

THE EARLY APPEARANCE OF TAZKIRAS IN CENTRAL ASIA DURING THE X–XIII CENTURIES

Shamsiyeva Maxbuba Sattorovna

Independent Researcher, Bukhara International University

maxbubashamsiyeva91@gmail.com

Abstract: This article examines the formation and developmental stages of the tazkira tradition as a distinct genre of literary studies in Central Asia during the 10th–13th centuries. The paper analyzes the structure of the earliest biographical works written in Arabic and Persian, as well as the evaluative criteria applied to the lives and creative output of poets and writers in these texts. In the course of the research, rare sources such as Abu Mansur al-Tha‘ālibī’s *Yatīmat al-dahr* and Muhammad ‘Awfī’s *Lubāb al-albāb* are studied, and their influence on subsequent Uzbek and Persian literary historiography is elucidated. The article reveals the significance of these works not only as literary sources, but also as important historical documents reflecting the socio-cultural life of their time.

Keywords: tazkira, Central Asia, Eastern Renaissance, Abu Mansur al-Tha‘ālibī, Muhammad ‘Awfī, biographical work, Islamic culture, philological tradition, *Yatīmat al-dahr*, *Lubāb al-albāb*.

Аннотация: В данной статье исследуются формирование и этапы развития традиции tazkira как своеобразного жанра литературоведения на территории Средней Азии в X–XIII веках. В ходе исследования изучены такие редкие источники, как «Ятīмат ад-дахр» Абу Мансура ас-Саолибия и «Лубаб ал-албаб» Мухаммада Авфи.

Ключевые слова: tazkira, Средняя Азия, Восточный Ренессанс, Абу Мансур ас-Саолиби, Мухаммад Авфи, биографическое произведение, исламская культура.

INTRODUCTION

The X–XIII centuries represent a period of profound advancement in science, thought, and culture in the history of Central Asia. This process laid the foundation for the formation of biographical genres, particularly the traditions of biographical anthologizing

(anthology-writing) in literary studies. Uzbekistan's independence has provided an opportunity to re-evaluate the national cultural heritage and study historical sources based on an objective approach, which necessitates a new interpretation of the scientific significance of biographical sources such as tazkiras. This article analyzes the initial manifestations of tazkira writing that emerged in the Arabic and Persian languages within Central Asia during the X–XIII centuries, the factors of their formation, and their influence on the subsequent historiography of Uzbek and Persian literature. Abu Mansur al-Tha'alibi's "Yatimat ad-dahr fi mahasin ahl al-asr" and Muhammad Afi's "Lubab ul-albab", along with the historical-literary environment associated with them, are studied as the objects of research. The main objective of the article is to demonstrate the role of tazkiras as philological and historical sources, as well as to highlight their connection with the socio-cultural processes during the Eastern Renaissance.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed historical-comparative, source-study, and philological analysis methods. First, the texts of al-Tha'alibi and Afi's works, their structural organization, biographical information about poets and writers, and evaluation criteria were internally analyzed. Furthermore, a comparative method was applied using modern literary and Oriental studies research regarding these tazkiras, alongside historical developments in science and culture in Central Asia during the IX–XIII centuries. Existing data on the influence of the political-cultural environments of the Samanid, Ghaznavid, Seljuk, and Khwarazmian states on tazkira writing were synthesized, and the tazkiras were interpreted within this historical context. As a methodological approach, the function of tazkiras was considered not only as literary-biographical sources but also as historical documents reflecting the socio-cultural life of the period.

RESULTS

The research results indicate that the earliest examples of tazkira writing in Central Asia during the X–XIII centuries were primarily created in Arabic and Persian, often taking the form of poetic anthologies and biographical collections. Abu Mansur al-Tha'alibi's "Yatimat ad-dahr fi mahasin ahl al-asr", written in the late X and early XI centuries, is a four-

part anthology-tazkira covering the lives and works of poets from Syria, Egypt, the Maghreb, Iraq, Persia, Jurjan, Tabaristan, Khorasan, Mavarannahr, and Khwarazm. The fourth part of the work is particularly significant for illuminating the literary environment of Khorasan, Mavarannahr, and Khwarazm in the X–XI centuries, containing unique information about dozens of poets who lived and worked in Bukhara and Khwarazm, including those who wrote in Arabic and Persian. Al-Tha’alibi began writing “Yatimat ad-dahr” around 994 and completed the first manuscript around the year 1000, later revising it between 1011 and 1020 to include new poets and information. The work covers the literary environment between approximately 912 and 1010.

In terms of structure, “Yatimat ad-dahr” combines the characteristics of a poetic anthology and a biographical tazkira: it provides brief biographical information about poets followed by samples of their poetry, and occasionally evaluates their artistic skill and reputation among contemporaries. While the first three parts are dedicated to poets from regions such as Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, the fourth part focuses on the poets of Khorasan, Mavarannahr, and Khwarazm.

Of the more than 120 poets included in “Yatimat ad-dahr”, information about some has been preserved only through this work; this makes it one of the unique written sources for studying the literary life of Central Asia in the X century. Although al-Tha’alibi did not provide full biographies, he included short but vital details regarding their social origins, connections with court and scholarly circles, poetic mastery, and status. The information recorded in the tazkira about scientific centers, libraries, book markets, and literary circles in Bukhara, Samarkand, and other cities demonstrates the level of development of the scientific-cultural infrastructure during the Eastern Renaissance.

From a chronological perspective, “Yatimat ad-dahr” is a direct reflection of the literary life of the IV–V centuries AH, particularly the Eastern Renaissance environment formed around Bukhara and Nishapur. Therefore, this work is valued as a primary source not only for literary studies but also for research in history, cultural studies, and Islamic civilization.

“Lubab ul-albab” (“The Core of Kernels” or “The Essence of Meanings”) is a tazkira written in Persian and is considered Muhammad Afi’s most important biographical-literary work. In this book, he provides information about poets from the early periods of Persian-Tajik poetry up to his own time, highlighting their biographies, creative paths, and artistic skills in a brief yet meaningful manner. The work is generally regarded as having been written in India during the XII–XIII century transition period, shortly before the Mongol invasion; thus, it is evaluated as the “final snapshot” of the pre-invasion Persian literary environment. Structurally, “Lubab ul-albab” follows classical tazkira traditions: poets are divided into specific sections (based on region, period, or status), with a brief biographical note followed by poetic samples. Afi evaluates the poets’ talent, style, and place in the court and scholarly environment, utilizing legends and anecdotes about them. In this respect, the work possesses socio-historical value, containing many references to the relationships between rulers, courtiers, scholars, and poets, as well as the political events of the time. The significance of “Lubab ul-albab” lies in the fact that it compiles information on hundreds of poets from the X–XIII centuries, many of whom are known to us only through this tazkira.

“Jawami ul-Hikayat wa Lawami ur-Riwayat” (“The Collection of Narratives and the Radiance of Legends”) is Afi’s second major work, extensive in both volume and content. This work is not a tazkira but rather an ethical-didactic, historical, and educational collection of stories. It compiles events, legends, and tales related to various fields—history, jurisprudence, ethics, politics, philosophy, medicine, and even nature and animals.

The work consists of prose texts in the form of stories and legends; each story serves to convey a specific ethical, social, or religious idea. Its purpose is not only to inform the reader but also to educate, form moral qualities, expose the vices of the time, and promote virtues such as justice, honesty, respect for knowledge, and humility. Regarding its sources, historical events, oral traditions, previous books, and the author’s personal observations were processed and given artistic form. “Jawami ul-Hikayat” includes stories about kings, viziers, judges, scholars, Sufis, poets, and common people. Each story hides a certain conclusion—a lesson, advice, or critical thought. Consequently, Eastern and Western

scholars have compared this work to the "memorable stories" of the Roman historian Valerius Maximus. The work was widely distributed in Eastern countries, with many manuscript copies made, and several sections have been translated into various languages, including Uzbek. In Uzbek literary studies, this book has served as an important source for writers of historical novels and stories; many motifs and plots were taken directly from it or reinterpreted through it.

The Samanid Period (819–999): The Initial Foundation During the Samanid era, Bukhara evolved into a preeminent center of science and enlightenment. Political stability and the patronage of rulers toward the arts led to the establishment of grand royal libraries. Abu Mansur al-Tha'alibi, who lived within this milieu, authored his famous work "Yatimat al-dahr" ("The Unique Pearl of the Age"). Although written in Arabic, this work was the first to systematically compile the lives and works of poets from Transoxiana and Khorasan. The movement for national identity during the Samanid period ensured that local talents were given a prominent place in the tradition of tadhkirah.

The Ghaznavid Period (962–1186): The Rise of Court Literature Under the reign of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, the city of Ghazna became a major cultural hub. To project political power, the ruler assembled hundreds of poets at his court. The title of "Sha'ir al-Shu'ara" (Poet Laureate) was introduced during this time, creating a need to register creators and establish their artistic rankings. Although few independent tadhkirahs were produced during this specific era, the literary environment of the Ghaznavid court served as a rich resource for later biographers, such as Muhammad Awfi.

The Seljuk Period (1037–1194): The Systematization of Anthologies The geography of literature expanded significantly during the Seljuk era. The enlightened policies of viziers, particularly Nizam al-Mulk, and the founding of the "Nizamiyya" madrasas opened the doors to the scientific study of literature. Muhammad Awfi's "Lubab al-Albab" ("The Core of Cores") is a direct product of this intellectual environment. As the first comprehensive tadhkirah in the Persian language, it introduced a new system of categorization, grouping poets by their social strata, such as sultans, viziers, scholars, and folk poets.

The Khwarazmshah Period (1077–1231): Philological Analysis and Criticism Gurganj (Old Urganch), the capital of the Khwarazmshah state, was one of the largest cultural centers of the East. During this period, the tradition of tadhkirah shifted its focus toward artistic mastery and the analysis of linguistic features. In the works of writers like Rashid al-Din Vatvat, valuable insights were provided regarding the stylistic innovations and poetic craftsmanship of contemporary creators. The Khwarazmian environment elevated tadhkirah from being a mere collection of biographical data to the level of sophisticated literary criticism.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that the genre of tazkira writing is closely linked to the cultural awakening processes in Central Asia. The emergence of Bukhara as a "place of glory" and a center of science and literature during the Samanid period, along with the activities of scholars like Rudaki, Farabi, and Ibn Sino, created a rich socio-intellectual environment for tazkira writing. Al-Tha'alibi's direct communication with poets in Bukhara and other cities and his recording of their poems through oral traditions and reliable individuals show that tazkira writing relied on a living literary tradition.

During the period when Muhammad Afi lived, the complicating political situation in Central Asia and the necessity of moving from Bukhara to India gave his works broad geographical and cultural horizons. The information gathered in "Lubab ul-albab" and "Jawami ul-Hikayat" serves as an important source not only for Central Asian but also for Indian literary and cultural life. The interest of Eastern and Western researchers in Afi's heritage demonstrates the place of tazkira writing and storytelling in the global literary process. In this regard, the X–XIII century tazkiras are of incomparable importance in reconstructing the history of Central Asian literature, determining the biographies of poets, and studying the spiritual and ethical views of the period.

CONCLUSION

The tazkira writing traditions formed in Central Asia during the X–XIII centuries are one of the most important manifestations of the scientific and cultural ascent of the Eastern Renaissance. Abu Mansur al-Tha'alibi's "Yatimat ad-dahr" and Muhammad Afi's "Lubab ul-

albab” and “Jawami ul-Hikayat” hold special value as historical documents reflecting the socio-cultural life of the period, while providing rich information about the lives, works, and social status of poets and writers. These tazkiras strongly influenced the formation of subsequent Uzbek and Persian literary historiography and tazkira schools, constituting one of the main foundations of biographical-literary source studies. In the future, a comparative analysis of manuscript copies, translations, and modern editions of these works will allow for a deeper study of the history of tazkira writing.

REFERENCES

1. Mirziyoyev Sh.M. We will build our great future together with our brave and noble people. – Tashkent: O‘zbekiston, 2017.
2. Qori Rahmatulloh Vozeh. “Tuhfatul ahbob fi tazkiratil as’hab” // Manuscript, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Inv. № 2336/1. – 145 v. See also: Khadi-Zade R. Sources for the study of Tajik literature of the second half of the 19th century. – Stalinabad, 1956.
3. Abu Mansur al-Tha’alibi. “Tatimmat al-Yatima”. Tashkent, “Fan”, 1990.
4. R. Hodizoda, U. Karimov, S. Sa’diyev. Tajik Literature: XVI-XIX centuries and the beginning of the XX century. – Dushanbe: Maorif, 1988. pp. 372, 407. See also: Majmuai shoiron. – T.: Ilin Printing House, 1902.
5. Muhammad Siddiq Hashmat. Tazkiratush shuaro // Manuscript, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Inv. № 138 v. 2252/I.
6. Abdulazim Shar’iy. “Tazkirai shuaro Abdulazim Shar’iy” // Manuscript, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Inv. № 3396/III.
7. Ne’matulla Muhtaram. “Tazkirai Hoji Ne’matulloh Muhtaram” // Manuscript, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Inv. № 2252/II. 178b; see also S. Ayni, Samples of Tajik Literature.

8. Abdumutallib Faxmiy. Tazkirai Faxmiy // Manuscript, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Inv. № 2331/I. 74v. – 174 v.; see also: B. Valixo'jayev, History of Uzbek Literary Studies.
9. I. Abdullayev. Abu Mansur Al-Tha'alibi. Tashkent, "O'zbekiston", 1992.
10. Jumayeva Nilufar Ahmatovna. "SCIENTIFIC HERITAGE OF EASTERN SCHOLARS" Study Guide. "Durdona" Publishing House, Bukhara, 2022.
11. Ziyouz.com Library.
12. www.natlib.uz