

“BOBURNOMA” — A HISTORICAL, LITERARY, AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SOURCE

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Annotation: The article is devoted to a multifaceted analysis of the “Baburnama” — the autobiographical memoirs of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur (1483–1530), written in Chagatai (Old Uzbek) language. The work is examined as an outstanding historical source reflecting political events, military campaigns, and socio-cultural life in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India from the late 15th to the early 16th century; as a unique literary monument featuring elements of confessional prose and poetic insertions; and as valuable source material for linguistic, onomastic, and ethnographic studies. Particular attention is paid to the frankness of the narrative, the cultural synthesis of the Timurid era, and issues related to the translation of the text.

Keywords: Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Baburnama, historical source, literary monument, source studies, Chagatai language, Timurid era, Mughal Empire, onomastics, autobiography.

Аннотация: Статья посвящена многогранному анализу «Бобурнама» — автобиографических записок Захириддина Мухаммада Бабура (1483–1530), написанных на чагатайском языке. Произведение рассматривается как выдающийся исторический источник, отражающий политические события, военные кампании и социокультурную жизнь Центральной Азии, Афганистана и Индии конца XV — начала XVI вв., как уникальный литературный памятник с элементами исповедальной прозы и поэтических вставок, а также как ценный источниковедческий материал для лингвистических, ономастических и этнографических исследований. Особое внимание уделяется откровенности повествования, культурному синтезу тимуридской эпохи и проблемам перевода текста.

Ключевые слова: Захириддин Мухаммад Бабура, Бобурнама, исторический источник, литературный памятник, источниковедение, чагатайский язык, тимуридская эпоха, Империя Великих Моголов, ономастика, автобиография.

Annotatsiya: Maqola Zahiriddin Muhammad Boburning (1483–1530) chig‘atoy tilida yozilgan «Boburnoma» avtobiografik esdaliklari ko‘p qirrali tahliliga bag‘ishlangan. Asar O‘rta Osiyo, Afg‘oniston va Hindistonning XV asr oxiri — XVI asr boshidagi siyosiy voqealari, harbiy yurishlari va ijtimoiy-madaniy hayotini aks ettiruvchi muhim tarixiy manba, shaxsiy iztirob va she‘riy qistirmalarga ega o‘ziga xos adabiy yodgorlik hamda lingvistik, onomastik va etnografik tadqiqotlar uchun qimmatli manbashunoslik materiali sifatida ko‘rib chiqiladi. Hikoyaning ochiqligi, temuriylar davri madaniy sinteziga va matn tarjimalaridagi muammolarga alohida e‘tibor qaratilgan.

Kalit so‘zlar: Zahiriddin Muhammad Bobur, Boburnoma, tarixiy manba, adabiy yodgorlik, manbashunoslik, chig‘atoy tili, temuriylar davri, Buyuk Mug‘ullar imperiyasi, onomastika, avtobiografiya.

The “**Baburnama**” is the autobiographical memoir of Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur (1483–1530), written in the Chagatai (Old Uzbek) language, and represents a unique monument of medieval Central Asian culture. The work combines features of a historical chronicle, literary

narrative, and a valuable source for linguistic and ethnographic research. In scholarly literature, the *Baburnama* is regarded as a multidimensional text of exceptional value simultaneously as a historical document, a literary masterpiece of autobiographical character, and a source-critical material enabling the reconstruction of the political, social, and cultural realities of the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Analysis of translations and scholarly interpretations highlights the importance of the work for understanding the transitional stage from the Timurid tradition to Mughal statehood.

The *Baburnama* begins without a traditional preface:

“In the month of Ramadan of the year 899 [1494], and in the twelfth year of my life, I became ruler in the land of Fergana” [1].

Such a direct and concise opening immediately immerses the reader in the flow of events in Babur’s life, covering the period from his accession to the throne in Fergana to the foundation of the Mughal Empire in India. The absence of introductory religious formulas typical of Eastern historiographical tradition gives the text dynamism and emphasizes its autobiographical orientation. Modern encyclopedic editions define the *Baburnama* as a memoir that combines elements of political history, economics, military affairs, geography, and philosophical reflections on human nature [2]. This genre multilayeredness moves the text beyond the boundaries of a simple chronicle and transforms it into a living testimony of its era.

The work fits into the tradition of imperial autobiographies but differs significantly from more formalized texts such as the Akbarnama, primarily in its degree of candor. Babur does not seek self-glorification; he openly speaks about defeats, doubts, and personal weaknesses—an uncommon phenomenon among Eastern ruler-memoirists. This feature increases the credibility of the source while simultaneously requiring a critical approach to the author’s subjective assessments. The language of the *Baburnama* is characterized by considerable Persianization at the levels of structure, morphology, and vocabulary. The text widely incorporates Persian poetic quotations and set expressions, while retaining Turkic clarity and narrative dynamism [4]. Such linguistic synthesis reflects the cultural specificity of the Timurid era and makes the work a bridge between Persian and Turkic literary traditions.

The *Baburnama* constitutes a firsthand account of Babur’s life and activities. It provides detailed descriptions of the loss and temporary recovery of Samarkand, the conquest of Kabul and India, including the key battles of First Battle of Panipat (1526) and Battle of Khanwa (1527). Of particular value are the ethnographic and geographical descriptions, including information about flora, fauna, and the social organization of various regions [5]. The text contains extensive portrayals of Indian realities exotic to Central Asia—rhinoceroses, bananas, parrots, climatic conditions, and agricultural practices. These observations make the *Baburnama* an important source for reconstructing the material culture of the era.

At the same time, the presence of lacunae in the manuscript tradition—particularly the absence of entries for 1508–1519—compels researchers to compare Babur’s account with other sources, such as the Tarikh-i Rashidi. Babur thoroughly describes the socio-political landscape of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India, paying attention to alliance systems, inter-dynastic rivalries, and military strategies, including the tulughma tactic [6]. Although the emphasis on military achievements is typical for rulers’ autobiographies, it is noteworthy that the author does not avoid describing defeats and strategic mistakes, which enhances the source-critical reliability of the text. Nevertheless, one must consider the subjectivity of a conqueror’s perspective, especially in his characterization of “foreign” peoples and cultures.

The Japanese scholar Eiji Mano described the *Baburnama* as a “treasure trove of information” on the history, geography, and ethnography of the late 15th and early 16th centuries [7]. This definition reflects the scale and richness of the source, although modern historiography emphasizes the need to take into account the author’s dynastic and ideological position. From a literary standpoint, the *Baburnama* is distinguished by first-person narration, detailed depictions of military campaigns and natural landscapes, elements of psychological introspection, and the inclusion of Babur’s own poetic compositions [8]. These poetic insertions expand the artistic scope of the text and give it emotional depth beyond dry chronicle writing.

In academic studies, the *Baburnama* is often regarded as a unique example of autobiography in Islamic literature, comparable in its candor and psychological depth to the *Confessions* of Augustine of Hippo or Jean-Jacques Rousseau [9]. However, such parallels require caution, since excessive emphasis on Western analogies may overshadow the Eastern and Turkic cultural context of the work. Special attention should be paid to Babur’s use of humor, irony, and artistic exaggeration, evident, for example, in descriptions of his passion for chess or sharp characterizations of opponents [10]. These elements enliven the narrative and enhance its individuality, yet they are often partially lost in translation, diminishing the emotional and stylistic impact of the original.

From the perspective of linguistics and onomastics, the *Baburnama* constitutes exceptionally rich material. The text records about one thousand toponyms, more than one and a half thousand anthroponyms, as well as numerous hydronyms and ethnonyms [11]. This makes the work a valuable source for research in historical geography and toponymy, although the abundance of names complicates perception and requires extensive reference apparatus in modern editions.

The history of translations of the *Baburnama* begins with fragmentary publications in the 18th century, while the first complete translations are associated with the names of Leyden and Erskine (1826), Annette Susannah Beveridge (1922), and Wheeler M. Thackston (1996). Scholars have noted a number of inaccuracies in commentaries and interpretations, including errors in identifying elements of material culture, particularly flora and fauna [12]. These problems are обусловлены the cultural distance of translators and highlight the necessity of involving regional specialists. The original text of the *Baburnama* has survived in fragmentary form; an important role in its preservation was played by the Persian translation completed by Abdur-Rahim in 1589–1590 [12]. The existence of multiple versions broadens interpretative possibilities while also underscoring the need to prepare a critical edition in the Chagatai language.

The *Baburnama* remains an unparalleled source that combines historical informativeness, literary expressiveness, and high source-critical value. Despite the author’s subjectivity and textual lacunae, the work enables a comprehensive understanding of the political, cultural, and mental characteristics of the Timurid–Mughal era. Prospects for further research are associated with the digitization of manuscript heritage, preparation of critical editions, and expansion of analytical perspectives, including gender aspects and representations of women in the text.

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