

The Concept of "Territory" in the Sasanian Period: A Contemplation

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Abstract

The term "territory", in the Sasanian cultural-political discourse, alludes to a concept wider than the kingdom's frontiers. This concept, rooted in the cultural-political traditions of the ancient Iranian governments, was redefined and revived in the Sasanian period relying on myths, religion, and history. A significant part of this concept was founded on the basis which was constructed in the pre-Sasanian periods during the Achaemenid and Parthian periods. The Sasanian monarchs' conquest of the east and west of the ancient world expanded the physical borders, and thus paved the way to extend their cultural territory over the world. Evidence of such cultural territory can be obtained from Sasanian material culture which has been found from all over the ancient world. Also, they introduced some innovations in the myths to justify developing the territory legally and religiously. In the present paper, after investigating the concept of territory with regard to the cultural-political discourse of Achaemenids, Arsacids and Sasanians, the role of myth and history in the definition of "ēran" is examined. Moreover, the Sasanian endeavours to expand their physical territory and then evidence of the Sasanian cultural territory is reviewed based on the historical accounts and archaeological evidence. Examination of the "territory" in different dimensions shows that the Sasanian territory set the stage for parading the Iranian culture which continued to survive over time and space. Accordingly, one can surmise that many historical events and cultural processes determining the significant Iranian events and organizations throughout history were affected by the Sasanian cultural-political characteristics, even after the decline and fall of the Sasanian empire.

Keywords: Territory, Frontier, Sasanian Period, Ēran, Zoroastrianism.

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