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**Nasib Goyushov**

*Doctor of Science in Philology, Associate Professor  
Institute of Manuscripts named after Muhammad Fuzuli, ANAS  
26 Istiglaliyat street, Baku  
e-mail: nesib2010@yandex.ru*

## **NIZAMI GANJAVI: ARMAN, ARAN AND AZERBAIJAN**

### **Abstract**

In medieval literature you can find many realities from history and life. But historical and other real figures can reveal completely new, and sometimes opposing features in the poetic imagination. Nizami Ganjavi's "Khamasa" describes historical and pseudo-historical events that are intertwined with legends and fairy-tale elements. There are names of historical figures and mythological characters, geographical names, traditions, religions and cultures of individual peoples. All these elements serve to express the poet's ideological and aesthetic intent. The researcher has to determine reality based on strong arguments from the sources.

The novel "Khosrow and Shirin," although dedicated to the life and work of the Sasanian king of Iran, was written on the basis of the local legend of Aran, the manuscript of which was in Barda. Here supremacy is given to the image of Shirin. Throughout the novel, she raises Khosrow. As the poet hints, this image resembles his first beloved wife, who was given to him by the ruler of Derbent. This means that it was created in honor of the Kipchak beauty. In local legend, Shirin is the niece of Mahinbanu, the ruler of Arman. Historical Arman is not an ethnic, but a geographical name; as is often mistakenly believed, this is not Armenia. The classic Persian explanatory dictionary "Burkhan-Kate" (17th century) says that Arman is a mountainous province of Azarbaijan.

Critical text of this dictionary was published by the famous Iranian lexicographer M. Muin. He notes that nowadays Armenians use this word as "Armenians" and their country "Armenia", but earlier they called themselves "Haig" and their country "Haiestan". As noted by the famous Iranian scientist Said Nafisi, Arab geographers, following Greek authors, mistakenly called the entire eastern part of the Caucasus region as a Armenia.

In addition, some researchers, without compelling arguments, mistakenly believed that Shirin as a historical figure was Armenian, but sources claim that she is from Khuzistan. Consequently, she, as an artistic image, also has no relation to Armenian women.

**Keywords:** *Nizami Ganjavi, Khusrau and Shirin, Arman, geographical name, Aran, Azerbaijan*

### **Introduction**

Nizami's "Khamasa" describes historical and pan-historical events that are intertwined with legends and fairy-tale elements. There are names of historical figures and mythological characters, geographical names, traditions, religions and cultures of individual peoples.

In the novel "Khusrau and Shirin" the poet depicts the image of Khusrau and Shirin. As the poet hints, this image of Shirin is reminiscent of his first beloved wife, who was presented to him by the ruler of Derbent. So it was created in honor of the Kypchak beauty. In local legend, Shirin is the niece of Mahinbanu, the ruler of Arman. Arman is not an ethnic name; as is often mistakenly believed, this is not Armenia. Nizami made repeated use of the word "Arman" (ارمن) in his original texts, as a geographical name. Ganja was the capital of Arran, and Arman was the mountainous region of Arran. The Aran region in which Nizami lived and worked, was developing scientifically, culturally and socio-economically; it was, however, not always peaceful. There were internal disputes and, still, social imperfections; there were also incursions from outside, consequences of the Crusades, to add to social tension. During the Mongol invasion, Arran and Azerbaijan were united

Also, very interesting is Shirin's historical and literary identity; literary works very often, and quite understandably, offer different interpretations of historical personalities. Nizami used a local legend, popular around Ganja, Barda, and Arran. An addition, some authors, without compelling arguments, erroneously believed that Shirin as a historical figure was Armenian, but many sources, including the ancient Syrian chronicle, claim that Shirin was not Armenian, she is an Iranian from Khuzistan.

### **Presentation and interpretation of the issue.**

Referring to a geographical location, the word "Arman" used in Nizami's poem *Khosrow and Shirin* was incorrectly transliterated in the Russian, English, French and other languages as "Armenia", without consulting dictionaries. This misunderstanding apparently comes from Arabic sources: one may think the words "Erminiyya" and "Arman" used there have the same meaning. This is not the case; even if it were the case, transformation of one into the other would have nothing to do with contemporary Armenia and Armenians. We should also add that the "Erminiyya" used in Arabic sources is incorrectly read as "Armeniyya".

1. First of all, we must point out that Arabic sources do not refer to "Arman" as a geographical location; instead, they use the word Erminiyya. The spelling of the latter was given by Yaqut al-Hamawi (1179-1229), a scholar of Greek origin, in his famous book *Muj'am al-Buldan*, which is one of significant sources of the time. In his six-volume encyclopaedic work, published in Leipzig in the Arabic language, it is provided in this form: (رمنية), and pronounced "Erminiyya" according to the principles of classical pronunciation (HAMAVI, 1866. p. 219).

Like other Arab scholars, the Greek-born Yaqut al-Hamawi repeated erroneous and ambiguous information by stating that the region of Erminiyya had been split into large and small parts. He then described the length and breadth of its territory by referring to Ptolemy (Ibid., pp.220-221), who, as we will see below, also relied on inaccurate and unreliable data. His description is also contradictory; he writes of the vast territory of Arran and its many cities: Ganja, Barda, Shamkir, Beylagan (Ibid., p.183), and then mentions Beylagan again when describing Erminiyya (Ibid., p.220). Writing about Tbilisi (historically Tiflis), the author describes it as a city that belongs to both Erminiyya and Arran. He then mentions Misar bin Muhalhil, a poet from Shirvan, and maintains that the poet wrote in his treatise, "the cities of Arman reach the boundaries of Tiflis which is crossed by the Kur River right in the middle" (Ibid., p.857). It is a surprise that the author of the geographical encyclopaedia, the Greek-born Yaqut al-Hamawi, mentions the toponym "Arman" but does not refer to it as an individual geographical location.

Arab geographers and historians generally confused Arran with Armenia; this misinformation apparently derived from the Greek sources they referred to.

Now let us go to specific sources to try establishing clarity on this issue:

2. Arab scholars took the word "Erminiyya" from their Greek sources. Nizami made repeated use of the word "Arman" (ارمن) in his original texts, but he never wrote "Erminiyya". Naturally,

the thinker and the poet who had – for his time – an excellent, and wide, education would study original sources when creating his works, so it would not be by chance that he chose the word “Arman”; there was a location of this name at the time. So, it is strange that al-Hamawi, a geographer and near contemporary of Nizami, did not know this word.

3. The word “Arman” was referred to as a geographical location in the encyclopaedic dictionary *Burhan-i Qate* (The Compelling Evidence) compiled in the Persian language by Muhammad Husain ibn Khalaf al-Tabrizi (17<sup>th</sup> century CE). In the introduction, the author expresses his intention to create a comprehensive dictionary based on previous sources. He must have possessed the relevant skills and sources to be the first to create such a complete dictionary. Residing in Heydarabad, the author had in-depth scientific knowledge and was well received at the palace of the Qutb Shahi dynasty that reigned in India; he dedicated his dictionary to Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah (ruled 1626–1672). He intended to give clear and precise definitions based on compelling evidence and documents, so there would be no need for further books. He worked long on the dictionary, completing it in 1651. Such was its significance that, published in Bombay (Mumbai), Calcutta and Tehran, it was then translated into the Ottoman Turkish language. This book defines the word “Arman” as a mountainous geographical location in Azerbaijan: “*Arman is a mountainous region in Azerbaijan, the birthplace of the famous Shirin; it is known for its silk production*” (TABRIZI. A. p.26b).

4. The outstanding Iranian lexicographer Dr. Mohammad Moin has republished the critical text of this dictionary in five volumes based on the manuscripts and paper copies, and defined the word “Arman” as above (TABRIZI. B. pp.109-110). He notes that today the Armenians use this word as "Armenians" and their country "Armenia", but they called themselves "Haig", and their country "Haiestan" (Ibid., p. 110).

5. The contemporary multi-volume Dehkhoda Dictionary also defines this word as belonging to a geographical location by referring to Muhammad Husain ibn Khalaf al-Tabrizi’s dictionary (DEHKHODA, 1377. p.1903).

6. There is a further point of interest in the famous Iranian scholar Saeed Nafisi’s valuable guidance in his introduction to Nizami’s *Divan* (Foroughi Publishing House, 1362 AH (1943 CE)). Referring to medieval sources, he writes that Ganja, where Nizami grew up and spent his whole life, was also the land of his ancestors. Known as Aran in the late Sassanid period (6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries) and later as Arran (following Islamization), it maintained its independence until the Mongol invasion (second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century). The Greeks referred to it as ‘Albania’. In the early Islamic period, the administrative region after Sassanid rule and bordering on Derbent in the north-east, Tiflis in the west, and the River Araz in the south and south-west was known as Arran (NAFISI, 1362. pp.34-35).

Saeed Nafisi notes that before Islam, the Sassanids (Sasanians) would call this region Aran, whereas the Greeks would refer to it as ‘Albania’ or ‘Alania’ (Ibid., p. 34). Gabala was its capital in ancient times; after the conversion to Islam, the capital was relocated to Barda.

The Islamic historian and geographer Abu Ishaq al-Farisi al-Istakhri (mid-4<sup>th</sup> century AH/10<sup>th</sup> century CE) wrote that ancient Albanians spoke the Aran language; this information can also be found in other sources. Further, there was a struggle for the region between the Romans and Greeks on one side and the Sassanids on the other. The Romans and Greeks patronized Christianity and the latter Zoroastrianism. Some people of Aran had been baptized before Islam appeared in these lands. Saeed Nafisi highlights an interesting fact: the Albanian (or Alanian) churches operated separately and independently of the Armenian Church (Ibid., p. 35).

Before the Seljuks (468 AH/1076 CE) there were two states within the region, namely Shirvan and Arran (Ibid., p.38). Barda was the capital city of Arran until 332 AH (944 CE); an attack by the Rus devastated the city, and Ganja became the capital (Ibid., p.39). But before that, Barda was a beautiful, cosy town, and Nizami praised it in his works as part of his country. Academician V. V. Bartold cites the renowned 10<sup>th</sup> century Arab geographer al-Maqdisi writing

about Barda's prominence among other cities in Arran and the Caucasus: "**Barda was the Baghdad of this country**" (BARTOLD, 1974. p.213). The source Bartold refers to is: (*Descriptio imperii moslemici auctore Schamso'd-din Abu Abdollah ibn Ahmed ibn abi Bekr al-Banna al-Basschari al-Mokaddasi*. Ed. M.J. de Goeje, Lugduni Batavorum, 1877; ed. 2:1906 (BGA, III). p.375.)

Bartold writes that Barda was a starting point for all Arab trade routes passing through Transcaucasia; later, he indicates the four directions those routes took: to Shamakhi, Shirvan, Baku and Derbent in the east, to Beylagan and Ardabil with the Mughan Steppe in the south-east, to Ganja and other towns in the north-west. Bartold points out that those provinces were under Sassanid rule and adds that from the second half of the Middle Ages, the term "Arran" was replaced by the Turkic-Persian word "Karabakh" (Ibid., pp.213-214).

Saeed Nafisi then notes that in 340 AH (952 CE) Muhammad of the Shaddadid dynasty became the ruler of the part of Arran that was later known as Karabakh, and made Ganja his capital city. According to the famous Arab historian Ibn Asir, Ganja is the mother of the cities of Arran. He writes that after the Seljuk victory (first half of the 11th century) Arran became part of Azerbaijan and its southern region was known as Karabakh during both Atabey (1136–1225) and Mongol rule (1256–1349) (NAFISI, 1362., p.39). Until that time, the areas south of the River Araz were referred to as Azerbaijan.

The author refers to another Arabic source, *Hudud al-'Alam Min al-Mashriq ila al-Maghrib* (The Boundaries of the World from the East to the West) of 372 AH (982 CE). Nafisi notes that this book often confuses the regions in north-west Iran, that is, Azerbaijan, Arran and Armenia. Still, it provides a more extensive description of Aran as part of Azerbaijan. He then lists the areas related to Arran, which include Qafan, Barda, Mughan, Beylagan, Ganja, Shamkir, Tiflis, Sheki, Gabala, Shabran, Shirvan, Baku, Derbent-Khazran etc. (NAFISI, 1362, pp. 51-54).

7. Another Iranian scholar, Dr. Behruz Sarvatiyan, who conducted long-term and in-depth scientific research into both the *Khamsa* and Nizami's poetic legacy in general, provides some interesting information about the toponym "Arman". In his study of Nizami's thoughts, the author points to the poet's praise of Barda and describes the history of this ancient cultural centre in the section, "Azerbaijan in the Historical Geography of *Sharaf-nameh*". "From 300 BCE until 500 CE, this city had a rich culture. From Nizami's quill appears Nushaba, a sage Aran-Azerbaijani ruler; Iskandar, surrounded by a council that includes Aristotle, Bulinas and dozens of other philosophers, finds himself defenceless when facing her. Nizami makes Iskandar travel to this land to have him become acquainted with the towns of Azerbaijan. The poet also points out that Abkhaz and Arman, and their surrounding areas, are provinces of Azerbaijan." (SARVATIYAN, 1394. pp.323-325).

The most interesting point in this information derived from medieval sources concerns the Arab authors' contradicting views on Azerbaijan, Arran, and the Caucasus. Saeed Nafisi explains: "...in general, Arabs borrowed the word "Armenia" from the Greeks and used it later on to denote the whole East Caucasus region" (NAFISI, 1362. p.42). This, apparently, was the very same error that prompted references to the "independent rulers" appointed by caliphs to the provinces of Derbent, Ganja, Shirvan and Azerbaijan as, "rulers of Erminiyya" (Ibid., p. 36).

We should add that Arab geographical manuscripts also drew from Greek sources, notably from Arabic translations of Ptolemy's books (KHALIDOV, 1985. p.59). Yaqut al-Hamawi, referred to above, also took from Ptolemy and other Greek sources and therefore transferred much contradictory and incorrect information to his book.

One may therefore come to the logical conclusion that Arabic books drew from Greek sources and referred to many locations as "Erminiyya", without them having anything to do with Armenians. One cause of such incorrect representation was therefore the resort to Greek sources. The question then arises as to whether Greek sources are credible at all. Even "the famous mathematician and astronomer Ptolemy committed numerous geographical errors as he relied on travellers' tales about faraway countries and cities" (<https://dic.academic.ru/>). Thus, the questionable information drawn from Greek sources.

In other words, Arab geographical and historical books replicated errors made in Greek sources, resulting in numerous distortions of historical facts. While the word "Arman" used by Nizami was defined in many encyclopaedic dictionaries in a way unquestionably attributing it to Azerbaijan rather than Armenia. This also explains why cities and locations in Arran and Azerbaijan that were referred to as "Erminiyya", were attributed to Armenia and Armenians.

Also, very interesting is Shirin's historical and literary identity; literary works very often, and quite understandably, offer different interpretations of historical personalities. Nizami writes that she was the niece of the Arman ruler Mahinbanu. Mahinbanu's influence extends to all Arran and Arman: she spends spring in the green valleys of Mughan, summers in the blooming Arman mountains, autumns in the hunting grounds of Abkhaz, and winters in the mild climate of Barda. (XOSROV, 1392. p. 155).

Nizami does not mention Shirin's religious affiliation, but it is clear from historical sources that she was brought up in a Christian family. Although Zoroastrianism was the state religion in the Sassanid era, Christians also populated both the empire and surrounding lands, enjoying greater freedom during Khosrow Parviz's reign (CHRISTENSEN, 1936. pp. 481-482).

In some cases, the province of Arman has incorrectly been referred to as Armenia, and so Shirin was also incorrectly described as a native Armenian; the description is groundless. This false description stems primarily from confusion of Arman with Armenia, and, moreover, the names of Shirin and Mahinbanu are unquestionably not Armenian.

The story of Khosrow and Shirin is mentioned in Byzantine as well as in western historical sources. It is related as a short narrative in Pahlavi and Islamic sources. Firdawsi wrote the poem in his special epic style. The Iranian scholar Dr. Abdolhossein Zarrinkoob proves that, although Nizami was familiar with earlier sources, he used a local legend, popular around Ganja, Barda, and Arran to produce a story different from that of Firdawsi, referring to the latter only when describing Khosrow's rule (ZARRINKOOB, 1372. pp.74-75).

The Tus-born poet (Firdawsi) praises Khosrow's magnificence, but leaves no room for a glorification of Shirin's beauty and true love. As for Nizami, he artfully attributes this to Firdawsi's advanced age (Ibid., p.93). At the same time, Firdawsi's version describes Khosrow as being attracted by a beautiful, young girl from the lower social class and bringing her to his harem of three thousand wives and twelve thousand maids (Ibid., p.94). Dr. Zarrinkoob then cites the medieval historian Balami's writing that Shirin was a maid in Khosrow's harem and that "there was no-one more beautiful than her in the lands of Rum" (Ibid., p.94). The author also cites sources used in Firdawsi's epic and maintains that Shirin was rather Rumi (Byzantine) than Armenian (Ibid., p.96). Dr. Zarrinkoob adds further that another Armenian source confirms that she was a Christian native of Khuzestan rather than Armenian (Ibid., p.98).

The Danish orientalist Arthur Christensen also dismisses the notion of Shirin having been Greek, as cited by oriental and western sources; her name, he maintains, was of Persian origin and she was a native of Khuzestan (CHRISTENSEN, 1936. p.469). Legend-based historical chronicles tell of thousands of women and maids in Khosrow's harem, clearly exaggeration and not represent fact. Khosrow had two wives: Shirin from Khuzestan and Maria (Maryam) from Byzantium. According to historical sources, "Khosrow's beloved Shirin had a beautiful face like a full moon. And Maria was the daughter of the Byzantine emperor; Khosrow married her for political reasons, but Shirin's influence on him was much stronger" (Ibid., p. 470).

We should add that Nizami does refer to Khosrow's marriage to Maryam in his work.

As V. Lukonin maintains from the sources, "Most of the Christians living in Iran during the Sassanid era were Nestorians; the Byzantine emperor Mauritius helped young Khosrow to restore his rule, and in exchange the Sassanid king took his daughter Maria as a wife. And so Khosrow cared about the Christians who resided in his country. After the Byzantine emperor's death, Khosrow backed the monophysites, to gain support of oriental Christians, and his other wife Shirin

belonged to that church in Khuzestan. Khosrow even built a temple in her honour" (LUKONIN, 1987. pp.183-184).

In addition, an ancient Syrian source mentions that Khosrow had two Christian wives: the Aramean Shirin and the Roman (Byzantine) Maria (PIGULEVSKAYA, 1939. p.65). Rustam Aliyev cites the same source given by N. Pigulevskaya and proves that Shirin was not Armenian (ALIYEV, 1991 pp.102-105.).

To conclude, we focus on another interesting aspect: Firdawsi's and Nizami's stance on Shirin. First and foremost, Nizami, unlike his predecessor, prefers Shirin to other female characters and, regardless of her actual origin, depicts her as royal. He portrays Shirin as a woman of high feeling and likens her to his late wife. Nizami has Khosrow look into the essence of things and submit to Buzurg Umid's advice in order to understand the world (ZARRINKOOB, *Ibid.*, p.106). Remarkably, Firdawsi's Shirin possesses none of the high qualities described by Nizami and, guided by jealousy, she even poisons Khosrow's second wife Maryam (FERDOWSI, 1386. pp.269-270).

Nizami created a completely new image. It is clear that a great artist working with traditional motifs does not just copy them but adapts them to the socio-cultural, moral and ethical values and aesthetics – even to popular legends and other local literary sources – of the time and place and shapes those motifs to his own ideals, desires, dreams and feelings, thus imbuing them with new flavour and life. Just as in his other works, Nizami creates Shirin's character according to his own thoughts and ideas. In fact, the poet actually managed to revive a beautiful image of Kypchak keniz, who had been sent to him by the Derbent ruler as a slave, and to create a vivid, brave, devoted, honourable and bright female character that was a living embodiment of Arran-Azerbaijan and Islamic ethical values.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude from the evidence and facts cited above that just as the toponym "Arman" has nothing to do with ethnic origin and it is not related to Armenians. Written sources and other research materials demonstrate that Arman as a geographical name is a mountainous province of Azerbaijan. Besides, Shirin is not of Armenian origin, be it in historical sources or in Nizami's work of literature. Nizami in this image personifies the synthesis of moral and spiritual values of the local ruler Shirin and the beloved Kipchak beauty. One more undeniable fact is that Christian temples and churches that existed in Arran (or Azerbaijan) before Islam belonged to the ancient Albanians rather than to Armenians.

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### **Nəşib Göyüşov**

## **NİZAMİ GƏNCƏVİ: ƏRMƏN, ARAN VƏ AZƏRBAYCAN**

### *Xülasə*

Bədii əsərlərdə tarix və həyatdan çoxlu gerçəkliklər tapmaq olar. Ancaq tarixi personajlar və real şəxsiyyətlər poetik təxəyyüldə tamamilə yeni, bəzən isə əks mənalara kəsb edə bilər. Nizaminin "Xəmsə"sində əfsanə və nağıl elementləri ilə iç-içə olan tarixi və digər hadisələr təsvir olunur. Burada tarixi şəxsiyyətlərin və mifoloji personajların adları, coğrafi məkanlar, ayrı-ayrı xalqların adət-ənənələri, dinləri və mədəniyyətləri yer alır. Bütün bu ünsürlər şairin ideya-estetik niyyətini ifadə etməyə xidmət edir. Tədqiqatçı mənbələrə istinad edərək tutarlı dəlillərə əsaslanmaqla gerçəkliyi müəyyən etməlidir.

"Xosrov və Şirin" dastanı Sasani şahının həyat və yaradıcılığına həsr olunsa da, əlyazması Bərdə saxlanılan yerli Aran əfsanəsi əsasında yazılmışdır. Burada Şirin obrazına üstünlük verilir. Dastan boyu o, Xosrovu tərbiyə edir. Şairin eyham vurduğu kimi, bu obraz Dərbənd hökmdarının ona bəxş etdiyi ilk sevimli arvadını xatırladır. Bu o deməkdir ki, əsər qıpçaq gözəlinin şərəfinə yaradılmışdır. Yerli əfsanədə Şirin Ərmən hökmdarı Məhinbanunun qardaşı qızıdır. Tarixi Ərmən etnik deyil, coğrafi addır; Bir sıra müəlliflər səhv edərək bu vilayəti Ermənistan kimi qələmə vermişlər. "Bürhane-Qate" (XVII əsr) adlı klassik fars izahlı lüğətində yazılır ki, Ərmən Azərbaycanın dağlıq vilayətidir. Lüğətin tənqidi mətnini məşhur İran leksikoqrafı M.Muin nəşr etdirib. O qeyd edir ki, indiki vaxtda ermənilər bu sözü "erməni", ölkələrini isə "Ermənistan" kimi işlədirlər, halbuki onlar özlərini "Hay", ölkələrini isə "Hayistan" adlandırmışlar. İran alimi Səid Nəfisi qeyd etdiyi ki, ərəb coğrafiyaşünasları yunan müəlliflərinin ardınca səhv olaraq Qafqazın bütün şərq hissəsini Ərməniyyə kimi təqdim etmişlər.

Bundan əlavə, bir sıra tədqiqatçılar heç bir tutarlı dəlil olmadan Şirinin tarixi şəxsiyyət kimi erməni olduğunu iddia etsələr də, mənbələr onun erməni olmadığını, Xuzistanlı olduğunu təsdiqləmişlər. Eyni zamanda Nizaminin əsərində verilən Şirinin ədəbi obraz olaraq ermənilərlə heç bir əlaqəsi yoxdur.

*Açar sözlər:* Nizami Gəncəvi, Xosrov və Şirin, Ərmən, coğrafi ad, Aran, Azərbaycan

Recommended for publication by **Zakiya Abilova**  
D.Sc. in Philosophy, Associate professor