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On a disputed question in a story by Mawlana Jalaladdin al-Rumi

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In Mesnevi, the famous work of Mawlana Jalaladdin al-Rumi (d. 1273) there are pages of Koran, maxims, anecdotes of prophets, legends of Saints also some stories and short articles all of which are shared materials of classic East literature. Mawlana touches lots of points in these stories and motives. Sometimes he explains his theosophical, religious, philosophical, moral, pedagogical views, and opinions symbolically with a story by itself and sometimes with allegories making use of allusions which are one or a few versed motives and with allegories about resemblances and man-animal, internal-external relations.¹ In addition, some stories in Mesnevi are about Jesus Christ and Christians.

The first story of Mawlana about Christians is the story of the Jewish Emperor who killed Christians for fanaticism. This story is Mesnevi's third story of the first volume. In short, the verses 321 to 739 tells the following story:

Once, there was a cruel Jewish emperor who was killing the Christians and torturing them. Whatever this Jewish emperor did, and no matter how many Christians he killed, he could not stop christianity from spreading. Thereupon, the trickster vizier of this emperor told him that he could not get rid of this religion by killing the Christians, but only by corrupting their faith. Then they made a plan about how the corruption would occur. According to this plan, the emperor would both torture the vizier and cut his hands and feet. Just when the time come to hang him, he would forgive the vizier and exile him to a distant region. When the vizier was exiled, he would tell that the reason for his torture was that he was Christian. In order for him to, gain the Christians' trust. The plan was applied, the vizier was sent to a distant region with hands and feet cut off.

The Christians began to visit the vizier who was sermoning about their religion. When the vizier properly gain their trust after six years, he stayed in a private room in is a sign of practicing religious seclusions for forty days. After these forty days he invited, in turn, the leaders of the Christians who were divided into twelve tribes . The vizier met with each leader separately and told them he would be their leader until his death. Whereupon they should assume a certain role. These roles were intentionally made so that they would be taking positions contrary to one another and he also told each leader that he would be the new leader of all Christians.

After some time the vizier killed himself, then the leaders of the Christians began to fight. because of these fights they started different customs. In this way, even though the emperor could not get rid of Christianity, he succeeded to corrupt it.

Who is the vizier according to Mesnevi commentaries?

Mesnevi has been translated and commented on so many times from the period it was

¹ Özgür Baykal, "Mevlana'nın Mesnevi'sinde hayvan ve hikaye motifleri" *Şarkîyat Mecmuası*, V/25 (1964), p. 23.

written.² In these commentaries, while some do not comment on the vizier's identity, some do. The first translators and commentators of *Mesnevî*, Mûini (d. 1436)³, Sarı Abdullah Efendi (d. 1661)⁴, Ankaravî İsmail Efendi (d. 1631)⁵, Şifai Mehmed Dede (d. 1671)⁶, Şeyh Murad-i Buhari (d. 1848)⁷, Tahirü'l-Mevlevî (d. 1951)⁸ and Mehmed Muhlis Koner (d. 1957)⁹ do not make any comments about the vizier's identity. Abdülmecid-i Sivasî (d. 1639)¹⁰, Abidin Paşa (d. 1848)¹¹, and Kenan Rifai (d. 1950)¹² are contented with saying that the vizier is a trickster, deceptive and double faced one. They do not comment on the identity of him, yet they wanted the readers to think about him as being one of the worst tricksters and swindlers.

In his detailed commentary named *Mesnevî-i Şerif Şerhi* (Sacred Commentary of *Mesnevî*) Ahmet Avni Konuk (d. 1938) indicates that; one of the Jewish king Herod's sons was king Celil and it is his vizier who tracked the Christians. He points out that this issue is a minor detail and that is why it is not given importance by the historians.¹³ He includes two paragraphs of data taken from Ahmet Mithat Efendi's work named "Mudafaa" without any comment whether Pavlus is the vizier in the story or not.¹⁴

Three commentators give explanations about the vizier's identity. Yet, these commentators are not definitive in their explanations. They contend with saying that the vizier is Pavlus. These commentators are; Mustafa Şemsi Dede (d. 1596)¹⁵, İsmail Hakkı Bursevî (d. 1726)¹⁶ and Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı (d. 1982)¹⁷. The most detailed information among them is presented in the commentary of Gölpınarlı. For him, Polos (Pavlus) the main character of this story was born in the second year of the Christian Era. Pavlus whose original name was Saul rooted from Israelites. At first he was the biggest enemy of Christianity, then he pretended this religion as being his own and tried to spread it over Anatolia, Cyprus and Greece. Pavlus went to Rome in A. D. 62-A. D. 63 and he was executed in A. D. 66. Mawlana studied the Bible and he commented on this story according to it. He used this story in a way that he had planned.¹⁸

² For more information about this issue, look. İsmail Güleç, "Türk edebiyatında *Mesnevî* tercüme ve şerhleri?", *Journal of Turkish Studies Türklük Bilgisi Araştırmaları*, yay. haz. Zehra Toksa, Harvard: 2003, 27/II, p. 161-176.

³ Kemal Yavuz, Mûini'nin *Mesnevî-i Murâdî*'si II. cilt Metin, İstanbul Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, (unpublished doctarete thesis) İstanbul: 1976, p. 137.

⁴ Sarı Abdullah Efendi, *Cevâbir-i Bevâbir-i Mesnevî I*, İstanbul: 1287, p. 307.

⁵ İsmail Ankaravî, *Şerh-i Mesnevî I*, İstanbul: Matbaa-ı Amire, 1289, p. 108.

⁶ Şifai Mehmed Dede, *Şerh-i Mesnevî*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Dârü'l-Mesnevî, 209, 22^b-23^a

⁷ Şeyh Mehmed Buhârî, *Şerh-i Mesnevî*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, M. Arif-M. Murad 112/1, 32^a.

⁸ Tahirü'l-Mevlevî Olgun, *Şerh-i Mesnevî*, 2nd. ed., İstanbul: Şamil Yayınevi, t.y., p. 244.

⁹ M. Muhlis Koner, *Mesnevî'nin Özü*, Konya: Konya Belediyesi, 1961, p. 25.

¹⁰ Abdülmecid Sivasî, *Şerh-i Mesnevî*, Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin Efendi 1651, v. 70^b.

¹¹ Abidin Paşa, *Tercüme ve Şerh-i Mesnevî-i Şerif*, 3th. ed. İstanbul: 1305, p. 249.

¹² Kenan Rifai, *Şerhli Mesnevî-i Şerif*, İstanbul: Kubbealtı Yayınevi, 2000, p. 84.

¹³ Ahmet Avni Konuk, *Mesnevî-i Şerif Şerhi I*, preparing for publishing, Selçuk Eraydın, Mustafa Tahralı, İstanbul: Gelenek Yayınları, 2004, p. 178.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 179.

¹⁵ Musrafa Şemî Dede, *Şerh-i Mesnevî*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Halet Efendi 334, v. 30^a.

¹⁶ İsmail Hakkı Bursevî, *Rûhü'l-Mesnevî II*, İstanbul: Matbaa-ı Amire, 1287, p. 23.

¹⁷ Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Mesnevî Şerhi I*, 3. bs., Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 2000, p. 166.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 170.

2- Is the Pavlus an envoy according to varies commentaries on the Koran?

The story about envoys sent to the people of a town takes place in Yasin Sura (13-30 verses) of Holly Koran is one of the distractor issues that makes it difficult to make a definite comment whether Pavlus is the trickster vizier or not.¹⁹ Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır (d. 1942)²⁰, Süleyman Ateş²¹, Hasan Basri Çantay (d. 1964)²², Ömer Nasuhi Bilmen (d. 1971)²³ are among the commentors who say that Pavlus is one of these envoys. In his work of “Peygamberler Tarihi” (The History of Prophets), M. Asım Köksal (d. 1998) points out that Jesus Christ sent envoys to twelve places. The one sent to Antiochia with Butrus was Bulus, and he was among the apostles.²⁴ The agreed points in commentaries are; the name of Simun or Sem’un, the name of Antiochia the place where the event takes place and the reality that the envoys were sent by Jesus Christ.

3- Who is Pavlus called as vizier?

The basic source of the information about Pavlus is in the New Testament. There is bo other information about Pavlus in other sources except in Christian literature.²⁵ There is not any explicit statement about his birthday in first hand sources, or his nationality are doubtful. It is accepted that he was born in Tarsus A. D. 10.²⁶ His preceding name was Saul and that was before he met with Jesus Christ. He is the son of a rich and well-known family that is conferred the right of citizenship of Rome. Pavlus was first educated in Tarsus and then went on to Jerusalem. While he was a member of Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, he was sent to control Syria Jews. There he witnessed an incident that changed him. It was narrated in Bible like this:

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? 5 who are you Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting?” he replied. 6 “Now, get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” (Acts, 9).

After this incident, Saul served Jesus Christ to the end of his life. He had three main mission travelling for the sake of this. According to Traditional Christian mentality, Pavlus was killed by the emperor Nera in A. D. 67 fearing that his power could be damaged.

Pavlus is so important for Christians that; it is not possible to talk about the Catholic Church, Hellenic or Latin patriarchal theology, or the Christian–Hellenistic culture without

¹⁹ The story in the verses is like that: two envoys were sent to a city, the people of the city did not leave them and denied them. Then another envoy was sent to this city. Again the people did not leave him, upon this event one man who lived faraway told people to listen and believe them since they were real envoys. Again people did not listen to and killed him. (Yasin 36/13-30)

²⁰ Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dini Kuran Dili 5*, İstanbul: Bedir Yayınevi, 1993, p. 4016.

²¹ Süleyman Ateş, *Yüce Kuran’ın Çağdaş Tefsiri 7*, İstanbul: Yeni Ufuklar Neşriyat, t.y., p. 342-343.

²² Hasan Basri Çantay, *Kuran-ı Hakîm ve Meâl-i Kerim II*, İstanbul: Çantay 1984, p. 781.

²³ Ömer Nasuhî Bilmen, *Kuran-ı Kerim’in Türkçe Meâl-i Alisi ve Tefsiri 6*, İstanbul: Bilmen Yayınevi, 1965, p. 2925.

²⁴ M. Asım Köksal, *Peygamberler Tarihi II*, Ankara: TDV, 1995, p. 328.

²⁵ Şinasi Gündüz, *Pavlus Hristiyanlığın Mimarı*, Ankara: Ankara Okulu, 2001, p. 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

mentioning him.²⁷ Besides, in one respect Pavlus is a man that has been argued about concerning with his views and thoughts he asserted for nearly two thousand years In another respect he is a philosopher whose role in history is accepted by almost everyone, a missionary, a theologian and a founder of a new religious thought. For some, he is an epileptic who sees illusions or a hysteric, yet for some he is a creative philosopher and a theological revolutionist. Common believers appropriated the doctrines of Pavlus thinking that he was an envoy chosen by God for carrying the messages of Jesus Christ the Messiah.²⁸ In his letters he was the one charged with sermoning the messages of Jesus Christ who was crucified and again came back to life. (Galatians, 1/1-2, 2/7, I. Kor. 11/23, First Thessalonians)

Lots of researchers are in agreement about the one who deteriorated the message of Jesus Christ by changing it, was Pavlus.²⁹ Pavlus was accused of betraying the faith of Jesus Christ, and destroying his simple doctrines, and bringing the religion known as Christianity into existence. Christianity gained a form in the hands of Pavlus as a secret religion. He saved Christianity from Jewishness and formed it as an adaptation of paganist secret religions.

4– The resemblances and differences between the vizier and Pavlus

We can arrange the resemblances between the vizier of the Jewish king and Pavlus according to the brief story above like that;

a- The resemblances between the vizier and Pavlus

- 1- Both are Jewish.
- 2- Both practised sorcery. Pavlus suppressed sorcerer Elimas in Cyprus in the presence of the Governor of Cyprus (Acts,. 13/6-11)
- 3- They both indicated themselves as a religious leaders.
- 4- They both called people to Christianity and Christians gathered around them.
- 5- They both deprecated the faith of Christians.
- 6- They both claim that Jesus became visible and they are his caliph.
- 7- The Christians who had wisdom did not believe them.
- 8- Christians were prosecuted for their beliefs and killed in the times they both lived.
- 9- The vizier wrote scrolls and Pavlus wrote letters.
- 10- Both said that Jesus Christ spoke with them.

²⁷ From Şinasi Gündüz; H. Küng, *Christianity: Its Essence and History*, tr. J. Bowden, London, SCM Press, 1995, p. 144.

²⁸ Şinasi Gündüz, *ibid*, p. 12.

²⁹ In the film called “Last call for the Sin” which was adapted to cinema from the novel having the same name, there was a scene which Pavlus and Jesus Christ met. In that scene, Pavlus scolded at Isa like that: “I did not tell these, you are lying”, and Pavlus replied: “People believe in Jesus Christ I described, not in you”. This rejoinder summarizes this kind of approaches very successfully.

11- Christians grieved after their death.

b- The differences between the vizier and Pavlus

1- Pavlus did not have the rank of a vizier, he did not communicate with Emperors.

2- Pavlus was tortured then put into jail but he was not exiled with ear, nose, hand and feet cut.

3- In history, Christians were not divided into twelve tribes.

4- While the vizier taught the rules of the Bible to the leaders in a way that contradicted each other, Pavlus said similar things according to people's conditions wherever he went. Yet, especially while discussing with Jews in Jerusalem, he said different things from the ones that he said the Moslems in Anatolia.

5- Pavlus did not appoint people as a caliph after him.

6- There is no proof that Pavlus stayed in a private room for fourty days.

7- Concerning the vizier committing suicide, Pavlus was killed by the emperor in Rome.

Conclusion

In commentaries, there is not any common agreement about the vizier's identity in the story narrated in Mesnevi. Both Mawlana and the commentators except for three of them did not assert any idea about the vizier's identity. According to the ones who mentioned his identity, it may be said that he is Pavlus but it is not definitive.

As it has been seen there is not any common name about this matter among the commentaries. In addition to this, it is not possible to think that Mawlana as a professor of theology does not know this verse and its commentary. We estimate that Mawlana was aware of the commentaries of the verse and also the rumours about the vizier being Pavlus. So it a big assertion that Mawlana accused someone who was mentioned as a real envoy in some commentaries of being a liar and behaving as a spoilsport.

Also it is evident that there are resemblances between the vizier story and the life of Pavlus. It is difficult to say the vizier is Pavlus according to these resemblances. The differences between them are serious and there is disagreement in chronicles. In addition to this, in the letters of Pavlus there was not any expressions contradict with each other, but there are parts that are at odd's with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Another issue drawing attention in the story is that there are not any comments about who is the Jewish Emperor in the commentaries. Also it is interesting that only three of the commentators who believe the vizier is Pavlus give his name and only one of them is detailed. The Mesnevis' who grew up listening the Mesnevi and his commentaries in the convent does not comment on this issue making us think that in the traditional sense the

identity of the vizier is not important.³⁰

As a conclusion, it is a weak possibility that Pavlus is the vizier in the story. The story is remarkable in the sense that Muslims think the religion came with Jesus Christ but changed and deteriorated by one of his followers. Pavlus being thought as the deteriorator of the Christianity by some theologians has the possibility of being the vizier in the story. Together with that, this issue will be more clear when the mentality of Jesus Christ and Pavlus in the period Mawlana lived and in the Mesnevi sources is found out.

³⁰ When I asked about that issue to Pr. Dr. Kemal Yavuz, with a different view, he stated that Mawlana drew attention to that intriguity and defeatism are not good, that Mawlana called out according to his period and stated the harms of seperateness, while that the period after Mawlana was unity period and also Aşık Paşa and Gülşehri discussed the same idea. Shortly, Mawlana talked about and advised the harms of seperateness and Gülşehri talked about ther benefits of unity. Both two writers mentioned about their period. Thanks to my teacher for sharing his precious ideas.

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