



Article

The Study of Hagiographic Works in Central Asia

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Abstract: Hagiographic works, originating from religious traditions, play a significant role in shaping societal values. These works depict the lives of saints, prophets, and religious figures, often blending theological, cultural, and historical narratives. This article focuses on the development of hagiographic literature in Central Asia, with a particular emphasis on Nasiruddin Rabguzi's Qisas Rabguzi as a prime example of Turkic hagiographic writing. Despite the rich tradition of hagiography, there has been limited scholarly attention to the specific characteristics and impact of these works in Central Asian literature, especially within the context of Turkic-speaking communities. The aim of this study is to explore the history, types, and significance of hagiographic works, with a detailed examination of Qisas Rabguzi and its role in disseminating religious and moral teachings. The study highlights the artistic sophistication and ideological depth of Qisas Rabguzi, showcasing its use of Quranic verses and historical references to impart spiritual lessons. This paper provides a unique analysis of the literary, theological, and cultural dimensions of Central Asian hagiography, shedding light on its enduring relevance in both historical and contemporary contexts. The findings underscore the importance of hagiographic works in shaping religious discourse, offering valuable insights for literary scholars, historians, and those interested in religious literature's societal impact.

Keywords: hagiography, Muslim hagiography, Buddhist hagiography, Christian hagiography, commentary, biography, classification, status.

1. Introduction

Hagiographic works created and being created by the great artists of their time play an important role in instilling noble views in the minds of humanity. The masterpieces of hagiographic literature are widespread among the peoples of the world, and are mainly intended to spread religious views among the masses and win the love of the people through the artistic depiction of the lives of prophets and saints. The word hagiography is derived from the Greek language and means "hagios" - saint, "grapho" - to write [1]. Since such works are based on religious concepts, one can find different definitions of this term from the point of view of eras and beliefs. For example: In the encyclopedic dictionary "Fundamentals of Spiritual Culture" this term is explained as follows: "Hagiography (Greek – holy, to write) – is a science devoted to the study of the lives of saints, studying the theological, cultural, psychological, social and historical aspects of holiness", while in other sources this concept is also defined as follows: "Zhitiya svyatih, hagiography – the exemplary lives and teachings of pious, holy figures in the Christian religion; the main genre of medieval literature" [2], [3].

Taking into account the above definitions and the specific aspects of oriental classical literature, J. Sayidolimov defined this term in his study as follows: "Hagiography is a work of art that reflects the lives and activities of prophets, companions, (apostles), followers, saints, saints, saints, religious leaders, and works that are characterized by their predominant artistic aspects". Thus, hagiographic works are an important source that

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describes the lives of prophets and saints, religious leaders through artistic and pictorial means. Since such works are created on the basis of certain literary canons, they reflect the literary environment of the era in which the author lived [4].

Hagiographic literature also has its own unique aspects, which are different from other types of literature, which are described by the Russian scholar N.Yu. Chalisova as follows: "... hagiographies (zhitiya svyatikh) are historical (works) due to the presence of elements related to the biography of the saint, theoretical works in terms of demonstrating correct answers to moral issues, and from the point of view of genre, poetic (works) due to the presence of artistic prose (examples and a deep emotional impact on believers)" [5].

It follows that hagiographic works can be approached as historical, theoretical, and artistic sources and used effectively for certain purposes.

Initially, hagiography as a genre did not have clear manifestations. In particular, the heroic works that appeared in ancient Greece between 900 and 700 BC can also be considered the first hagiographic sources. During this period, works in the form of poetry and short stories were popular. Homer's epics "Iliad" and "Odyssey" are among the most famous works of this period, and the epic became a sacred and authoritative book of the Greek people in ancient times. Also, the widespread distribution of works about Zoroaster, who lived in Central Asia between 589 and 512 BC, and his life, indicates that our ancestors were familiar with hagiographic literature in very ancient times.

Since hagiographic works are mainly intended to spread religious ideas among the masses, they have developed widely on the basis of the unique hagiographic literature of the three major religions of the world - Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

In particular, "Buddhist hagiography" arose in the 6th-5th centuries BC and developed in connection with this religion. The holy book of this religion is "Tripitaka", that is, "Three Baskets of Wisdom", which describes the beliefs of Buddhism. Works such as "Mahavostu", "Lalitavstara", "Buddhakhacharita", "Nidanakahta", which are created in a poetic way about Siddhartha Gautama, who is considered the founder of this religion, are considered the first major examples of Buddhist hagiography [6], [7], [8]. The events in these works are described based on the "Triptaka", and therefore reflect hagiographic features.

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology of this study is grounded in a comprehensive textual analysis of hagiographic literature, particularly focusing on the work *Qisas Rabguzi* by Nasiruddin Rabguzi. The primary approach is literary-historical, combining both qualitative and comparative methods to examine the structure, themes, and religious significance of the text. The research begins with a review of existing literature on hagiography, analyzing the evolution of the genre across different cultures, particularly in Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist traditions. This background provides a framework for understanding the unique aspects of Central Asian hagiographic works. The study then shifts to a detailed examination of *Qisas Rabguzi*, employing a close reading of the text to uncover its thematic elements, narrative style, and religious teachings. Special attention is given to the integration of Quranic verses, hadiths, and other religious sources within the narrative. Furthermore, the methodology incorporates a comparative analysis of other significant hagiographic works in Turkic literature, including those by Alisher Navoi, to highlight the literary techniques and ideological underpinnings shared across these texts. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how *Qisas Rabguzi* reflects the cultural and religious values of its time and its place in the broader tradition of hagiography. By focusing on the historical and literary contexts of the work, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the role of hagiographic literature in shaping religious and cultural identities in Central Asia.

3. Results and Discussion

At the beginning of the Common Era, as a result of profound changes in the social life of the Roman Empire, the Christian religion - the religion of salvation - emerged. After

Emperor Constantine (Roman emperor in 306-337) recognized Christianity as the state religion, hagiographic literature related to this religion also began to develop. "...Christian hagiography, as an artistic and propaganda literature, arose in Rome in the 2nd-3rd centuries and arose in connection with the spread of Christianity". The main type of hagiographic literature related to Christianity was the early martyrology (literature about the lives of Christian martyrs), which was the story of the martyrdom of Christians persecuted by the Inquisition. Another type was the direction that told about the life of a churchman who died peacefully. In addition, there was a mixed type, a type that illuminated the life of a martyr. The collection of texts reflected in them is diverse: anonymous, undated, and works with a known author. Later, warriors who achieved victory in military campaigns or died heroically were also given hagiographic features. In particular, "in 313, all the soldiers who were exiled by Emperor Constantine and died in the desert were declared heroes. In later times, these became the main characters of hagiographic works and became known as the "Desert Fathers" [9].

The emergence of Islam in the East at the beginning of the 7th century paved the way for the emergence of many hagiographic works in this land. The first reason for this was that the holy book of Islam, the Quran, contained a large amount of hagiographic information. Secondly, as Islam began to spread to vast regions, interest in studying the lives of past prophets and messengers, especially the last prophet Muhammad, grew among non-Muslim peoples. The words of L.I. Sottiyeu are also proof of this. In his opinion, "Muslim hagiography first appeared in Arabic literature in the 7th century. Most of them were works telling about the founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, and his followers and caliphs. It should be noted here that there is a big difference between the stories of the prophets and their biographies. While the biographies of a particular prophet or saint are described in the form of a translation, in hagiographic works, along with the biographies of the prophets, the events and miracles that occurred in their lives are also reflected. As the Russian scholar Klyuchevsky said: "The difference between the stories of the saints and their biographies is like the difference between signs and speed" [10]. Perhaps this is why the stories about the lives of the prophets and their miracles have always been popular and have attracted a large audience of readers in all eras. Our great grandfather, Al-Farabi, also said about this: "Akhbar an-nas" and "Akhbar al-Umam" belong to such a type of knowledge that they give pleasure to the reader and open the heart".

The work "Qisas Rabguzi" by Nasiruddin Rabguzi is the first and rare example of this kind in Turkic literature. As stated in the introduction to the work, it was written in 709 AH (1309-1310 AD) at the request of Nasiruddin Toqboga, a prominent Mongol bey who converted to Islam, by Nasiruddin Burhanuddin, the judge of Rabato'guz in Khorezm. The work is a unique source in terms of its structure, artistic sophistication, ideological direction, logical consistency, skillful use of quotations, and the mixing of various literary genres in one place. "In writing the work, Rabguzi used the Quran, Abu Ishaq Nishapuri's Persian "Qisas ul-anbiya", and Wahb ibn Munabbih's Arabic "Ka'b ul-akhbor". "Qisas Rabguzi" is linguistically close to such works as "Tafsir", "Khusraw and Shirin", "Nahj ul-faradis", and "Siraj ul-qulub", and is known among the Turkic peoples living in Central Asia as "Qisas ul-anbiya". The work consists of 72 stories. While telling the stories, Rabguzi, as a sensitive and deeply knowledgeable literary scholar, studies the existing versions of the stories, analyzes which narrations are true and which are fabricated" [11], [12].

Another of the magnificent works written in the hagiographic direction in Turkic literature is the work "Tarihi anbiyo va hukamo" by Alisher Navoi. This work is dedicated to the study of the history of prophets, saints, scholars and wise men. The work consists of two parts, first "Tarihi anbiyo" - the history of prophets, then "hukamo" - information about judges and wise men. The book discusses 59 prophets and saints, 4 saints and 13 scholars, starting with the first prophet Adam.

Doctor of Philology, Professor Hamidulla Boltaboyev, in his review of Nasiruddin Rabguzi's work "Qisas Rabguzi", noted that the history of the prophets in the story was, in a sense, the reason for the creation of Alisher Navoi's work "Tarihi anbiy va hukamo". When writing this work, Navoi studied the works of writers who had written about the prophets before him.

In Turkish literature, works written in a completely hagiographic direction can also include such unique masterpieces as Firdawsi's "Yusuf and Zulayha", Mahmud ibn Ali as-Saroy's "Nahjul Faradis", Durbek's "Yusuf and Zulayha", Alisher Navoi's "Nasayimul Muhabbat", "Holoti Sayyid Hasan Ardasher", "Holoti Pahlavon Mahmud", Nurmuhhammad Andalib's "Yusuf and Zulayha", Sayqali's "Qissai Ibrahim", "Ravzatush Shuhado", Salahi's "Yusuf and Zulayha" in Tajik, Kholis's "Ravzatush Shuhado" and "The Story of the Imams" [13, 14].

If we pay attention to the information provided in the above-mentioned works, we can see that all of them are based on the verses of the Quran, hadiths and narrations of reliable narrators. Because, "the leading purpose of hagiographic works is to educate the human soul through the spiritual state and status achieved by great people through asceticism."

In addition, through works of this style, it becomes possible to quickly spread knowledge and enlightenment among the masses, both large and small. Because, while religious literature on sciences such as aqeedah, hadith, jurisprudence, and tafsir is mainly circulated among scholars, hagiographic works can attract a large community of readers due to their diversity, artistic appeal, and adaptability to the worldview of people of all classes. At the same time, since works of this type are written in accordance with certain laws and regulations of artistic art and can fully reflect the poetry and prose of their time, as literary works, they can also gather a large community of researchers, regardless of religion and race. Because a person who reads such books not only gains knowledge about the prophets, but also becomes aware of the specific features of the literature of the past and the social, political, economic and spiritual life of the era in which the work was written. As Likhachev said, "no written monument exists in isolation. It is a social phenomenon." As proof of this, if we turn to Rabguzi's work again, "the teachings of the monument encouraging people to behave correctly towards each other, not to oppress each other, not to shed blood unjustly, not to indulge in forbidden deeds, not to lose their sense of shame and dignity have not lost their essence even today: "... Gather together in the religion of Islam, judge among the people, do not commit violence, do not commit adultery, do not shed blood, do not betray." Therefore, hagiographic works also had the task of promoting the exemplary lives of the prophets to the public and to unite with them and not deviate from the true path. It follows that the creator who wanted to write a work in the direction of hagiography must have mastered dozens of knowledge perfectly. Below are the types of knowledge that have become the crown jewels of Turkish literature. Let's take the example of the work "Qisasul Rabghuzi" as an example:

1. The Quran. A writer who wants to cover the stories of the prophets must be fully aware of the verses of the Quran. As a result of research, we have witnessed that Rabghuzi referred to the verses of the Quran a total of 859 times in his work "Qisasul anbiya". In the na'at section of the work alone, the attributes of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) are expressed in 24 verses. The verses cited in these naats are various verses from different surahs of the Quran, and it is impossible for a person who is not a reader and does not know the science of the Quran and tafsir well to quote these verses. It is also impossible to imagine other books of "Qisas" and "Sirat" without quoting from the Quran.
2. Dictionary. That is, the author who is writing a hagiographic work must be well-versed in the Arabic language. Because the basis of the stories consists of Quranic verses and hadiths in Arabic, it is impossible for the creator who quotes from it to interpret the information without knowing this language and its features. In "Qisas Rabguziy", one can also find many pieces of information written in Arabic and then their meanings

explained in Turkish. For example, on page 5 of the British edition of the work, under the title "Al-Qawlu Fil Malaikati Wal Jinn Wal Ins", this hadith al-qudsi is first quoted in Arabic, followed by its commentary in Turkish:

إني أعلم أن عبادتكم مشوب بالعجب إذ قلتم نحن وفسادهم المشوب بالعذر و الفساد بالعذر أحب إلي من العبادة مع العجب

The meaning of this is, - the author comments on this holy hadith, - "your worship is based on obligation, and you have corrected yourself by saying "Nahnu". But the corruption of the sons of Adam is based on excuses. Corruption based on excuses is dearer to Me than worship based on obligation." In some places, on the contrary, the meaning of the verses is first given, followed by their Arabic form: "If you are a wordsmith, tell me what the names of these things are."

فَقَالَ أَنبِيُّنِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

3. History. A creator who intends to create a "general hagiographic work" in the field of hagiography must be aware of human history and ancient books written on this subject. Because hagiographic sources are notable for reflecting historical truths.

For example, in the story of Zulqarnain, Rabguzi says that Zulqarnain built a fortress in Constantinople, and even includes a picture of the fortress.



Picture 1. The fortress of Zulqarnain described by Rabguzi. "Qisas Rabguzi" 15th century. British copy

"Aymishlar, Zulqarnayn olam ichinda obodliq telim qildi, binolar qo'pordi. Yetti yo'li o'vrulmaguncha anga kirsang bo'lmas. Ul qal'aning surati bu turur. Hiyor Qustantaniya bu turur".

There are many examples of this from "Qisas Rabguzi" or other similar hagiographic books. Also, almost all of the authors who wrote such works used historical sources as a basis for writing their books and acknowledged this. For example, Rabguzi used the Quran, Abu Ishaq Nishapuri's Persian "Qisas ul-anbiya", and Wahb ibn Munabbih's Arabic "Ka'b ul-akhbar" in his work. Or, as an example, Hafiz ibn Kathir ad-Dimashqi used Ibn Ishaq Madani's biography book in writing his work "As-Siratun Nabawiyya".

4. Tafsir. Being aware of the science of tafsir and books on this subject ensures that the basis of the hagiographic work being written is solid and the scientific value is high. If we turn to "Qisas Rabghuzi", the author proves in the work itself, in the praise section, how profound a scholar of interpretation he is. We are not referring to the clear and unambiguous comments written on the verses in the work, but to the precise hints and omissions in the words. For example, at the beginning of the praise section, the author says: "Countless praises and endless tongues have been sung, and the power of the Almighty, the Glorious and Exalted, created us human beings and did not create a year. Qavluhu taolo:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

Indeed, We have honored the son of man.

Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) said that the dignity of mankind is that they are different from animals in that they can speak, understand, acquire knowledge, eat with their hands, are upright in stature, and are beautiful in appearance. That is, in almost

all books of tafsir, the qualities that make mankind noble and honorable are mentioned in comparison to animals in the commentary of this verse. It follows that the author, who is well versed in the science of tafsir, refers to this and says that he created humans and not horses.

5. Hadith. When we carefully study the works written in the fields of "Qissa" and "Siya", we see that the creators used the hadiths of Muhammad (peace be upon him) effectively in covering events. At this point, if we look again at Rabguzi's "Qisasul anbiya", we will witness that the author referred to the qudsiy and nabaviy hadiths in about fifty places in his work. In the work "Reliable News from the Story of the Prophets", one of the notable biography books written in the later period and attributed to the pen of Ibrahim Muhammad Ali, the author also based it on the most reliable hadiths about the lives of the messengers and prophets. It can be seen that in other works that emerged in Muslim hagiography, one can also see that hadiths are referred to in many places. After all, the creative process in this field requires this [15].
6. Doctrinal and jurisprudential sciences. As mentioned above, the verses of the Quran play an important role in the hagiographic sources of the Muslim world. The verses are not devoid of doctrinal and jurisprudential rulings. The writer who wrote them down must be careful when encountering verses of faith and rulings. Views on these sciences are not found in all hagiographic sources. However, in Rabghuzi's "Qisasul anbiya", the author showed that he was sufficiently endowed with both of these sciences. For example, in the chapter "Qissasi Meraj Nabiyy alayhis salam", while providing detailed information about Isra and Meraj, under the "Issue" column, he stated that a person who denies the event of Isra that happened to Muhammad alayhis salam is a disbeliever:

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى

Glory be to Him who made His servant travel by night from Al-Masjid Al-Haram to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa.

“Kim Rasul alayhissalom merojing’a Makkadan Baytul Muqaddasg’a bir tun ichina bormishiga munkar bo’lsa kofir bo’lur, yana Baytul Muqaddasdin Qob qovsayn osharig’a munkar bo’lsa mubtadi’ yo’lsuz, havodor bo’lur”. In religious sources on the science of faith, the story of Isra is mentioned among the deeds that are obligatory to believe in because it is proven by a verse. The author, in the process of writing the work, has also placed special emphasis on such doctrinal issues in order to serve as a reminder for those who read it. (It is also necessary to write what different schools of thought said!)

It can also be seen that the author has placed emphasis on an important jurisprudential issue in his commentary on the following verse:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَى مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنْ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ

“Alloh mo’minlardan jonlari va mollarini jannat evaziga sotib olgan”.

“Odamni ujmohg’a kiyurdi, ul kun Odam o’g’lonlari Odamning o’ngurqasinda erdi. Ujmohg’a kiyurmakda hikmat ul erdi: tengri azza va jalla azalda hukm qilmish erdiki, mo’minlarning tanini, molini sotg’in olib ujmoh bergusini ko’rilmagan narsani bay’ qilmoq shariatda ravo bo’lmaz teb ujmohg’a kiyurdilar. Yana dallol ni kelturdilar. Ujmohni ko’rguzdi bay’ va ittifoq durust bo’lsun teb”.

Modern commentators say that the word "bought" is used figuratively. Rabghuzi, on the other hand, takes this word literally and supports his opinion with jurisprudential evidence. That is, in Muslim law, there is no trading in something that cannot be seen with the eyes. As mentioned, the author interprets the verse as meaning that Allah bought the souls of the believers after they saw Paradise and agreed to give their lives in exchange for it. In fact, the author mentions in the introduction to "Qisas Rabguzi" that he is the judge of a place called Rabato'guz, which shows that this work is not devoid of many jurisprudential rulings.

7. Logic. Logic is the basis of all sciences, especially the tool of creative people. Because, through logical thinking, a person reforms his inner views. After all, the main reason

why reliable sources can "live" for centuries is that they comply with logical rules. Logical views and reasonable conclusions are of great importance in hagiographic sources. If we look again at "Qisas Rabguziy", the author's reasonable and thought-provoking logical views, which justify themselves in terms of truth and metaphor, written under the headings "Hikmati digar", "Nukta", "Foydali digar", "Foyda", further increased the scientific value of the work [16]. For example, in the story "Adam safiyyullah", it is mentioned that Adam, peace be upon him, used to sacrifice every year. If the sacrifice was accepted, fire would come from the sky and burn the sacrifice, but if it was not accepted, it would not burn it. In the Sharia of Muhammad, peace be upon him, it was made permissible to eat the sacrifice. The creator concludes from this as follows:

"Foydali digar. Bu kun bu dunyoda mo'minning qurboni kuyurmakni harom qildi. Yo rab, uqboda mo'minning tanini tamug' o'tig'a harom qilsa hech ajab va g'arib bo'lmag'ay..."

Fiction and poetry. Finally, we will talk about the knowledge that makes the creator create a work of art and makes it well-received by intellectuals and readers. If every historian and literary scholar does not know the genres of fiction such as short stories, stories, ghazals, anecdotes, narratives, quatrains, and wisdom, his work will be lost in the depths of centuries. As researcher J. Saidolimov said: "Hagiographic works are doomed to extinction if they are not related to faith and do not express artistry in themselves." "Examples of art, imbued with the spirit of high artistry, always survive the whirlwind of years and centuries; they always attract the attention of the reader and continue on the path to immortality..."

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be said that in Eastern literature, hagiographic works are represented through various genres. In particular, Eastern hagiography has been represented through genres such as siyara, tabaqat, holat, manolib, tazkira, risola, shajara, tarikh, raviyat, shar'at, alatifa, hikmat, khabar, fulf, munajat. Although Eastern hagiography has been divided into such various genres, it has not lost its original essence and has been able to find its researchers and readers in all eras. As Professor I. Ostanakulov said, regardless of the genre in which hagiographic sources are covered, they continue to perform "the function of admonition in society".

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