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The Imperative of Critical Discourse in Archaeology and History

Fereydoun Avarzamani
Faculty Member, Nazar Research Center, Tehran, Iran.

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Mythologization: The Bane of Ancient Truths

Due to its inherent inaccessibility and its roots in traditional paradigms, the ancient world is highly susceptible to being portrayed through the lens of fictional mythologies. By employing scientific methodologies and rational logic, the disciplines of history and archaeology possess the capacity to unveil ancient truths, presenting the experiences of our predecessors to modern humanity with the utmost proximity to reality. Consequently, the objective of these disciplines cannot be reduced merely to describing past civilizations. Rather, history and archaeology provide modern society with a standard framework for applying historical insights to the trajectory of contemporary social development.

In the pursuit of understanding ancient civilizations, scholars face not only a scarcity of transparent data but also the pervasive influence of self-generated myths. Purging these misconceptions in parallel with the study of the civilizations themselves is imperative. Engaging with and refining prevailing historical and archaeological beliefs can only be achieved through rigorous scientific critique. It is fundamentally impossible to assess the validity of these narratives without actively addressing and critiquing the prevalent myths entrenched within these fields.

Although the critique of widely accepted historical and archaeological narratives is not unprecedented, a close examination of the relevant literature reveals that critical discourse has historically been treated as a matter of subjective preference rather than a strict

Email: f.avarzamani@yahoo.com

methodological necessity. Evidently, without purging these disciplines of erroneous beliefs, the potential to explore new horizons and uncover genuine historical truths becomes severely compromised.

On the one hand, prominent ancient myths distract researchers from conducting objective and impartial investigations. On the other hand, by presenting a distorted version of the truth, they undermine the necessity of exploring and uncovering the practical and functionally beneficial aspects of antiquity. Therefore, mainstreaming critical discourse in archaeology and history—particularly when aimed at exposing unfounded, yet widely accepted claims—is an indispensable prerequisite for rendering these academic disciplines practically valuable.

Critique of a Famous Legend

A prevalent scholarly assumption identifies the modern city of Damghan as the ancient Parthian capital of Hecatompylos, famously known as the "City of a Hundred Gates." However, a rigorous examination of historical texts and archaeological data suggests this geographic identification is fundamentally flawed. Historically, Hecatompylos served as a primary administrative center since the reign of Arsaces I and functioned as a crucial node along the Silk Road, facilitating lucrative trade between China, Mesopotamia, and the Greco-Roman world.

The literal interpretation of the moniker "Hundred Gates" is strategically and logistically implausible. Constructing an excessive number of gates would have rendered the settlement highly vulnerable to military incursions. Furthermore, defending such vast infrastructure would necessitate a massive, economically unviable garrison—defying standard military logic. While another distinct Parthian settlement, known locally as "Ghusheh," exists in the vicinity and frequently yields regional numismatic artifacts, it severely lacks the monumental scale attributed to the Parthian royal city.

Consequently, the hypothesis situating Hecatompylos in Damghan is invalidated by several critical factors. First, the limited geographical expanse of the storm-prone Damghan region contradicts classical descriptions of a sprawling -٢٨square-kilometer metropolis. Second, the prominent first-century BCE geographer Isidore of Charax conspicuously omits Hecatompylos in his accounts. Finally, extensive scientific excavations at the presumed site have failed to unearth significant material evidence or the foundational remains of the purported hundred-gate fortification system.

Given that classical historians such as Strabo, Pliny, and Ptolemy documented Hecatompylos as a magnificent royal center located directly along the Silk Road, any search must be strictly confined to this strategic economic artery. Therefore, this paper treats Hecatompylos as a lost metropolis and introduces a novel hypothesis: the "Iraj Fortress-City" (Qaleh-Eraj) represents the authentic Parthian-era Hecatompylos. Beyond geographical alignment, this paradigm shift is robustly substantiated by material evidence, specifically extensive Parthian-era artifacts and numismatic discoveries systematically unearthed at the Iraj site.

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