



# ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES ON THE HISTORY OF THE LEFT-BANK KAT-QALA: MYTHS AND LEGENDS

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## ABSTRACT

*This article is dedicated to the results of ethnographic studies of the history of the left-bank Kat-qala. The researches, conducted by G.P. Snesev with the representatives of the local population near this monument and in Beruni city on the right bank of the Amu Darya river, testifies the relation direct of the history of the left-bank Kat-qala with the ancient capital Kyat. In particular, the abundance of the myths and legends associated with Sheikh Abbas Vali in studies indicates how important this character was in the history of these monuments. This information mainly refers to the subsequent 300-year history and ideas about the ancient places of the population of the new (left bank) Kat-qala, were preserved in memories up to the present days. Ethnographic studies also show the position of representatives of the Uzbek clan of the population of ancient Kat-qala in the political life of the khanate, and this is evident of their resettlement in a new built fortress. Left-bank Kat-qala as one of the largest fortresses always had a particular value in the history of the Khanate. Once the ancient capital city Kat-qala on the right bank of the Amu Darya river, gradually forgotten from the memory of the people and the toponym Shabbaz is formed instead. And we can see by the legends associated with Sheikh Abbas Vali, how important his name was in the formation of this toponym.*

**KEY WORDS:** *G.P. Snesev, Shabbaz Baba, Sheikh Abbas Vali, left-bank Kat-qala, the ancient capital Kat, Khorezm legends, Shavat.*

## INTRODUCTION

We know that in the process of exploring each historical monument, we come across folk oral heritage, including legends and myths, associated with its name or the history of its construction. The object we are studying is the Kat-qala archeological monument located on the left bank of the lower Amu Darya basin. The monument is located 25 km northwest of Urgench, in the territory of Kat-qala mahalla of Shavat district. Traces of the trapezoid-shaped monument walls are clearly visible as a hill. The legends and myths about the history of this castle have not been studied as a separate subject and have not been generalized as an object of study.

The myths and legends associated with the Left Bank Kat-qala are very short and unrelated. It is difficult to generalize them. Nevertheless, we cite the myths and legends collected in the course of

ethnographic research as an integral part of the history of the monument.

The importance of this information for the history of the monument is enormous, covering mainly the processes associated with the history of the castle over the next 300 years. The left-bank (new) Kat city under study shows that the ancient capital is directly related to the history of Old Kat on the right bank. In this regard, the results of ethnographic research conducted by the Khorezm archeological ethnographic expedition in Khorezm region under the leadership of G.P. Snesev are very important [Tolstov et al. 1963, 22; Arjanceva 2016, 233-234].

## LITERATURE ANALYSIS

Studies show that most of the information about the history of the monument, although brief, was mainly reflected in the research of G.P. Snesev. For many years, as part of the Khorezm



archeological ethnographic expedition, in the process of studying the ethnography of the Uzbeks of the Khorezm oasis, special attention was paid to the history of place names, their origin, myths and legends. Myths and legends related to the history of the left bank Kat-qala were reflected in his scientific monographs, including "Pre-Islamic beliefs and customs of Khorezm Uzbeks" [Snesarev 1969], "Khorezm legends as a source on the history of religious beliefs in Central Asia" [Snesarev 1983]. In the process of studying myths and legends, information about the name and history of the monument has been comparatively studied with the sources given in the works "History of irrigation of Khorezm" [Gulyamov 1959], "Toq-kala" [Gudkova 1964], "Ancient Khorezm defense structures" [Khojaniyozov 2007] and "Tazkiratul avliyo, i.e. mentions of the saints in Khorezm" [Qamariddin Eshon Muhammad Karim Eshon oghli, Komiljon Durdi Qilich oghli 1997, 6-7].

## RESEARCH MATERIAL

G.P. Snesarev's first research on the history of monuments was carried out in 1958-1960. The Uzbek ethnographic group led by the researcher, in the course of research in the territory of Shavat district of Khorezm region, also collects some information about the monument by talking to the representatives of the population around the left bank Kat-qala [Snesarev 1983, 58, 126-129; Snesarev 1969, 30, 284].

In one of the legends, this city was the scene of the heroism of the legendary Rustam, who is depicted in Iranian epics as a brave warrior, and no doubt, the story of this image was influenced by Firdavsi's work "Shahname". According to the legend, he comes to Kat to avenge his murdered grandfather. Brave Rustam, in the appearance of a salt trader, enters the city with his soldiers and takes revenge on the ruler who killed his grandfather. This plot is reminiscent of the plot of the conquest of Misqala (Copper fortress) in the "Shahname" [Snesarev 1983, 58]. At the same time, the leading plot of this legend also seems to have been taken from Siyavush's motive for revenge. If Siyavush's activity is connected with Khorezm, the popularity of the motive of revenge in the legends of the oasis is of special importance [Snesarev 1969, 284].

When we talk about the construction of this or that ancient city and fortress of Khorezm, we also come across legends about giants in historical legends. The image of the giant is often embodied in the image of the builder, the creator. The Shahname states that King Jamshid forced the giants to mix mud, make bricks and construct buildings, thus creating architecture [Snesarev 1969, 62]. The

legendary kings of Khorezm also used them to build their famous cities and fortresses. Legends about giants are widespread in the formation of some monuments in Khorezm (Chilpik, Toq-kala). They are directly reflected in the toponymy of many monuments (Devkesgan (Giant cut), Devsolgan (Giant built), Dev-qala (Giant fortress)) [Gulyamov 1959, 35; Gudkova 1964, 150; Khojaniyozov 2007, 17-18; Snesarev 1969, 29-30, 62].

G.P. Snesarev in his data collected from the elders during the ethnographic research in Shavat district notes that there is also a legend associated with giants in the construction of the left bank Kat-qala. According to the legend, Kat-qala was built by giants overnight. That is why the people called it "Devsolgan qala" [Snesarev 1969, 30].

Even, today, the name "Devsolgan" is mentioned in the talks with some of the older representatives of the population of Kat-qala village in Shavat district. Besides, Pirov Ilhom, a retired teacher at School No. 5 in the village, said he had heard from the elders that the left-bank Kat-qala was called Devsolgan.

In G.P. Snesarev's researches in ethnographic field, the legend associated with the old Kat on the right bank, is often studied in direct connection with the Kat on the left bank [Snesarev 1983, 125-129]. Especially important stories among the myths and legends formed in the last centuries are the stories about Shobboz bobo (father Shobboz), which are associated with the ancient city of Kat.

It should be noted that the capital on the right bank, Kat, had been flooded by the Amu Darya many times in its history and as a result the migration of people happened very often. Abu Rayhan Beruni mentions one of these floods in his book "Monuments of the Past". During the reign of Anushakhan, another floods caused the relocation of its population to a new place. According to legends, the inhabitants of Old Kat were cursed by Shobboz bobo. For this reason, the city of Kat was frequently flooded.

It is evident that the local population was frequently exposed to such calamities, the inability to determine the cause of the floods, the weakness of man in the face of these calamities, as if these events were the basis for composing various myths and legends associated with the curse of the saint.

Today, this ancient city is named after our great ancestor, encyclopedic scientist Abu Rayhan Beruni. The name was given to the city in 1973 for the scientist's contribution to world science during the celebration of the millennium, as well as for the fact that he was born and grown around the city.



The name of the city in the late Middle Ages, that is, during the khanate period, was called Sheikh Abbas Vali and the term Shabboz was widely spread in the people's language. This is the name which is come across in the Russian maps of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Sheikh Abbas Vali is the name of a saint, the patron saint of the city. It is this legend associated with the saint, recorded by G.P. Snesarev in an interview with a local resident Pirjonov Bekim.

According to the legend, "Before Sheikh Abbas Vali, the oppressive king Daqi-Yunus ruled in Kat. All the property here was considered as his personal property. There were also slaves in the service of Daqi-Yunus. The skeletons still standing on the walls of the fortress are the slaves of Daqi-Yunus. Slaves who died during the construction of the wall were immediately thrown into the wall.

Sheikh Abbas Vali was a representative of the local population. He persuaded the slaves to revolt against Daqi-Yunus. They took revenge for their misery by seizing this oppressive king and dragging him over the thorny plants. Daqi-Yunus could not bear this suffering and died.

After that, the state was ruled by Sheikh Abbas. He delivered the lands to slaves and strictly controlled the distribution of water. In this case, he was assisted by his little brother Kechirmas bobo (Unforgiving father), who severely punished any violation of the rules. After the death of Sheikh Abbas Vali, the local people began to respect him as a saint, and many people visited his grave" [Snesarev 1983, 126].

While collecting information about the saint, G.P. Snesarev draws attention to the fact that they have different meanings. He offered this information about the origin of Sheikh Abbas Vali from an old man Nasrullah Mahsum: "Sheikh Abbas Vali was not a local, but came from Turkey. He had no father and his mother was seriously ill. One day he called his son and said to him: "I am going to die today, bury me and go to Khorezm yourself. You will be the king of a kingdom there". After burying his mother, Shabboz came to Khorezm. He ruled here for a while. Then he left them all and became a Sufi and reached the level of a great sheikh". [Snesarev 1983, 126-127].

G.P. Snesarev, relying on calculations based on conversations with informants, suggests that Sheikh Abbas Vali died in about 1188. Also interesting is the information received by G.P. Snesarev from Kuramboi Makhsum about the miraculous qualities of the saint: "Once upon a time there was a war in these places. The enemy has invaded. That's when Shabboz bobo opposed them.

He collected a pile of stones in his robe and poured them on the enemy. Shabboz bobo was a wanderer, a madman" [Snesarev 1983, 127].

The already contradictory information about the saint Shabboz bobo was further deepened on the basis of stories taken around Kat-qala (Shavat district) on the left bank of the Amu Darya.

In 1958-1960, G.P. Snesarev was collecting ethnographic data in the territory of Shavat district of Khorezm region, and thoroughly studied the left bank Kat-qala and its surroundings. "In those years, this monument stood out as a half-ruined surrounded with wall. The population had mostly moved to the surrounding villages. There were only 2-3 families living in the fortress" [Snesarev 1983, 127].

G.P. Snesarev collects information about the history and origins of the inhabitants of the left-bank Kat-qala based on the legends he heard from the locals here.

The fate of left bank Kat is closely linked to the legends of Shabboz Bobo. At the time of G.P. Snesarev's research, several legends about the relocation of the population of the ancient capital of Khorezm, Kat (Shabboz), to the new Kat on the left bank, had not yet risen from the memory of the older generation.

The issue of relocation of the population of the ancient capital Kat to new places depends on the direction of the flow of the Amu Darya and the natural disasters associated with floods. There are, of course, a number of sources, including Abu Rayhan al-Biruni's "Monuments of the Ancient Nations": Al-Fir could be seen from a distance of 10 miles or more. It was gradually washed away by Jayhun every year, and in 1305 of Alexander's history nothing was left of it" [Beruni 1968, 71].

Other information about the Amu Darya on the right bank of Kat-qala is mentioned in the account of the 17<sup>th</sup> century events of the Khivian historian Shermuhammad Munis: "During the reign of Anushakhan (1663-1683) Kat on the right bank was left without water. For this reason, he dug a new Yormish canal on the left bank of the Amu Darya, built a fortress next to it and relocated the population to this new city. This fortress was called New Kat" [Gulyamov 1959, 200].

Apparently, the flooding of Kat-Shabboz was frequently observed in both the Middle Ages and new period. G.P. Snesarev also recorded that a similar catastrophe occurred in 1902 as the old people of Shabboz [Snesarev 1983, 128].

Whenever there was a conversation about the people displaced from Kat-Shabboz, the story of the saint Shabboz bobo would always begin. The reason for the various calamities that befell the city



and its inhabitants was that they were cursed by the saint Shabboz Bobo. Myths and legends about this are so fragmented and confusing that it is very difficult to connect them.

However, their content suggests the following: “The population of Kat-Shobboz is divided into two groups: “katli” and “shotli”. It is still unknown what this division means. Apparently, the city was meant to be divided into two neighborhoods. One day, the katli people insulted the saint, that is, they burn his straw hat, and the sheikh curses them for it. According to some legends, it was these katlies who moved to the left bank. The information about this that G.P. Snesarev received from 54-year-old Jamol Khoja near Kat on the left bank is very interesting: “One of those who came here burned Sheikh Abbas Vali’s skullcap. The people of Shabboz say about us: “The one who set fire to Shabboz’s skullcap”. If someone crossed the left bank from Kat to the right bank, he was turned out” [Snesarev 1983, 128-129].

Hence, Sheikh Abbas Vali was the patron-protector of ancient Kat from the right bank. There is even a saying about him: “Sheikh Abbas in front of the work, a thousand go-heads in front of the soup”. The informant who quoted this proverb, in turn, gives information about the meaning of the name of the saint: the word “Abbas” means “water bearer, water giver”, and thus indicates that when irrigating the land, water was pumped to the high places by means of a chighir (water pumping wheel set on a river). Consequently, this informant believes that the name of the saint is widespread in Khorezm and is associated with the duties of the saints who provided people with the most important source of water [Snesarev 1983, 129].

It is very difficult to give clear evidence about the period of the life, birth and death of Sheikh Abbas Vali, the patron-protector of the Shobboz. Only information about his death is available. As noted above, he died in 1188 [Snesarev 1983, 127], according to some sources in the thirteenth century [Gulyamov 1959, 212].

At the same time, we come across another interesting source about Sheikh Abbas Vali in the pamphlet “Tazkiratul avliyo, i.e. mentions of the saints in Khorezm” written by Qamariddin Eshon Muhammad Karim Eshon oghli and Komiljon Durdi Qilich oghli:

“According to some narrations, His Highness was a relative and ally of the Sufi Imam Muhammad al-Ghazali. He was also the one who

made *sujjodanishin*<sup>1</sup> in the land of Khorezm, revealed the history of the sheikhdom and expressed mysticism to the people.

He was buried in a place called Old Kat on the north side of the river Jayhun (Amu).

It is said that he came to the area and was busy with farming. The people of that area were annoying him from time to time. He used to say, “It is sunnah for us to feel insults from our own people”, since the Sultani Anbiyo Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was also persecuted by the Quraysh people. From time to time, he held a canopy of straw and reaped plants in the heat.

One day, while He was lying on the grass in that program, He threw an umbrella of straw from his head into a fire. His heart aches. It is not because the umbrella is burning in the fire, but because of the disrespect and indifference of those who live in that area. That is why it is said that the people of the coast prayed badly for not turning their heads away from the evil path. According to legends, the date of his death is “Sahibi zamon”. – 784 AH” [Qamariddin Eshon Muhammad Karim Eshon oghli, Komiljon Durdi Qilich oghli 1997, 6-7]<sup>2</sup>.

It is clear from this date that the death of Sheikh Abbas Vali dates back to 1382 AD.

Thus, in the middle of the twentieth century, the legends about Sheikh Abbas Vali were mostly found in the monuments of the people of the right bank Kat, i.e. Shobboz, but the memories of the ancient capital are still preserved, albeit in a fragmentary form among the older representatives of the population of the left bank Kat-qala.

## CONCLUSION

The research of the Uzbek ethnographic group of the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition led by G.P. Snesarev presented contradictory and interesting legends and myths of different content related to the history of the left bank Kat-qala. According to legends and myths, the fortress is associated with the character of Rustam, the hero of the epic poem “Shohname”, as well as information about the history of the

<sup>1</sup> “Sujjodanishin”, more exactly “sajjodanishin” (سجاده نشين) – “sajjoda” (سجاده) – joy namoz (praying place of muslims), “nishin” (نشين) – to sit, i.e. a man who is always praying sitting on joy namoz.

<sup>2</sup> In gathering this information, the authors note that they applied the works “Tazkiratul Avliyo” by Fariddin Attor, “Nafahot ul uns” by Abdurahmon Jomi and “Rashahoti ain al-hayot” by Fahridin Ali Voiz.



construction of most monuments, the image of the “giant” to build this fortress. Studies show that the name of the left-bank Kat-qala is directly related to the ancient Kat on the right-bank. This is reflected in the historical processes associated with the resettlement of the inhabitants of the ancient city during the reign of Anushakhan. In turn, the fact that the legends about Sheikh Abbas Vali are widespread among the townspeople on both shores also confirms the connection between them.

Although the cultural layers of the monument cover a 2,400-year historical period, the legends and myths associated with its history cover the last 300 years of the city. The question of its ancient name has not yet been sufficiently studied. Life at the monument ceased completely after the Mongol invasion and was abandoned until the time of Anushakhan (1664-1686). Apparently, the area around the monument was also in a state of disrepair for a long time. The people who migrated from the ancient Kat on the right bank of the Amu Darya also bring here their memories, mainly related to their ancient cities. Although this information is related to the later period of the monument, it is of great importance as a source that serves to fully cover the period of the fortress’s history of the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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