



Article

A Comparative Analysis of the Image Of Ulugbek in Tazkiras and Historical Works

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Abstract: This article examines various aspects of the image of Mirzo Ulugh Beg, an outstanding scholar and statesman of the Timurid period, as reflected in tazkiras and historical works. Particular attention is paid to the representations of Ulugh Beg found in "Majolis un-nafois" by Alisher Navoi and "Tazkirat ush-shuaro" by Davlatshah Samarqandi, as well as to the information presented in the works of such historians as Khwandamir, Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi. The study demonstrates that these sources present Ulugh Beg from different methodological perspectives. In tazkira literature, he is primarily portrayed as a patron of science and culture, whereas in historical works he appears as a political figure actively involved in the socio-political processes of his time.

Keywords: Ulugh Beg, Timurid period, Tazkirat al-shu'ara, Majalis al-Nafais, tazkiras, historical sources, historiography, patron of science and culture, comparative analysis.

1. Introduction

The Timuriys period occupies a distinctive place in the history of Central Asia as an era marked by remarkable achievements in science and culture. Among the most prominent figures of this period was Mirzo Ulugh Beg, an eminent statesman, ruler, and scholar who made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of scientific knowledge. During his reign, Samarkand emerged as a major center of learning, where disciplines such as astronomy, mathematics, history, and literature flourished [1, 2].

The personality and achievements of Ulugh Beg have been extensively reflected in numerous historical and literary sources. Among these, biographical anthologies (tazkiras) and historical chronicles hold particular significance. The tazkira genre traditionally provides biographical accounts of literary figures and their intellectual activities while also offering valuable insights into the cultural environment of a given period. Historical works, in contrast, primarily focus on political events, state administration, and the broader socio-political developments of their time [3, 4].

The primary objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the literary representations of Ulugh Beg in tazkira literature and historical sources, examining his portrayal both as a historical personality and as a distinguished scholar and intellectual [5, 6].

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies on Mirzo Ulugh'bek have been conducted to date. Scholarly interest in his scientific legacy dates back to the seventeenth century, with early research

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primarily focused on examining and elucidating his contributions to science. Among foreign scholars who made significant contributions to the study of Ulugh Beg are John Greaves, Thomas Hyde, Francis Baily, Lorenzo Sédillot, Vasily Bartold, Vasily Vyatkin, and Edward Knobel. In Uzbek scholarship, the study of Ulugh Beg's intellectual and scientific heritage has been notably advanced by scholars such as Toshmuhammad Niyozov Qoriniyoziy, G'ulom Jalolov, Bo'riboy Ahmedov, Abdulla Ashrapov, and M. Abdullayeva. These studies have examined various aspects of Ulugh Beg's scholarly and creative activities from different perspectives [7].

In particular, N. Jabborov has emphasized the importance of investigating Alisher Navoi's attitude toward Mirzo Ulugh Beg. According to the scholar: "Although a number of studies have been devoted to Alisher Navoi and the literature of the Timurid period, this scholarly issue has not yet been comprehensively explored. Valuable information concerning Mirzo Ulugh Beg and the literature of his era can be found in Navoi's *tazkira Majolis un-nafois* as well as in his other works [8]. Systematizing and subjecting these materials to scholarly analysis remains one of the important tasks facing Navoi studies." This observation demonstrates that the study of Mirzo Ulug'bek and the literary heritage of his period continues to retain its scholarly relevance and significance across different generations of researchers [9].

3. Methodology

The portrayal of Mirzo Ulug'bek in *tazkira* (literary-biographical) works and historical sources reveals notable differences in emphasis and interpretation. In most cases, these sources primarily highlight his role as a patron of science and a scholar-ruler, whereas his political career and tragic fate are often either omitted or presented in a symbolic manner.

This study comparatively examines two major sources containing information about Mirzo Ulug'bek: *Tazkirat ush-shuaro* by Dawlatshah Samarqandi and the historical chronicle *Matla' us-sa'dayn va majma' ul-bahrayn* by Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi.

In *Tazkirat ush-shuaro* ("Memoirs of Poets"), the work that brought fame to Dawlatshah Samarqandi and provides accounts of more than 150 poets and scholars, several references to Mirzo Ulug'bek can be found. The *tazkira* presents Ulug'bek as an idealized "scholar-king," emphasizing his intellectual excellence, justice, and generosity. Dawlatshah describes him as a ruler who attained extraordinary heights in astronomy and the sciences while promoting the status of scholars and intellectuals during his reign. The author also highlights Ulug'bek's achievements in mathematics and astronomy, particularly his establishment of the Samarkand Observatory and his completion of the celebrated *Zij-i Sultani* after the deaths of Qadi-zada al-Rumi and Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid al-Kashi. According to Dawlatshah, the astronomical tables compiled under Ulug'bek's supervision were regarded by some scholars as even superior to the *Zij-i Ilkhani*. He further praises the magnificent madrasa built by Ulug'bek in Samarkand and commends his just administration of Transoxiana for nearly forty years.

These observations constitute one of the highest assessments of Mirzo Ulug'bek found in medieval literature. Expressions such as "he rose as high as the heavens in the science of the stars" emphasize his profound expertise in astronomy, while descriptions of his intellectual acuity underscore his philosophical insight and scholarly sophistication. The references to the Samarkand Observatory and the *Zij-i Sultani* demonstrate that Ulug'bek was not merely a patron of learning but also an accomplished scientist actively engaged in research. Moreover, Dawlatshah's characterization of him as a ruler who pursued "justice and fairness" portrays Ulug'bek as an ideal sovereign embodying wisdom, justice, and moral integrity.

Historical chronicles, by contrast, present Mirzo Ulug'bek primarily as a leading representative of the Timurid dynasty, the beloved grandson of Amir Timur, and the most learned son of Shah Rukh. These sources devote considerable attention to his lineage, political activities, and contributions to the development of science. Ulug'bek is often depicted as a ruler who sought to preserve political stability within the Timurid realm and who served as an important supporter of Timur's centralized state policy.

In his historical work *Matla' us-sa'dayn va majma' ul-bahrayn*, Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi discusses Ulug'bek's administration of Transoxiana and portrays him as a just ruler who showed great respect for scholars and intellectuals. At the same time, the author notes that, in certain political matters, Ulugh Beg tended to favor compromise and conciliation over military confrontation. The chronicle also provides valuable information regarding Ulug'bek's distinguished position among the sons of Shah Rukh, his passion for learning, the scholarly atmosphere of his court, the political circumstances of the Timurid state, and his relationship with his father. Through highly laudatory language, Abd al-Razzaq depicts Ulug'bek as a prince whose wisdom and enlightened vision contributed significantly to the prosperity and refinement of the realm:

*Agar o'g'il shunday bo'lsa – bu ota
chehrasining quvonchidir,
Agar ota shunday bo'lsa – bu o'g'il
dilining shodligidir."*

This passage sheds light on Mirzo Ulug'bek's political status, spiritual maturity, and relationship with his father, ShahRukh Mirza. The expressions "the pearl of the casket of sovereignty" and "the shining star of the constellation of the caliphate" symbolize Ulugh Beg as the most valuable and honorable figure of the state. He is portrayed as the treasured jewel of the Timurid Empire and the brightest star in the firmament of governance.

The statement, "He is a prince by whose beauty the kingdom attained perfection," emphasizes his contribution to the prosperity and advancement of the realm, while the phrase, "from the radiance of his enlightened thought the entire world acquired beauty," highlights his intellectual breadth, wisdom, and scholarly excellence. Furthermore, the verse at the end of the passage presents Shah Rukh and Ulugh Beg as complementary figures whose virtues and achievements reinforce one another.

Overall, the text reveals several important dimensions of Mirzo Ulugh Beg's character:

- ✓ an enlightened and educated prince;
- ✓ a pillar of the state;
- ✓ a devoted and loyal son;
- ✓ a ruler who illuminated the world through the light of knowledge.

Distinguished from other princes by both his scholarly accomplishments and personal virtues, Mirzo Ulugh Beg occupied a unique place within the Timurid dynasty. The tragic end of his life represented not only a personal misfortune but also a significant loss for the development of science and intellectual culture. Such an outcome deprived the scholarly world of one of its most outstanding patrons and contributors, whose legacy continued to influence scientific thought long after his death.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that tazkira literature and historical chronicles portray the personality of Mirzo Ulug'bek from different perspectives. While tazkira works primarily depict him as an enlightened ruler, distinguished scholar, and patron of learning, historical sources provide a broader account of his personality by

emphasizing his political activities, role in state administration, and complex historical destiny [10].

In historical chronicles, additional dimensions of Ulug'bek's character are revealed. His political leadership, administrative responsibilities, and involvement in the affairs of the Timurid state are discussed in greater detail. In particular, the works of Khwandamir provide extensive information on the political developments within the Timurid dynasty and the challenges of governance. These sources place Ulugh Beg's political career within the broader context of the turbulent historical circumstances of his time, thereby highlighting his significance not only as a scholar but also as a statesman and ruler [11, 12].

A comparative analysis of tazkira and historical sources indicates that representations of Ulug'bek were shaped largely by the authors' objectives and by the generic characteristics of their works. Among the Timurid rulers, Mirzo Ulug'bek stands out as one of the most devoted supporters of scientific advancement. In addition to fulfilling his duties as a ruler, he achieved remarkable accomplishments in astronomy and made important contributions to the history of science [13]. The observatory established in Samarkand became one of the most significant scientific centers of the fifteenth century, and scholarly investigations into its achievements continue to this day. Ulug'bek's scientific legacy, particularly his contributions to astronomy, occupies a distinguished place in the global history of science. His astronomical catalogue, *Zij-i Jadid-i Guragani* (*Zij-i Sultani*), remained an authoritative reference for astronomers over many centuries.

Similarly, in Dawlatshah Samarqandi's *Tazkirat ush-shuaro*, Ulug'bek is portrayed as a ruler deeply committed to the promotion of science and culture. He is described as a just, knowledgeable, and magnanimous sovereign whose achievements in astronomy ("the science of the stars") and mathematics ("the mathematical sciences") elevated him above his contemporaries. The author emphasizes that scientific learning flourished during his reign and that scholars enjoyed unprecedented prestige and recognition [14]. Through the compilation of the *Zij-i Sultani*, Ulug'bek left an enduring mark on the history of science. His madrasa in Samarkand is presented as a prominent intellectual center, while his governance is praised for its adherence to justice, fairness, and sound judgment.

Ulug'bek's collaboration with eminent scholars such as Qadi-zada al-Rumi and Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid al-Kashi further enhanced the intellectual environment of his court. The construction of the observatory and the systematic astronomical observations conducted there represented an exceptionally advanced scientific undertaking for the period. His scientific achievements, particularly the *Zij-i Guragani*, continue to retain their scholarly importance today, demonstrating that Ulugh Beg occupies a significant place not only in the history of Central Asia but also in the broader history of world civilization [15].

Historical chronicles, however, situate Ulug'bek within a wider political and historical framework. These sources provide valuable information concerning his political activities, state administration, and the struggles for power within the Timurid dynasty. For example, in Khwandamir's *Habib al-siyar*, detailed accounts are given of political and military events that occurred during Ulug'bek's reign. The author records that Ulugh Beg dispatched reinforcements to the left wing of the army, contributing to the defeat of the Mongol forces and the subsequent victories of the Timurid troops. Such accounts illustrate Ulug'bek's strategic military leadership and his ability to respond effectively to battlefield challenges.

This evidence demonstrates that Ulug'bek's achievements extended beyond the realms of science and scholarship to include notable successes in military and political affairs. His command abilities and practical experience in warfare reflect the legacy of his grandfather, Amir Timur. Likewise, in the writings of Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, the broader historical panorama of the Timurid era is presented, with Ulugh Beg appearing as one of the dynasty's most prominent representatives.

Overall, historical sources portray Mirzo Ulug'bek as a multifaceted figure whose contributions encompassed both intellectual and political spheres. While he is remembered as an exceptional scholar and patron of science, he also emerges as an active participant in political affairs and a capable ruler who played a significant role in shaping the history of the Timurid state.

5. Conclusion

This study has conducted a comparative analysis of the representation of Mirzo Ulug'bek in tazkira literature and historical sources. The findings reveal that tazkira works predominantly portray Ulug'bek as an enlightened, learned, and intellectually distinguished ruler. In these sources, greater emphasis is placed on his personal virtues, his role in fostering a scholarly environment, and his image as a patron of science and culture. His character is often presented within an idealized literary framework that combines intellectual excellence with moral and aesthetic values.

In contrast, historical chronicles offer a broader and more nuanced portrayal of Ulugh Beg's personality. These sources focus not only on his scholarly achievements but also on his political activities, the complexities of governance, internal dynastic conflicts, and the tragic circumstances of his life. Consequently, historical works depict Ulug'bek not merely as an idealized ruler but as a multifaceted historical figure whose actions and decisions were shaped by the political realities and challenges of his era.

The comparative analysis further demonstrates that the principal distinction between tazkira and historical sources lies in their respective aims and methodologies. Tazkiras generally pursue literary, aesthetic, and didactic objectives, emphasizing exemplary qualities and cultural values. Historical chronicles, on the other hand, seek to reconstruct events with greater factual detail and historical accuracy, thereby presenting a more comprehensive account of political developments and social realities. For this reason, a full understanding of Mirzo Ulug'bek's personality and legacy requires an integrated examination of both types of sources.

Overall, the results of this study provide valuable insights into the diverse ways in which Ulug'bek's image has been constructed across different genres and source traditions. Such an approach contributes to a deeper understanding of his scientific achievements, political career, and enduring place in the intellectual and historical heritage of Central Asia and the wider Islamic world.

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