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THE STORY OF NEMAN AND SIMNAR: MYTH OR HISTORICAL REALITY?

LA HISTORIA DE NEMAN Y SIMNAR: ¿MITO O REALIDAD HISTÓRICA?

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ABSTRACT

The stories told by the people have served since ancient times as a means to transmit and preserve beliefs, customs and traditions. However, although with the passage of the generations they tend to be exaggerated in many cases after a more detailed investigation it is verified that these can have solid historical foundations. An example of the above is, in the author's opinion, the story of Neman and Simnar included in the work "Seven Beauties" by the renowned writer Nizami Ganjavi. Therefore, the objective of this work is to show that the story of Neman and Simnar is a true historical fact. In the work, historical documents from various sources are analyzed as well as the etymology of words used in them. As a result, it is shown that Nizami Ganjavi relies on his extensive historical knowledge to convey to us the tragedy of the architect, and through carefully crafted details he alludes the reader to the reflection of mortality.

Keywords:

Neman and Simnar, Khavarnag Castle, Nizami Ganjavi.

RESUMEN

Las historias contadas por los pueblos han servido desde tiempos antiguos como un medio para transmitir y conservar las creencias, costumbres y tradiciones. Sin embargo, aunque con el paso de las generaciones tienden a exagerarse en muchos casos tras una investigación más detallada se comprueba que estas pueden tener sólidos fundamentos históricos. Un ejemplo de lo anterior es, en opinión del autor, la historia de Neman y Simnar incluida en la obra "Siete Bellezas" del reconocido escritor Nizami Ganjavi. Por ello, el objetivo de este trabajo es demostrar que la historia de Neman y Simnar es un hecho histórico verídico. En el trabajo se analizan documentos históricos de diversas fuentes, así como la etimología de palabras usados en estos. Como resultado se demuestra que Nizami Ganjavi se apoya en sus amplios conocimientos históricos para transmitirnos la tragedia del arquitecto, y mediante detalles cuidadosamente elaborados alude al lector hacia la reflexión de la mortalidad.

Palabras clave:

Neman y Simnar, Castillo Khavarnag, Nizami Ganjavi.

INTRODUCTION

The story of “Simnar and Neman”, which was also popular in the time of Nizami Ganjavi, became more widespread in classical Eastern literature after being included in the poet’s poem “Seven beauties”. This has become a symbol of retribution for evil over good deeds throughout the Middle East, and it is still remembered today in everyday speech of ordinary people as “Jazai-Sinimmar”. It should be noted, that this story was skillfully taught in the works of most poets of the Middle and Early New Ages. For example, the eighteenth-century Ottoman poet Salonickly Mashhury says in a poem:

“I understood the short story from the famous “Sinimmar”

Courage is a slander that used to be genius.” (Shahamettin, 2016)

Or the story of Abdulkhalig (2019), a 19th-century Azerbaijan poet, one of the prominent representatives of the literary environment of Baku, nicknamed Jannati. He recalled as follows in his masnavi “Mutahayyirana bir sual” (A puzzling question):

“What kind of courage does Sinimmar have?

Nor does Neman have this fate.

Neither Khorengah, nor the temple of Bahram,

No one can be so famous.” (p. 77)

Arasli (2019), in her article “Seven beauties”, inspired by Nizami’s work, writes about an example of Turkish oral folk literature written by Amin Yumni in 1872 under the title “Biography-”Haft-peyker”. Describing Simnar being thrown to the ground from the palace he had built on Neman’s orders. Amin Yumni goes on to say:” Now, an innocent person is punished, and since then everyone takes it as “Jazayi-Simnar”.

The spread of the story led to Simnar and Neman, who punished him, being perceived as semi-legendary, semi-historical figures. Did Simnar really exist in history? We get the answer to this question from Bertels’ (2017), monograph “The great Azerbaijan poet Nizami”. Giving information about Khavarnag Castle, the scholar writes that its architect built many buildings in Egypt and Syria: *“Simnar is a historical figure. His real name seems to be Sin-im-mar in Babylonian form. The architect of Tagi-Busta near Kermanshah was allegedly his son Katus. The ruins of Khavarnag are still there.”* (p. 95)

Apparently, Bertels (2017), considers Simnar as a real historical figure, although he does not explain the meaning of his name. He puts forward some idea about its etymology and assumes that this anthroponym is of Babylonian

origin. Bertels’ (2017), claim is not unfounded. Thus, in the pantheon of Babylonian gods, “Sin”, the god known as the moon god, symbolizes victory over death. Described in Sumerian-Akkadian mythology as an old man with a long blue beard, the Akkadians called him “Sin” and the Sumerians “Nanna”. In ancient Mesopotamia, the main place of worship of its cult was the city of Ur, one of the most famous cultural centers of the Two Rivers (Meletinsky, 1990).

In our opinion, Bertels (2017), while writing the name of the architect presented by Nizami as Simnar in the form “Sin-im-mar” according to the original sources, probably meant that the name of the moon god “Sin” worshiped by the people of Babylon was at the root of this toponym.

However, most historical sources indicate that this legendary architect was of Greek (Byzantine) descent. For example, at-Tabari writes in his famous “History” that Simnar (Sinnimar in the above-mentioned source) lived in Damascus and came here from Byzantium. *“All regions were explored. All the regions have been visited. In this way, they looked for an architect who could build the building. They could not find. Finally, they found a man named Sinnimar in Damascus. He came from Byzantium and built various buildings from Greek houses. He was brought to the brave Numan.”* (Muhammad, 2007, p. 40)

It should also be noted that Nizami, while giving information about Simnar in his poem “Seven Beauties”, says that the art of his hero is admired by the population in Egypt, Damascus, China, as well as in Greece. However, the author mentions that when he was invited to build the castle of Khavarnag, Neman’s envoys went to Rome to bring Simnar. In the work it is written:

“Neman heard his praise,

Simnar’s fire inflamed him.

He quickly sent a man to Rome,

Master deceived Simnar with gold.” (Ganjavi, 2004, p. 55)

Taking the above into consideration, it seems logical to assume that the story of Neman and Simnar has, in addition to mythological roots, a solid historical component. The objective of this work is to clarify this fact. For this, various extracts from ancient texts are analyzed as well as the etymology of the words used by the various authors. It should also be noted that the castle of Khavarnag is a vital element in unraveling the historical component of the story that reach our days.

DEVELOPMENT

First, let's focus on the name of the architect. We come across the name of this person, presented by Nizami Ganjavi in the work as "Sam's son Simnar", in different sources for example: "Sinmar", "Senmar", "Sinimmar" and so on. Thus, in the dictionary "Burhane-qate" this special name, which goes as "Senmar", is indicated as "Sinimmar" in "Akhtari-kabir". But in Nizami's "Khamsa", published in Tehran in 1269 AD it went as "Simnar". It should be noted that the various reading variants of this name indicate that its original version, an ancient source of information about Simnar, is known to at-Tabari and other authors. It's just that these authors either read it differently or got acquainted with the translation of the same source into another language.

According to the famous artist, painter and scientist Latif (1983), the name "Simnar" is a distorted form of the word "Simar" and a nickname given by the people in accordance with the art of architecture. Thus, "simar" meaning thirty snakes is the name of one of the types of carpet patterns used in the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as in Azerbaijan long before the spread of Islam in these areas. Most likely the creator of this special decorative element was due to Nizami Ganjavi's poem "Seven beauties" and the famous episodic hero is the architect Simnar.

As was already mentioned, in most historical sources, the architect named Sinninmar is not only the author of the Khavarnag Castle, which was built at the request of Neman. Historical sources also preserve the names of other architectural samples he allegedly built (Latif, 1983). For example, the tenth-century Iranian historian Hamza Isfahani noted that another building near the city of Hira - the castle "Sinnin" is a work of art by the same architect. Therefore, it can be concluded that the nickname Sinninmar probably was given to him by the people in connection with the name of this architectural pearl he created.

Well-known orientalist and historian Ziya Bunyadov, citing medieval sources, noted that the name of Simnar, the protagonist of Nizami's "Seven Beauties", is more accurately written as "Sinninmar" and explained the etymology of this special name as follows: "*Sinninmar, that is, the lord of Sinnin, the owner of Sinnin's castle*" (Abdurrashid, 1992, p. 45). Furthermore, in various historical sources, it can be found that in addition to Sinn's castle, which Simnar (Sinninmar) built on the banks of the Euphrates River to Kufa, he was the architect of two other castles in Hira: Khawarnaq and Sadir. Nizami writes that both castles are among the rare architectural gems praised by poets in the East:

"To your honor poets Khavarnag, Sadeyr

wrote ghazals again and again". (Ganjavi, 2004, p. 58)

Abdurrashid (1992), a famous 15th century traveler and historian of Azerbaijani-Turkic origin, writes about the city of Hira in his Kitab talkhis al-asar and ajaib al-malik al-gahhar: "*Hira was the residence of the Arab kings of the tribe of Bani Lahm. Numan ibn Immrul - Qays ibn Amr ibn Ad built a castle called Khawarnaq on the outskirts of Hira. It was built by a Greek named Sinnimar for sixty years*". (p. 45)

As it can be seen, Simnar and Neman (Sinninmar and Numan) are also mentioned here in connection with the castle of Khavarnag. However, the above-mentioned source states that, unlike Nizami Ganjavi's "Seven Beauties", the construction of this castle was completed in sixty years, not five. For comparison, let's look at an excerpt from Nizami's work:

"Everything that was necessary for the building of the castle

Neman immediately put in the order,

Simnar's hand became an iron gauge

Worked in the building for exactly five years". (Ganjavi, 2004, p. 55)

Most likely, the construction period of the castle is closer to the existing reality in the work of Nizami Ganjavi. Thus, in at-Tabari's book "History" this period is indicated as five years. Abdurrashid (1992), on the other hand, exaggerated the term because it was based on a legend he had heard from locals during his travels. Information about the magnificence of this palace can be found in various historical sources.

Well-known orientalist Bertels (2017), citing these sources, writes that Nizami was based on a completely real historical fact, but the ruins of Khawarnag, where the ruins still exist today, are located not in Yemen, but in Mesopotamia, east of the city of Najaf. The scholar also noted that this palace was praised as a great miracle in Arabic poetry: "*This palace, which was described in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry as one of the 30 wonders of the world, was already in ruins in the 14th century*". (p. 320)

The fact that all three castles are named in the sources as magnificent pearls of art, and that travelers and poets describe them as the power of human intellect, indicates a new Renaissance in Mesopotamia during the construction of the palaces, i.e. in the IV-V centuries AD. Analyzing this historical stage, we see that in the IV-V centuries AD, a new geopolitical environment was formed in the Middle East. Ancient culture was slowly giving way to a new civilization that emerged from the synthesis of Eastern and

Western cultures. New states were emerging on the political map of the world, and the states that have formed centuries-old traditions of governance had been forced to make radical changes in their systems of governance. Political institutions, which at one time were completely dependent on the great empires and remained in the form of provinces, were slowly emerging, strengthening their political position and, as in history, erecting megalithic and ziggurat-type buildings and engineering projects that amazed people, creating architectural pearls.

Thus, during this time, the Great Roman Empire was already divided into two parts, and the Byzantine-Eastern Roman Empire was formed, reviving the ancient Greek culture in a new harmony in the Asia Minor Peninsula and adjacent territories. To East was the Sassanid Empire, which still maintained its ancient political and military hegemony and sought to maintain this status by all means. Territories such as Egypt and Babylon, the cradle of ancient civilization, were taking advantage of the current political situation, and the culturally backward Arab world was trying to take advantage of existing scientific advances to demonstrate its political significance.

Yemen, as well as present-day Iraq, was one of the first politically dependent buffer zones between the Sassanids and Byzantium, and the ruling Lahmid dynasty was a new military-political force controlling the situation. Thus, by fighting on the side of the Sassanids, they became an equal political ally of the former, constantly threatening the southern borders of Byzantium. Thus, Hira, the capital of the Lahmi kingdom, developed into one of the most important political centers, becoming one of the megacities of the ancient world, maintaining control of important trade routes. The emergence of new buildings here should be considered a matter of course.

Probably for this reason, the 14th Sassanid Shah-Yazdagird II, sent his son Prince Bahram (better known as Bahram Gur V) to the ruler of Yemen-Neman (one of the 18 kingdoms of the Arab countries, the ruler of the Lahmis, al-Numan bin al-Munzir) for bringing up and be educated as it is shown in Nizami's "Seven Beauties" to be the guarantor of this status of alliance between the Sassanids and the Lahmis. Thus, if we consider that Numan bin Munzir ruled the Lahmi since 399, and Bahram Gur was born in 406 and ascended the throne of the Sassanid emperor in 420, the construction of the Khavarnag Palace was completed in the first decades of the 5th century, about 406-420 can be assumed.

The palace of Khavarnag, which inspired many poets and was described by Nizami, also went down in history as a great symbol of this golden epoch of the Lahmis (Ganjavi,

2004). The great poet mentions the book "Tangulusha" here. Although this written monument, which amazed the people of its time with its artistic design and lives only in memories, has not survived to the present day, professor Rustam Aliyev gives the following information about the monument: *"Tanglusha is Lusha's book. The Babylonian astrologer Tevkr Babilini is the author of the famous book on the movement of the sun (elliptic), called Lusha in Persian and stars (zodiac). Decorated with unique miniatures, patterns, pictures of stars and constellations, this book has gained great fame in the East and has been considered a treasure of beauty for centuries"*. (Ganjavi, 2004, p. 313)

Nizami Ganjavi also gives information about the construction technology of Khavarnag castle. For example, he showed exactly the substance used to plaster the top:

"Plaster made with milk, syrup,

Reflects the viewer like mirrors". (Ganjavi, 2004, p. 56)

Probably, Nizami does not mention the name of "Tanglusha" here by chance. The results of research on historical documents and archeological excavations suggest that Simnar (Sinninmar) tested the design of this palace in Mesopotamia (as in other engineering structures built near Hira, Najaf, Kufa in the IV-V centuries). He also used the technologies of the Babylonians, such as the Tower of Babel, the hanging gardens of Semiramis, and the temple of Ishtar. In this author's opinion of this author, he managed to combine in his work both the architectural styles of ancient Rome and the Two Rivers. Thus, this trend can be observed in many buildings built in the Middle East, such as Palmyra about the same time.

It should also be noted that Nizami likens him to the famous Roman naturalist Guy Pliny the Second, who lived in the first century AD, saying about his hero, "will shine like Greek Belinas". It is known that Pliny, the founder of natural history was engaged in such sciences as botany, geology, mineralogy, astronomy, geography, physics, chemistry, as well as he wrote works on painting and sculpture.

Although we do not know the exact date of Sinninmar's life, we can estimate it based on the date of construction of Khavarnag Castle. We know that this castle was built by order of Neman. So, the years of power of the person who built the castle allow us to calculate the date of its construction. An-Numan - the son of Imrul-Qays II, who goes by the name of Neman in the "Seven Beauties", was the sixth ruler of the Lahmid dynasty and he ruled from 399 to 429 AD. So, his contemporary Sinninmar (Simnar in "Seven Beauties") also lived in the IV-V centuries AD. It is difficult to say for sure about the nationality of this historical figure, whose name symbolizes the power of architecture

although the sources contain information about the name of his son and even the state of which he is a citizen.

As was already reported, Kaddus (Bertels shows his name as Katus), the author of the famous relief of Khosrov Parviz on the Shabdiz horse in the Tagi-Bustan complex near Kermanshah, was a citizen of the Sassanid Empire. An interesting fact is that his name is mentioned as Futrus in Abdurrashid (1992), "Kitab talkhis al-asar ...". Let's pay attention to an excerpt from that work: *"There is Bisutun mountain between Hamadan and Khulvan. These are very high and inaccessible mountains that are difficult to climb. From the top to the bottom, this mountain is as rough and smooth. The width of the mountain is up to 3 days [road]. There is a stone balcony on the slope of Bisutun. In the middle there is a description of Khosrov Parviz and his horse Shabdiz. On the wall of the balcony there is a description of Shirin and her relatives. This image was engraved by Fitrus, son of Sinnimar. This is Sinnimar, who built Khavarnaq near Hira"* (Abdurrashid, 1992, p. 80)

Interestingly, the name of the same historical person is given in one source as Cadus (Katus) and in another as Futrus (Fitrus). This is due to the fact that the sculptor, who went down in history as the author of the listed reliefs in Tagi-Bustan, converted to Christianity. It is known that those who converted to Christianity took the Christian name when they were baptized. Futrus is the Greek version of the name of St. Peter, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. It is also known from sources that during this period there was a strong propaganda of Christianity in both Mesopotamia and the Sassanid Empire, and according to at-Tabari, even Numan bin Munzir, who ordered the assassination of Kuddus's father, later regretted his actions and renounced Christianity and isolated. Most likely, Sinnimar's son was a Byzantine Mesopotamian who converted to Christianity and took refuge in the Sassanid Empire to escape persecution during the reign of al-Munzir I, the ruler of the Lahmis, who, contrary to his father's religious beliefs, forbade Christianity.

It should be noted that the record of al-Numan's isolation and priesthood is also found in Nizami's poem "Seven Beauties". The poet writes:

"He had a just minister,

He was a devout believer in Jesus.

He said: "To hear and to know God

It is better than your wealth, but

You are perfect if you hear that knowledge,

You take your hand from this ornament".

... Neman came down from this balcony,

"He turned his face to the vast plains like a lion" (Ganjavi, 2004, p. 59)

The building that unites the two historical figures Sinnimar and Numan, is undoubtedly the Khavarnag Castle. Next, some information about the etymology of the name of this castle is analyzed. However, it is necessary to highlight that various etymological explanations are given to this oikonym in the sources. This was primarily due to the spelling of the name of this castle in different versions in those sources.

For example, at-Tabari described it as Khavarnak - "Oriental moon", Yagut Hamawi Khurangah - "Drinking place", Ibn Gutayba - Khorangah - "eating and drinking place", Y. Bertels (1962), Khavarnak - "Sunny". Authoritative explanatory dictionaries of the Persian language, such as "Burhane-gate", indicate that the word is more accurately pronounced as Khornaq and means a place where food is eaten. This idea is confirmed by the 19th century author Abdulkhalig Jannati. Thus, in his explanation to one of his Masnavi, the poet makes the following note in this regard: "Those who read "Khavarnag" read it wrong, the right version is Khorna and Khorangah" (Abdulkhalig, 2019, p. 77).

The author agrees with Bertels' (1962), version that it is a correct word derived from the word رواج and means «sunrise». According to at-Tabari, when Neman ordered the castle, he demanded that it would be built in the form of a circular fortress on a high hill, with walls of 200 inches (about 140 m) above the ground, and rooms suitable for winter and summer living. Nizami Ganjavi in his work «Seven Beauties» shows that this building is 100 feet high and attracts sunlight or any light, such as moonlight, and shines day and night in every season of the year. From this point of view, it is logical that at-Tabari mentions that such buildings are called «Nurmeh» in the Arabs. Probably for this reason, Bertels (1962), in his work «Nizami and Fuzuli» added: *«Nizami had the opportunity to get acquainted with some sources related to the construction of temples in ancient Babylonia»*. (p. 320)

The fact that people built such tall buildings in ancient times can give us a fantastic impression. However, comparing the results of archeological excavations in the ruins of ziggurats (religious temples) built in ancient Babylon with the records of the original written sources allows researchers to conclude that the ancient Babylonians had the technique to build such magnificent buildings.

Well-known German archaeologist Klengel-Brandt (1991), in her monograph "The Tower of Babel", suggests that the first prototype for such structures was the ancient city of

Ur, a temple dedicated to the moon god Sin, or Nanna, a stepped tower in ruins. Remains of this type of tower, found in a magnificent temple site in Dur Kurigalzu as a result of research in Iraq in the 1940s, show that only the main core is 57 m high. The author writes that this information is confirmed by the notes on the clay tablets. In the document entitled "Plate on the Esagil", involved in the research, information about the exact dimensions of such a stepped tower, the exact width, length and height of each floor is preserved to this day. According to the plaque, each layer of this seven-story building had a different height, which decreased as it rose from the bottom to the top. Thus, each floor is 12-15 m. The total height of this tower reached about 91.5 m.

Thus, research confirms the possibility of building such magnificent buildings in Mesopotamia before Christ. So, it is allowed to carry out construction on the basis of improvement of the existing achievements in IV-V centuries AD and 105-140 m of Khavarnag castle. The height should not look strange at all.

CONCLUSIONS

The legend of Simnar and Neman, which Nizami included in the plot of the poem "Seven Beauties", is a true event confirmed by historical chronicles. The Khavarnag Palace, built by Simnar for the Sassanid prince Bahram Gur by order of the Yemeni ruler Neman, is a historical building, based not only on the ancient architectural traditions of Mesopotamia, but also on the achievements of ancient Greco-Roman architecture. Including this event in his work, the great Azerbaijan poet Nizami Ganjavi once again managed to demonstrate in his artistic work that he preferred to rely on historical reality, as well as his deep knowledge of ancient and medieval sources.

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