

**TARIX. MANBASHUNOSLIK
HISTORY. SOURCE STUDIES**

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On the Religion of the Nawbahar Temple in Balkh

Abstract

There is different information about character of a cult in the Nawbahar temple in Balkh in medieval sources. According to some sources, this temple was a temple of fire worshipers or Zoroastrians, according to other sources – it was a temple of idolaters. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang, who visited Balkh circa 630 AD called the main temple of Balkh “nava sangharama”, i.e. “new Buddhist monastery”. In my opinion, Nawbahar temple was a place of worship of different religious communities throughout the different periods of history. Initially, (in the beginning of the I millennium BC) this temple was dedicated to the cult of the Moon, then, in the Kushan period, it was converted into a Buddhist temple. During the Sasanids (in the 6th century AD) the Nawbahar became a Zoroastrian temple, and in the 7th centuries the Turks converted it again to a Buddhist shrine. In the last period (7th – 8th centuries) this temple also was place of worship of the Manichaeans.

Key words: Central Asia, Baktria-Tokharistan, Balkh, Turkic Qaghanate, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism.

Balxdagi Navbahor ibodatxonasining diniy mansubligi xususida

Abstrakt

O'rta asrlarga mansub manbalarda Balxdagi Navbahor ibodatxonasi qaysi dinga bag'ishlanganligi xususida turli xil ma'lumotlar keltirilgan. Ba'zi ma'lumotlarga ko'ra, u otashparastlar yoki zardushtiylar, boshqa ma'lumotlarga ko'ra, butparastlarning ibodat qiladigan yeri bo'lgan. Balxga taxminan 630-yilda kelgan Xitoy ziyoratchisi Suan Czan bu yerdagi eng katta ibodatxonani “Nava Sangharama”, ya'ni “Yangi buddaviy ibodatxona”

deb atagan. Mening fikrimcha, Navbahor mintaqa tarixi davomida turli xil diniy jamoalarning ibodat qiladigan yeri bo'lgan. Dastavval (m.a. I mingyillik boshida) bu yerdagi ibodatxonada odamlar Oyga sig'inganlar, Kushonlar davrida esa u buddaviy ibodatxonaga aylantirilgan. Sosoniylar Balxni qo'lga olgandan keyin (VI asr) Navbahor zardushtiylar ibodatxonasi bo'lgan, VII asrda turklar uni yana buddaviy ibodatxonaga aylantirdilar. Ibodatxonaning so'nggi davri (VII – VIII asrlar)da bu yerda moniylik diniy ta'limotining tarafdorlari ham ko'p bo'lgan.

Kalit so'zlar: O'rta Osiyo, Baqtriya-Toxariston, Balx, Turk xoqonligi, buddaviylik, zardushtiylik, moniylik.

Introduction

There is different information about character of a cult in the Nawbahar¹ temple in Balkh in medieval textual sources. According to some sources, this temple was a temple of fire worshipers (عدة النار) or al-mağus (المجوس), i.e. Zoroastrians [Nizam al-Mulk 174; al-Biruni 1963, 66-67; al-Balkhi 20-37], according to another sources – it was a temple of idolaters (عدة الاوثان), i.e. Buddhists [Ibn al-Fakih 322-324]. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang, who visited Balkh circa 630 AD called the main temple of Balkh “nava sangharama”, i.e. “new Buddhist monastery”, and mentioned there a statue of Buddha and goddess P'i-sha-men (Vaiśravaṇa deva) [Beal 1990, 49]².

According to al-Masudi, Nawbahar temple was dedicated to the cult of the Moon and it was built by the king Manushahr, i.e. Manuchihr [al-Masudi IV, 47- 49]. The same author in other place mentioned that Nawbahar was a fire temple (بيت النار) [al-Masudi VI, 414]. It was a place of worship and pilgrimage in the days before treatment of the king Gushtasp in Zoroastrianism [Barthold 1971, 469].

Zoroaster arrived in Balkh from Azarbaijan and the king Gushtasp accepted his faith. According to Middle Persian (Pahlavi) sources, Spandiyat, son of Vishtaspa, has built in Bahl (Balkh) sparkling capital Navaza and founded a miraculous fire of Vahram [Markwart 1931, 10]. Spandiyat of the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) sources mentioned in Islamic sources as Isfandiyar, son of Gushtasp, who subsequently extended this new doctrine in the east and the

¹ Nawbahar (نوبهار) is a Middle Persian (Pahlavi) form of the Sanskrit nava vihara – “New Buddhist monastery”. According to al-Khwarazmi, the word al-buhār (البهار) means “house of idols” of the Indians [al-Khowarezmi, 34].

² The Sanskrit word sangharama – “Buddhist temple” used in Arabic and Persian in form sangār (سنگر) or sangaristan (سنگرستان).

west, using a power or peacefully. In all countries, from China to Rum he built temples of fire. Zoroastrianism became the dominant religion in Iran and Mesopotamia. Buddhists were expelled from Balkh to the east [al-Biruni 1963, 66- 67]. Ibn al-Faqih mentioned that Nawbahar temple was founded by the Barmakids – originally an ancient noble Persians, whose members, like the Quraysh worshiped idols. The main sacred temple was named Barmak, which is handed down [Ibn al-Fakih 323-324]. According to al-Balkhi, Nawbahar temple was built during the reign of the shahanshah Khusraw I Anushirwan, i.e. in the second half of the 6th century AD [al-Balkhi 18-19].

Thus, the sources give very contradictory information about time of foundation and nature of cult in the Nawbahar temple. In my opinion, Nawbahar temple was a place of worship of different religious communities throughout different stages of history. Initially (in the beginning of the I millennium BC) this temple was dedicated to the cult of the Moon, then, in the Kushan period, it was converted into a Buddhist temple. During the Sasanids (in the 6th century AD) the Nawbahar became a Zoroastrian temple, and in the 6th – 7th centuries the Turks converted it again to a Buddhist shrine.

Buddhism in Balkh

It is known that early medieval period the Buddhism was widely spread among the Turks. Restoration of many Buddhist temples of the Kushan period in Tokharistan and building of new temples in the 6th – 7th centuries AD is associated with activities of the Turks [Kamaliddinov 1996, 195-196, 204-205]. These include Buddhist monastery Ajina-Tepa built in the middle of the 7th century in 40 km north of the ancient city Kafir-Qal'a in the Vakhsh valley [Litvinsky, Zeymal 1971], Buddhist complex Ushtur-Mullah in settlement Tepa-i Shah [Zeymal 1987, 73-74], and Buddhist temple in the ancient city Qal'a-i Kafirnigan in Kubadiyan [Litvinsky 1981, 131-133]. According to the Chinese traveler Huei Chao, approx. in 726 in Khuttalan half of the population were Turks. The governor was also Turk. The king, the nobility and common people of Khuttalan confessed the Hinayana school of the Buddha's teaching. There were a lot of Buddhist monasteries and monks [Bernshtam 1952, 190; Litvinsky Soloviev 1985, 120]. With Turks associated building and functioning of the Buddhist temple of 7th – 8th centuries on the site of Kuva (Kuba) in Fergana. In the main hall of the temple had been discovered a large statue of the Buddha with Turkic features [Bulatova-Levina 1961, 241-245]. One of the earliest

so-called “Turco-Sogdian” coins of Fergana has image of impassive face of deity or priest, which is typical for the Buddhist iconography [Smirnova 1981, 24].

Celebration of Nawruz

According to some sources, inside the Nawbahar temple there were the idols brought to here from India, Sind and different parts of Tokharistan. Every year in spring in the 6th day of celebrating of Nawruz in Balkh came numerous pilgrims from all Tokharistan, and also from India, Turkistan, Irak, Sham (Syria) and more far countries¹. Celebratory ceremonies in vicinities of a temple of Nawbahar proceeded 7 days [al-Balkhi 17–18]. In the Nawbahar temple worshiped both the Turks and the Persians [Hafiz-i Tanish II, 137].

It means that in the Nawbahar temple dominated not only Buddhist canons. First, here annually came pilgrims not only from India, Sind, Tokharistan and Turkistan where the Buddhism has been extended, but also from Iran and Sham, i.e. Syria (or Byzantium) where Buddhism centers have never been. Secondly, celebratory ceremonies in a temple were spent in the spring during the Nawruz – a sacred holiday the Zoroastrians. On the other hand, pilgrims from Iran and Byzantium could not be Zoroastrians, because in the temple have been put the idols brought from India, Sind and various parts of Tokharistan that contradicts to the canons of the Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

Sabians in Balkh

There upon the data of some Arabian sources are of interest. According to some of them, local rulers of Balkh (ملوك الطوائف) were not the Zoroastrians, but they confessed religion of the Sabies and esteemed the Sun, the Moon, the Fire and seven stars [al-Ja’kubi I: 179], and the temple of Naubahar was devoted to the cult of Moon [al-Mas’udi V: 6 – 7]. In the Arabian sources the word “al-Sabi” used, mainly, for the Hanifs, the Harranian pagans [Бартольд 1966, 469–486], and also followers of the Manichaeism.

In the work of al-Fakhri devoted to various religions, are mentioned idolaters (عبدة الاصنام), who worshiped idols (وثن), bulls and cows, and also people worshiped to the Moon (عبدة القمر), who recognized the Moon as one of the greatest angels. They imagined the Moon as the spouse of the Sun and worshipped to an idol in form

¹ In the text: شامات, i. e. other western countries than Sham, probably, Rum or Byzantium.

of the Taurus [al-Fakhri 42-43].

Of particular interest is the information of religions historian al-Shahristani, who wrote that “to Vishtaspa kings of Balkh confessed the Sabian religion. They worshiped the stars, and especially esteemed two main heavenly bodies”, i.e. the Sun and the Moon [al-Shahristani 431]. Belief of the Sabians was founded on the ancient Chaldean religion, who worshiped to all heavenly bodies [Hamzae Isfahanensis 4-5; al-Khowarezmi 175]. According to al-Biruni, the Keyanids dynasty, who came to al-‘Iraq from Balkh, were Chaldeans. Keyanids honored two main heavenly bodies, as well as all of the stars and elements, and regarded them as sacred before the time, until Zarathustra appeared after 30 years of the king Vishtaspa’s reign [al-Biruni 1957, 103-201]. These data suggest that even before the appearance of Zoroastr people in Balkh worshiped heavenly bodies. In the next eras this ancient cult had been adapted to new religions – Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Manichaeism.

According to Chinese sources, Manichaeans worshiped 7 luminaries – the Sun, Moon and five planets, which, according to their doctrine, preside 7 days of the week [Belenitski 1954, 51]. Names of 7 days of the week in the Sogdian calendar were dedicated to the Avestian deities, which became later the names of heavenly bodies – the Sun, Moon, planets, and “lunar stations” [SDGM I, 46]. It should be noted that in the Nawbahar temple celebration continued also for 7 days.

According to al-Mas‘udi, the Sabian temples were different shapes, what they saw symbols and secrets, which they hide. These include the Temple of World Order, the Temple of Necessity and the Temple of Soul, which are buildings of round shape. Temple of Saturn – hexagonal, Temple of Jupiter – the triangular, Temple of Mars – a rectangular, Temple of the Sun – square, Temple of Venus – In the form of a triangle inside a square, Temple of Mercury – in the form of a triangle inside an elongated rectangle, Temple of the Moon – an octagonal [al-Mas‘udi IV, 62]. In the 8th century AD in the capital of Fergana was a House of Kavusan, built by the king Kavus. It was an amazing structure, dedicated to the Sun (Mercury). It was destroyed by the Caliph al-Mu‘tasim (reigned in 833 – 842) [al-Mas‘udi IV, 51; al-Shahristani, 431]. In Bukhara, in pre-Islamic times was a fire temple of Makh (ماخ), i.e. Temple of the Moon [al-Narshakhi, 32-33]. The columns, on which was based the palace of ruler at the Rigistan Square in Bukhara, were arranged in the shape of the Big Dipper [al-Narshakhi 35]. Early Sabians were sun-worshippers (عبدة الشمس)

and 5 times a day prayed the sun in the form of two-armed idol like animate the heavenly angels, possess human attributes to emit light [al-Fakhri 42].

Manichaeans in Balkh

In early Middle Ages in the Nawbahar temple people worshiped not so much to the Buddha as to the God of the Moon god (Aj Tängri) or to the God of the Sun and the Moon (Kün Aj Tängri), i.e. to the Manichaean supreme deity – Mani or Mani-Buddha [Litvinsky 1992, 526; Zuev 2002, 194-197], who embodies the Buddha, Zoroaster and Jesus Christ, the supreme Apostles of three world religions – Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. Therefore the representatives of the Manichaean communities scattered in different countries from China to Byzantium come here for worshipping.

Manichean doctrine, which appeared in the 3rd century BC in Babylon, soon became popular in Iran, because of which was subjected to severe persecution by the orthodox Zoroastrianism. These persecutions led to the mass emigration of the followers of Mani to the countries in the north, east and north-east of Iran. Strong Manichaean community for several centuries (3rd – 8th centuries AD) existed in Balkh or its environs. One of the magic-Parthian Manichaean texts was written here in the 6th century AD, reflecting the close contacts of the Manichaeans and Buddhists [Stavisky 1977, 178; Litvinsky, Zeymal 1971, 115]. From textual sources we know that the role of the Manichaeans in Tokharistan, particularly Chaganiyan, of the 7th – 8th centuries AD, was significant. Buddhism and Manichaeism in the Middle and Central Asia have coexisted for a long time, and the influence of Buddhism on the eastern branch of this religion was so strong that Mani in Manichaean texts was called Buddha or God of the Moon (Aj Tängri) Mani-Buddha [Litvinsky 1992, 526; Zuev 2002, 194].

In the 6th – 8th centuries the Manichaeism was widespread in Tokharistan, Sughd, Yetisu region and East Turkistan. The main centers of the Manichaeism were Balkh, Bukhara, Samarqand, Taraz and Turpan. Manichaeism professed not only the settled and urban residents, but also the majority of the nomadic Turkic tribes. It was the state religion of the Turkic, Uygur, Karluk, Kyrgyz and Kimak Kaganates [Kyzlasov 2004, 12-16].

In later times the Manichaeism was widespread in the countries of Islam. According to al-Biruni, in Islamic countries there

was almost no any region, where there were not Manichaeans. But their community, whose members were called “al-Sabi”, openly existed only in Samarqand. Outside of the Islamic world Mani’s doctrine professed most of the Eastern Turks, the people of China, Tibet and part of India [al-Biruni 1957, 211-213]. According to Mahmud al-Kashgari, Chigils and all Turkic nomads from Jayhun to Chin, i.e., from the Amu Darya river to the Great Wall of China, were Manichaeans [al-Kashgari I, 374]. The doctrine of Manichaeism was such widespread among the Turks because it was good to live with shamanic rituals [Zuev 2002, 182].

In the Manichaean schools, which the Turks called otuz oylan (Thirty boys), children have studied the sciences, including astronomy, philosophy etc. [Zuev 2002, 201]. The Muslim Turks called the Manichaeans yulduz æri (يِلْدُز اَرى) – “people of stars”, i.e., pagans, idolaters [Fayzullaeva 1969, 109].

In “Shah-Nama” of Firdawsi Mani called “the prophet who came out to Iran from the land of Chin”, i.e. from Turkistan. It is known that Mani in his youth for many years traveled to Central Asia and India, where he studied different religions. His religious system was formed first in the East and incorporated there the most essential of all other religions [History of Religions 2008, 153].

Barmakids

It was assumed that the Barmakids led their origin from the Kushan era or even earlier times [Pugachenkova 1976, 148]. They owned vast territory surrounding the monastery, as well as extensive rustaq, i.e. agricultural district named Ravan (راون) in Tokharistan [Ibn Haukal 428; Jacut II, 272]. Residents of this rustaq even in the 12th century did not accepted Islam and confessed their faith [al-Sam’ani VI, 58]. Barmakids were independent rulers and have not only a great religious authority but also political and economic power. Therefore, in some sources, their possessions are also called “State (dawla) of the Barmakids [al-Balkhi, 37].

According to some reports, Barmakids had a common origin with the Samanids, which were descendants of some Djabba-Khan (جبا خان) [Mahmud ibn Wali 315a, 317a; Barthold 1963a, 119], who belonged to the Turkic dynasty of the yabgu of Tokharistan and was governor of Balkh during occupation of Balkh by the troops of shahanshah Khusraw I Anushirwan (reigned in 531-579) or a contemporary of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang (630 AD) [Togan 1969, 282]. Ancestral domain of the Barmakids in Balkh was a

district named Djabba-Khan located in the western environs of Balkh [al-Balkhi 19-37]. Descendant of the Barmakids al-Fadl ibn Yahya al-Barmaki, former vizier of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid and the governor of Khorasan, passing through this village, spoke to the 'ulama' and nobility of Balkh with a speech in which he noted that the quarter Djabba-Khan is a legacy from his ancestor Djabba-Khan, who also built a monastery and temple Nawbahar [Togan 1969, 283]. Djabba-Khan is identified with the supreme Turkic Kagan Si (Se, Su)-Yabgu or Sir-Yabgu (reigned in 630 – 632), who was the son of Tun Yabgu-Kagan (reigned in 618 – 630) [Togan 1964, 64]. It was also assumed that the founder of the Nawbahar temple was El-Tegin (Parmuda), son of the Turkic ruler of Bukhara El Arslan (Shir-i Kishwar) [Harmatta, Litvinsky 1996, 371]. I believe that title Djabba-Khan likely refers to El-Tegin, who was a direct ancestor of the Samanids on the maternal side [Kamoliddin 2008, 39-63]. Name of the founder of this dynasty Barmak (برمك) produced from the Buddhist title pramukha, from which also comes the honorary nickname of El-Tegin – Parmuda (پرموده) [Harmatta, Litvinsky 1996, 371].

Conclusion

In the light of above mentioned data I think that:

- the place of Nawbahar temple during different periods of time was a place of worship for followers of different religions such as Sabians, Zoroasrians and Buddhists;
- in the pre-Islamic period (VI – VII centuries AD) it was a cult center of the Manichaeans;
- the founder of the Nawbahar temple famous in pre-Islamic time probably was El-Tegin (Parmuda, Nili-Khan), whose descendants were mixed with local Bactrian nobles and titled Barmak.

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