



Article

## Fris Wörtle and His Work “Babur – The Tiger”

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**Abstract:** This article studies the work of one of the representatives of modern Western literature, Fries Wörtle, entitled “Babur – The Tiger”, from a scientific-theoretical and literary-analytical perspective. The work analyzes the artistic interpretation of the personality of the great statesman and commander Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, the features of his reflection in Western literature as a historical figure. The author's coverage of the image of Babur as a symbol of courage, leadership, political wisdom and cultural heritage is the main focus of attention. The article analyzes Fries Wörtle's approach to the historical-biographical genre, the harmony of fact and artistic texture, as well as the method of relying on Western and Eastern historical sources. In “Babur – The Tiger”, the reinterpretation of Babur's personality for the modern reader, the coverage of his life and activities from the point of view of universal values, is based on important scientific conclusions. The article also focuses on the role of the image of Babur in world literature and its reception in Western literary thought. The results of this study have theoretical and practical significance for the fields of Babur studies, comparative literature, and the study of historical and biographical works, and can be a useful resource for students and researchers.

**Keywords:** Fris Wörtle, *Babur – The Tiger*, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Historical Biography, Literary Interpretation, Western Historiography, Babur Image, Central Asian History, Mughal Empire

**Citation:** Nigmatullaevich K. I., Akhtamovich R. S. Fris Wörtle and His Work “Babur – The Tiger”. Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy, and Culture 2026, 7(1), 304-311.

Received: 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 2025

Revised: 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2025

Accepted: 20<sup>th</sup> Jan 2026

Published: 31<sup>st</sup> Jan 2026



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### 1. Introduction

The global community of Orientalists, historians, literary scholars, as well as representatives of the creative intelligentsia, demonstrates a strong interest in and profound respect for the life and creative heritage of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur. A considerable number of biographical, historical, and literary works have been devoted to the ruler and poet. Among the scholars who have contributed to this field is the Orientalist researcher and writer Fris Wörtle, who pioneered Babur-related studies in German literature[1].

This naturally raises the question: what circumstances or motivations prompted the German writer to turn to the biography of Babur? As literary scholar A. Rasulov rightly notes, “there exists an organic connection between the writer's life experience and his creative work” [2]. Consequently, an examination of the biography of F. Wörtle and an analysis of his work “Andijan Prince” based on the biographical method make it possible to identify and gain a deeper understanding of this interrelationship[3].

## 2. Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on a combination of traditional philological and literary-critical approaches, which make it possible to examine the work not merely in a formal manner but within a living cultural and historical context. Central to the analysis is the biographical method, through which the personality of Fris Wörtle, as well as the specific features of his scholarly interests and spiritual experience that influenced his engagement with the image of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, are examined. Alongside this, a comparative analysis is employed: the content of the novella "Babur - The Tiger" is compared with the facts presented in Baburnama, Tarikh-i Rashidi, and the works of European Orientalists[4]. This approach makes it possible to delineate the boundaries between historical accuracy and artistic fiction, as well as to understand the author's interpretation of events and characters. In addition, a genre-stylistic analysis is applied, aimed at identifying the intended readership of the work and the role of artistic details in shaping the image of Babur. Taken together, these methods ensure a holistic and interpretatively rich understanding of Wörtle's novella[5].

## 3. Results and Discussion

Fris Wörtle (Wörtle Fric) was a German scholar and writer who lived and carried out his creative activities in Austria. To date, only a very limited amount of information has been preserved regarding his life and scholarly legacy. Active during the first half of the twentieth century, Wörtle was primarily engaged in academic research in the fields of art studies, design, cinema, and cultural studies. Among his scholarly works are such studies as "The Return of Venus" and "The Artist and the Model."

In the realm of fiction, only one literary work by the author, written in German, has survived to the present day - "BABUR, DER TIGER" ("Babur - The Tiger"). This adventure narrative was published in 1947 in Vienna, the capital of Austria, by the publishing house S. Jörgl & Co. During the years of independence, the work was rediscovered through the efforts of the International Babur Foundation, translated from German by the scholar and translator Yanglish Egamova, and published in 2011 in the Uzbek language under the title "Andijan Prince." The original copy of the work is currently preserved in the museum of the International Babur Foundation in Andijan[6].

A close reading of the work makes it clear that, prior to commencing the writing process, the author thoroughly examined the life and career of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, as well as his memoir Baburnama. Wörtle demonstrated a substantial knowledge of the historical period in which Babur lived, including the socio-geographical context and the economic and political conditions of Mawarannahr. In particular, in the introductory section of the novella the author provides the following information: "The protagonist of this work is the young Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, who lived and ruled in the sixteenth century. At the age of eleven, he became the ruler of Fergana. He founded a dynasty that ruled India for a long period of time. Babur recorded the events of his life in a book written in his native Turkic-Chagatai language. This book is called Baburnama, and the present novella is based on it" [7].

It is evident that the primary source forming the foundation of the novella is Babur's memoir Baburnama. However, it would be incorrect to claim that the author relied solely on this source in composing the work, as a number of episodes include scenes whose presence indicates Wörtle's use of other historical materials that shed light on the period in question. In particular, this concerns scenes depicting Babur's life prior to his accession to the throne, his educational formation, and various aspects of the everyday life of the population[8].

The novella "Andijan Prince" consists of twenty chapters, including "The Iron Stake in the Heavens," "Karavanbashi," "Punishment," "The Death of Umarshaykh Mirza," "The Will of Allah," and others. The work portrays the danger-filled life of a twelve-year-

old prince that began after his father's death, describes the political situation in Mawarannahr and Khorasan at the end of the fifteenth century, the struggle for the throne, and the trials faced by Babur amid loyalty and betrayal. The author evaluates these events through the lens of his own artistic imagination, thematic awareness, and life experience. In literary works devoted to the lives of historical figures, authors inevitably interpret historical processes, past events, as well as the actions and personal qualities of characters in accordance with their own worldview[9].

In particular, as literary scholar N. Akhmedov emphasizes, "in fiction, as in other forms of art, the human being is depicted in his material and spiritual existence. Consequently, in the process of artistic exploration of the integral essence of the human being, the creator chooses one of two paths developed through centuries of artistic experience. The first path offers the author broad possibilities for artistic imagination: in this case, the image of the hero is created within the limits of the author's talent, knowledge, and experience and is a product of artistic fiction. The second path is characterized by narrower but clearly defined boundaries and arises when turning to the life and activity of historical figures" [10].

Consequently, the portrayal of Babur's personality in the novella "Andijan Prince", as well as his responses to life's challenges, represents not merely a reproduction of a literary prototype already established in earlier works, but rather the outcome of F. Wörtle's worldview and artistic imagination, reflecting his personal interpretation of Babur's biography.

This adventure novella fundamentally differs from other Western literary works devoted to the same theme. In particular, in accordance with the genre's narrative possibilities, the author does not encompass Babur's entire life and creative career, but focuses only on the initial stage of his rule - the period from 1494 to 1496, beginning with his accession to the throne. Furthermore, the image of Babur presented in this work differs significantly from his representations in Uzbek literature, where he is traditionally portrayed as a statesman and poet. According to the People's Poet of Uzbekistan, Sirojiddin Sayyid, "regardless of who the author is and how thoroughly he has studied historical sources, he nevertheless remains a representative of the West; Eastern traditions, norms of conduct, as well as the elevated moral environment in which the young Babur was raised and educated, remain alien to him" [11].

For this very reason, the inner world of Babur, his behavior, and the nature of his relationships with those around him in the novella create the impression of a European nobleman endowed with the traits of a refined knight. Another characteristic feature of the work, as noted by some researchers, is that "F. Wörtle created his work within the framework of children's literature, oriented toward a young readership" [12]. Indeed, the novella emphasizes the depiction of how an eleven- to twelve-year-old adolescent suddenly assumes a heavy burden of responsibility, unites the people and the army in the face of the enemy, and demonstrates exceptional perseverance and courage, without retreating a single step from his intended goal.

The novella begins with a brief yet highly expressive preface in which, on behalf of the publishing house, F. Wörtle's personal views on the image of Babur are presented: "This tiger is a hero whose image awakens ardent inspiration in the hearts of the young. His destiny is extraordinary and filled with drama... The author has transcended the limits of a simple narrative for young readers and has created a rare work that young people read with undiminished interest" [13].

At the same time, the image of Babur in the novella is presented in a distinctive interpretation and differs in character from his artistic representations in both Eastern and Western literature devoted to this theme. As has rightly been noted, "any personality, even the most exemplary one, when introduced into a literary work, inevitably undergoes authorial transformation: certain features are added to the image, while some biographical

facts are omitted. As a result, a real historical figure is transformed into a literary hero" [14].

The author endows the medieval Eastern ruler with traits that are, to a certain extent, characteristic of European chivalry of that era. In particular, in the course of the narrative the young Babur is portrayed as somewhat coarse, abrupt in manner, and inclined toward familiarity: he addresses those around him—both elders and juniors, including his mentors—using informal forms of address, actively employs Western colloquial expressions in his speech, and displays a straightforward, at times even harsh, character. At the beginning of the narrative, the young Zahiriddin is presented as a student with limited interest in learning, somewhat frivolous, experiencing difficulty in reading Persian, compelled to study under the threat of punishment from his mentor Mirzo Ulloh, and at the same time allowing himself to give his elderly teacher the nickname "Baqaloq La'1". In the opening chapters, he is even depicted as an indifferent adolescent, unaware of his exact age and showing little concern for the condition of the people, despite his status as the heir to the throne.

Naturally, such an interpretation reflects the authorial position of F. Wörtle. Moreover, this artistic treatment is grounded in a certain life-based rationale and is presented in harmony with the European cultural context. At the same time, in the Uzbek translation of the work produced by Ya. Egamova, a noticeable tendency toward softening the characters' speech characteristics can be observed: informal forms of address are replaced by the polite form "you," and Western euphemisms in the dialogues are, where possible, adapted in accordance with the norms of Eastern speech culture.

In this regard, a legitimate question arises: did such a perception of Babur's personality and character exist in Western literary scholarship? However, European Orientalists—contemporaries of F. Wörtle—offered exceptionally high assessments of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, emphasizing his education, refinement, and spiritual maturity. Thus, the English historian S. Lane-Poole referred to Babur as "one of the most charming personalities in the history of the East" [15]. One of the first translators of Baburnama into English, the Orientalist W. Erskine, characterized the ruler and poet as follows: "Among rulers, one rarely encounters a personality as brilliant and gifted as Babur. In terms of wisdom, talent, courage, and generosity, as well as his ability to patronize science and the arts and to skillfully employ their achievements, it is difficult to find his equal". In turn, Harold Lamb, describing the years of Babur's education, noted that he "was exceptionally quick-witted and possessed an outstanding memory, surpassing his peers and often placing even demanding mentors in a difficult position; in addition to his native Turkic language, he was fluent in Persian, and in the course of his studies he also mastered Arabic—the language of scholars and theologians".

As the plot develops, F. Wörtle, who was well acquainted with Babur's personality and character, increasingly emphasizes such qualities as his good upbringing, courage, fidelity to his father's guidance, concern for the people, and readiness despite his young age to fight bravely for the peace and well-being of his homeland. After his father's death and the assumption of responsibility for governing the state, the young Zahiriddin appears in an entirely different capacity as a new hero who differs significantly from the image presented in the novella's prologue. Thus, a fundamental transformation occurs in the character of the protagonist, and the author quite justifiably carries out this artistic reconfiguration. As has been noted, "a writer who, through artistic imagination, succeeds in revealing the essence of life and convincing the reader by the mastery of representation proves to be more truthful than one who confines himself to incidental and isolated facts superficially borrowed from reality".

At the same time, the author does not confine himself in the novella to the use of artistic fiction alone, but seeks to provide it with a certain justification. In particular, the young prince's cold attitude toward learning in the work is motivated by the fact that his

mentors subject him to corporal punishment on an equal footing with other pupils, publicly and in front of the entire class. Wörtle explains the depiction of such a scene as follows: "The son of a ruler and the son of a craftsman must be punished in the same way. Such is the verdict of justice; since the time of Umarshaykh Mirza's rule, this has been the custom in the Fergana Valley, and it should be so in all countries of the world".

From this perspective, the image of Babur created by F. Wörtle in his artistic interpretations evokes in the reader a sense of respect for the personality of the ruler and poet. Thus, the author portrays Babur as a devoted son who follows his father's precepts, set forth in the letter from Umarshaykh Mirza to his son quoted in the novella: "If anything should happen to me, always remember this: one who wishes to build a house capable of withstanding the test of time must lay the bricks properly and must not mix the mortar with the tears of the oppressed people. Remember the words spoken in our Sacred Book: Allah did not create the earth and the heavens for amusement. Always heed the advice of experienced and wise people, and do not reject it out of frivolity". In accordance with this admonition, Babur is presented as a character guided by moral principles and a sense of responsibility toward his people. Throughout the narrative, the author introduces an image that serves as a spiritual guide for the protagonist and endows him with inner strength—the star "Temir Kozik" (the North Star). Even when deprived of paternal support and placed in difficult circumstances as a result of betrayal by those around him, Babur does not deviate from the path indicated by this star, following it steadfastly and moving resolutely toward his goal. Through this artistic detail, the author seeks to emphasize the idea that in every person's life there must exist a clear moral compass leading toward goodness. As F. Wörtle himself expresses it: "O Lord, grant us a Temir Kozik in the desert of life, so that we may not lose our way. The roads of life are no easier than the paths of the desert, and a person easily loses direction in the darkness".

Turning to the biographical details of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur as presented in the novella "Andijan Prince," it should be noted that in its introductory section the author states that the young ruler ascended the throne at the age of eleven. Meanwhile, in the preface to Baburnama, Babur himself writes: "In the Fergana region, I became a ruler at the age of twelve". This statement has served as a point of departure for the majority of historical and literary works about the ruler and poet produced both in the East and in the West. However, F. Wörtle's indication of the age "eleven" should not be regarded as an error, but rather as the result of a mathematical comparison between the year of Babur's birth and the year of his accession to the throne (1494–1483 = 11). It should also be noted that a number of studies in Uzbek Babur studies likewise contain the assertion that "the eleven-year-old Zahiriddin Muhammad became the ruler of the Fergana region as his father's heir".

In another episode of the novella, Qasymbek—who in reality was still relatively young at the time of Babur's accession to the throne—is portrayed as an elderly, visually impaired bek. Throughout the narrative, he remains constantly at Babur's side, fulfilling the role of a mentor and a paternal guardian. In the final part of the work, Qasymbek, in accordance with his will, is laid to rest at the foot of the stone minaret being erected for Umarshaykh Mirza and, even after death, demonstrates his devotion to the Timurid house by uttering the following words: "Place me together with the stone at the foundation of the eternal tower of love; it will rest upon my chest, and with my whole body I shall turn into stone, so that I may serve this stone tower forever".

Particular attention in the work is given to the depiction of the death of Babur's father, Umarshaykh Mirza. In modern historiography, as well as in Baburnama and in the majority of literary works devoted to this subject, his death is interpreted as an accident. Thus, Zahiriddin Muhammad recalls in his memoirs: "The fortress of Akhsı stood on a high cliff... on the fourth day of the month of Ramadan, Umarshaykh Mirza, soaring together with the dovecote like a falcon, fell down" [14]. A similar version is also confirmed

by the sixteenth-century historian Mirza Muhammad Haydar in his work *Tarikh-i Rashidi*. One of the earliest Western scholars to study Babur's biography—the nineteenth-century Orientalist W. Erskine—also adheres to this interpretation, noting that "Sultan Umarshaykh Mirza, who ruled for approximately twenty-six years, died in Akhsı at the age of thirty-seven to thirty-eight after falling together with his beloved dovecote into the riverbed".

Meanwhile, in F. Wörtle's novella this historically established fact receives a different artistic interpretation: the death of Umarshaykh Mirza is presented as a deliberate murder. In the chapter entitled "The White Dove," the partially blind Qasymbek, portrayed under the nickname "Biyino Basir," declares after examining the destroyed dovecote: "A terrible crime has taken place here: some traitor-devil has treacherously murdered our ruler". According to the author's version, the death of Umarshaykh ibn Abu Sa'id Mirza was not an accident but the result of a conspiracy by traitors seeking to ingratiate themselves with Shaybanikhan; in particular, the plot was led by conspirators headed by the bek of the Akhsı fortress. According to the perpetrators' plan, the beams of the dovecote were deliberately sawn through in advance, as a result of which the structure collapsed and Umarshaykh Mirza fell victim to betrayal.

The attribution of a fictionalized character to this historical situation serves an important compositional purpose in Wörtle's work: to intensify the atmosphere of anxiety during the early years of Babur's reign, to establish the narrative conflict, and to arouse the reader's heightened interest in the subsequent fate of the young ruler.

Nevertheless, the author does not confine himself solely to the use of artistic fiction but also seeks to provide it with a rationale. In particular, the young prince's cold attitude toward learning in the novella is explained by the fact that his mentors subject him to corporal punishment publicly, on an equal basis with other pupils. Wörtle himself comments on the depiction of such a scene as follows: "Both the son of a padishah and the son of a craftsman must be punished in the same way. Such is the verdict of justice. Since the time of Umarshaykh Mirza's rule, this has been the custom in the Fergana Valley, and it should be so in all countries of the world."

It is precisely in this respect that the image of Babur created by F. Wörtle in his artistic interpretations evokes the reader's respect for the ruler and poet. In particular, the author portrays Babur as a son faithful to his father's precepts, drawing on the letter from Umarshaykh Mirza to his heir quoted in the novella: "If anything should happen to me, always remember this: one who wishes to build a house capable of withstanding the test of time must lay the bricks properly and must not mix the mortar with the tears of the oppressed people. Remember the words written in our Sacred Book: Allah did not create the earth and the heavens for amusement. Always heed the advice of experienced and wise people, and do not act frivolously by neglecting it."

In the novella, Kasymbek's age is also distorted: in reality he was a comparatively young man, yet he is portrayed as an aged bey whose eyesight has weakened. He accompanies Babur until the end of the narrative, fulfilling the role of mentor and spiritual guardian. In the final episode of the work, Kasymbek, in accordance with his testament, is buried beside the stone minaret erected for Umar Shaykh Mirza, thereby demonstrating his loyalty to the Timurid house even after death.

One of the significant features distinguishing The Andijan Prince from other Western literary works devoted to Babur is that the author's primary focus is placed on the protagonist's courage and his qualities as a skilled military commander and popular leader, whereas his creative activity, spiritual legacy, and lyrical and epic works are virtually left unaddressed. This can be explained by the fact that F. Würtele's principal aim in composing this work was not to depict an Eastern poet and master of the word, but rather to construct the image of a courageous leader capable of ensuring the well-being of

his people through just governance and social cohesion—an image that was particularly relevant for a Western society exhausted by wars.

The German writer Fris Würtle, who lived and worked in distant Austria, in his adventure novel *The Andijan Prince* exalts the personality of our great ancestor Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur precisely through the prism of these universal human qualities, presenting his life path as an exemplar for the Western reader. As Würtle himself notes in characterizing Babur: “In reality, patience, willpower, and endurance alone are not sufficient to achieve victory. One who seeks to gain mastery over people and the world must be prepared to sacrifice his own life. And one who aspires to rule the destinies of others has no right to place a high value on his own life. Thus it has been in all ages. And a boy by the name of Zahir al-Din Muhammad followed this law”.

#### 4. Conclusion

Thus, an analysis of F. Würtle’s novella *The Andijan Prince* from the standpoint of the biographical approach allows the following conclusions to be drawn:

First, Fris Würtle is among the earliest authors in German Oriental studies to introduce the figure of Babur into fictional literature.

Second, since *The Andijan Prince* is primarily intended for a juvenile audience, the author deliberately places emphasis not on Babur’s poetic talent or his greatness as a statesman, but rather on constructing the image of a courageous hero capable of overcoming any life challenges with patience and fortitude.

Third, in presenting Babur’s biography in this novella, the fictional element clearly predominates over historical accuracy, as a result of which a substantial portion of the plot interpretations constitutes a product of the author’s imaginative invention.

Fourth, the image of the young Babur—able to endure the most severe trials with patience, to move forward unwaveringly, and even to seek reconciliation with a long-standing enemy for the sake of preserving peace—is presented by the author as a moral benchmark for the West in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, as well as for German society, which had itself passed through profound historical ordeals.

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