassan has been a strategic region in Iran. This region has been main commercial link of east and west and it was highly important for Medes, Achaemenian, Ashkanian and Sasanian governments. Great governments of India and China were in east of Iran which had vast commercial exchanges with Sasanian government. Extended land of great Khorassan played important role in markets for sales of goods and it also had important natural resources.

Silver coins of Sasanian called "Derakhma" had been used in their commercial exchanges in this region till years after downfall of Sasanian reign (Eshpuler, 1990). Power of central government has played important role in increasing security and amount of commercial exchanges, especially in Sasanian era, in a way that Sasanian government established a number of convenient places in order to promote commerce in Iran. Iran has been having a strategic status since ancient times and acting as a link for east and west and Khorassan or land of sun, in east and north-east of Iran, played an important role in these commercial exchanges. Iran established its commercial relations with India and China through borders of the great Khorassan and Iranian used borders of Khorassan to transit, import and export a number of goods and Khorassan had its own especial goods for trade. There has been passing a road through the great Khorassan which researchers believe that this road was primarily known as road of Khorassan but through the time, its name changed to Silk Road (Mohammad Malayeri, 2000).

Name of this road changed to Silk Road, because of trading valuable silk products through this road. Road of Khorassan or Silk Road started from Diyaleh in Iraq and passes through central Zagros to Hamadan and north and north-east of Iran and this road was one of main and vital roads of the region (Mori, 2001). While, some researchers believe that Silk Road started from Tisfoon, beside Dejlal, up to Khorassan, Kabul valley and India and continued to CN of China (Goljan, 2004). Silk Road had a number of sub-roads and it is better to say that this road was a link between China and India in east and Roman Empire in west and Iran as link of east and west used this road to transit its own commercial goods and also received taxes and dues from caravans which passed this way to east or west. This road had especial importance for Iran in both political and economic aspects (Nafisi, 2004).

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Iran controlled Silk Road not only to exchange goods, but also it was a type of political strategy to weaken Romans. Iranian government had been increasing price of Silk time to time in order to receive more gold coins from eastern Rome and weakened Byzantium Empire in military status. Increasing amount of good exchanges was not beneficial for Iran because eastern Rome could re-exchange these goods in Europe and earn more money and then they would have same power with Iran. This is the reason that Sasanian kings had been increasing silk price from time to time to limit and control sales amount of this product. This was one of the main reasons of conflicts between Iranians, Turks, Romans and eastern tribes of Iran (Reza 2002, p. 94). Of course in commerce, Iranian government looked after political targets in addition to economic ones. This caused in conflicts of Iranians and Turks and eastern Roman Empire had been trying to increase these conflicts (Reza, 2002).

Note that there were other commercial roads in addition to Silk Road. One of these commercial roads started from Bagdad and continued to Hamadan, Rey, Neishabour, Sarakhs and Marv and it divided into two roads; one of them went to north-east to Bokhara and Samarkand and the other one went to southeast and reached Marv Road and Balkh. There was another way from Iran to Turkestan which started from Neishabour to Sarakhs and Marv and it has a sub-road going to Balkh for transit of Indian goods (Bartold, 1929).

3. Commercial relation of India and China with Sasanian

Conflicts of Iran and Rome led Iranian to extend their commerce with east. Commercial exchanges with east were performed through land roads like Silk Road which continued from Khorassan to central Asian countries or they did it over the seas (Daryaie, 2003).

In great Khorassan in ancient times, agriculture was promoted because of its extended land and its industrial and agronomical products were exported to China, India, Mongolia, Arabian lands and different parts of Iran (Imam, 1969). On east side, Iran had closed relations with India because of their common borders. This relation was stronger during reign of Sasanian and they had commercial, cultural and spiritual relations (Nafisi, 2004).

China has been one of great eastern countries of Asia with thousands of years in civilization. China had good commercial relations with Iran in Sasanian era in a way that even after downfall of Sasanian by Muslim Arabs, Khaghans of China were supporting Iranians (Reza, 2002).

Balkh was one of major commercial centers during reign of Sasanian. Balkh was a fertilized land for cereals and commercial intersection of Iran and India and it has been place of coining and administrative center from era of Koshans up to Heptalian (Yarshater et al., 2001). Hariv or Herat

was another important region in trade between Iran and India.

There was a road from northeast to Bakteria (Balkh) which connected Hariv to Vartosepneh through road of Balkh-Bamiyan and it sounds that it was between Caspian and Kabul. Therefore, Hariv played important role in trade between India and China (Yarshater et al., 2001).

4. Important commercial goods and markets

Farghaneh horses were highly attended by emperors of China. China had been attacked by northern wild tribes (Hsiung-Nu) and Chinese could not defeat their cavalry forces with their own short horses. Greeks know Farghaneh horses as Nesaie horses which belonged to Medes and this race was famous in ancient world and there were myths about them in those eras (Bayat, 1991).

In those times, China imported woad, color, carpet, valuable stones and cloths from Iran and mostly exported silk to Iran. Silk was used with the same value of gold in Byzantium court and they exchanged it with valuable stones (Reza, 2002). Also, Skejket (a region in Khorassan) had strong and skilled people in commerce and they exported large amounts of burlap. Burlap was produced in Bokhara and but not like wheat, it was one of export goods of this city (Bayat 1991, p. 89). Musk was another export good of Badgheis city. Sodik was another important industrial center (Markuart, 2004).

Exports of other cities of Khorassan include: different types of cloths in Beihagh (Sabzevar) and Ghaen, stone pot in Noghan, jujube in Tabas, pot and bow in Khwarizm (knowned as Chachi), burlap, Cotoneaster and Grape juice in Kora and Pozhkan, Khaymand, Sangan and Salumand and Zozan as suburbs of Neishabour and Herat, wool and cotton, silk cloths, burlap and turquoise in Neishabour; collyrium stone in Manshan; white marble in Samangan; salt in Sakimesht; chain mail, cuirass and weapons in Ghor; burlap, soap, dried fruit in Bost; garnet and azure in Badakhshan; wool cloths in Taleghan; camel in Sarakhs; black and white marble in Obeh and Shah Maghsood villages of Ghandahar (Sotodeh, 1983). Generally it can be said that most important productive and export goods of cities of great Khorassan include: types of cotton, silk and wool cloths, carpets, raw silk, fur of ermine, sable and squirrel, paper, wheat, barley, rice, types of oil seeds, cereals, dried nuts (nut, almond and hazelnut), dried fish, honey, soap, candle, types of candies, stone dishes, weapons (chain mail, bow and etc.) and minerals (Imam, 1969).

There were different markets in parts of the country during Sasanian era; the markets were important for economy of the region. One of these markets in great Khorassan was Tavayes market, held in July for ten days. About 10,000 people traded in this market, every year and traders came to this market from Faraghaneh, Chach and other parts of the region. This market was on main road of Samarkand. Marv was another important market in

Khorassan and there were a number of markets in Rabaz, Balkh (Sotodeh, 1983).

5. Mints

Exclusive money of each country was one of the most important issues in its commerce and policy. Silver coins of Sasanian had been verified money in Asia and even in Roman Empire for centuries. Sasanian made different mints in different parts of the country to coin their coins, combining copper, silver and gold. Tisfoon mint was one of the greatest and most famous mints of the era. There were some portable mints which mostly used during wars. Most important eastern mints of Iran included: Marv, Neishabour (metropolis), Herat, Sod, Balkh, Banjahir and Gorgan and these mints were discrete based on their abbreviations on coins. MRW-MR was used for Marv, AB-APR-AP for Neishabour, HRI-HR-H-HRC for Herat, SD for Sod, BHP-BHL for Balkh, BN-BC for Banjahir and GUR for Gorgan. These words on coins showed their place of coining. These mints worked under the supervision of Vaster Yushan Salar (minister of finance). Close distance of mints to silver, gold and copper mines was one major factor in selection of places for mints (Althaeim, Steal 2003, p. 88-93).

6. Conclusions

This research concludes that great Khorassan was a strategic region for Iran and also for other countries of the world. This region was a main road and a global market and also acted as a cultural university in prevailing cultures between tribes and races and this place was also important in prevailing religions.

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