

**SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF COMPOSITION
OF THE EPIC “YUSUF VA ZULAYXO” ATTRIBUTED TO DURBEK**

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Annotation: The article discusses certain controversial issues related to the 15th-century epic poem Yusuf va Zulayxo. It examines various scholarly opinions regarding the author of the work and the date of its composition. Manuscripts, published editions, and previous studies on the poem are compared and analysed.

Keywords: Durbek, Ahmadi Jom, Navoiy, Yusuf va Zulayxo, manuscript, textual variants, abjad chronology.

The epic Yusuf va Zulayxo, created in the 15th century, is one of the rare works in Uzbek literature that treats the story of Prophet Yusuf. The earliest known verse treatment of this theme in Uzbek literature is associated with a 13th-century poet named Ali. Below, we present some observations concerning the date of composition and authorship of the 15th-century Yusuf va Zulayxo.

The work was first brought to public attention by Abdurauf Fitrat in his book *O‘zbek adabiyoti namunalari*. Fitrat transliterated several couplets into Cyrillic script and, relying on the couplet “Erdi chu xotir chu musammam bu azm, Ayladi bu qissani Durbek nazm,” concluded that the author of the epic was a poet named Durbek. This view of Fitrat was later repeated by the literary scholar B. Valixo‘jayev in his book *O‘zbek epik poeziyasi tarixidan*. Valixo‘jayev based his opinion on the same couplet found in a manuscript of Yusuf va Zulayxo preserved in the personal library of the Samarkand educator Abduhamid Po‘lotiy. [1, 161]

The earliest scholarly mention of the epic’s authorship appears in the work of the French orientalist Édouard Blochet. In 1900, while cataloguing Arabic, Persian and Turkic manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Blochet listed the Yusuf va Zulayxo manuscript (inventory no. 1365) as a work by Alisher Navoiy. The reason for this attribution was that Blochet misread the line “Erdi Ali sheri Haqq-u shohi din” in the chapter of na’t (praise of the Prophet) as “Alisher”. In reality, Navoiy himself had intended to write a romantic epic about Prophet Yusuf, as he states in his *Tarixi anbiyo va hukamo* in the chapter on Yusuf (peace be upon him):

“Notwithstanding all this, this humble servant also entertains the wish – if Allah grants life – to compose this story in the Turkish language, to draw with the musk-scented pen upon the pages of existence the candle of black amber, to begin this tale in verse and bring it to its conclusion. May the Lord grant success in this, Or may such grace come from Heaven.”

Blochet, being well acquainted with Eastern literature, may have relied on this passage when asserting that Navoiy had written an epic about Yusuf. Furthermore, the Paris manuscript he studied contains, after the sections of hamd and na’t, a separate 30-couplet chapter entitled “Madh of Sultan Husayn Mirzo”. The literary scholar Fozila Sulaymonova published an article about the copy attributed to Navoiy, arguing that the real author is not Navoiy but Durbek. [2, 87]



The oldest known manuscript of the epic is preserved in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library (Revan Köşkü), Istanbul, under inventory no. 832, with the title *Dostoni Hazrati Yusuf alayhissalom va Zulayxo*. This copy was transcribed in 922 AH (1516 CE). Turkish scholars such as Halide Cemil Dolu and Zeynep Korkmaz have conducted research on this manuscript. One of the studies is Halide Dolu's article "Yusuf hikayesi hakkında birkaç söz ve bazı Türkçe nushalar" (A few words about the Yusuf story and some Turkish copies). In it, she provides information about five manuscripts of works on the Yusuf theme by different authors. Among them are the two copies of the epic in question: the Topkapı manuscript and the "Tashkent copy" studied by Fitrat. She calls the Topkapı manuscript the "Hamidiy copy" and states that its author is a poet named Hamidiy, basing this on her reading of the couplet "Sendin o'tub Homidiy bil ro'zg'or, Qolg'ay o'shal safhasidin yodigor."

Halide Dolu further notes that the work was written two years after Sultan Husayn Bayqaro's accession to the throne and quotes the following two couplets in praise of him:

Shohi jahon soyayi lutfi Iloh, Hami-i din dunyoga pushti panoh. Toati erur bariga farzi ayn, Shoh Abul G'ozi Sulton Husayn.

While discussing the Tashkent copy, she writes: "When we examined the Yusuf va Zulayxo copy attributed to Durbek, we compared it with the Hamidiy copy because of certain similarities." [3, 431-432] From this, it is clear that Halide Dolu mistakenly treated two manuscripts of the same work as two separate works.

Another Turkish scholar, Zeynep Korkmaz, published an article in 1968 in the journal *Türkoloji Dergisi* entitled "Hüseyin Baykara adına yazılmış çağatayça Yusuf ve Züleyha mesnevisinin tanınmayan bir yazması ve eserin yazarı" (An unknown manuscript of the Chaghatay Yusuf and Züleyha masnavi written in the name of Hüseyin Baykara and its author). Unlike Halide Dolu, Korkmaz not only provides general information about the manuscripts but also addresses controversial issues and substantiates her own conclusions. She examines the Berlin, Paris, Istanbul and Tashkent copies studied by Fitrat. In this study, Zeynep Korkmaz attempts to prove that the author is Ahmadi Jom of Jand and that the work was written in 874 AH (1469 CE). She bases this on the following couplets found in the Berlin manuscript:

Zod(ض) edi tarix dog'i ayn(ع)-u dol(د), Muddati tarixdan o'tub moh-u sol.

According to the abjad system: ض = 800, ع = 70, د = 4 → total 874. This date coincides with the year of Husayn Bayqaro's accession. Historical sources confirm that Husayn Bayqaro ascended the throne in Rajab 873 AH. The existence of a separate chapter praising Sultan Husayn Bayqaro in the Paris and Istanbul manuscripts led both Halide Dolu and Zeynep Korkmaz to conclude that the epic was composed on the occasion of his accession.

At the same time, relying on the couplet in the Berlin manuscript "Qolg'ay uchun safhasida yodigor, Sendin o'tub Ahmad bil ro'zgor," Zeynep Korkmaz argues that the author is Ahmadi Jom of Jand. She also notes that in the Istanbul manuscript the name appears as "Hamidi" and explains this as a scribal error in which the letters ^۱ (alif) and ح (ha) were confused. To further prove that the author is not Durbek but Ahmadi Jom of Jand, Korkmaz refers to a number of historical works and events. [4, 10-15]

One of the most recent studies on the authorship issue is the article by Professor Nafas Shodmonov (Turan University) entitled "Rare manuscripts of Yusuf va Zulayxo: analysis of the authorship problem". Relying on Zeynep Korkmaz's article and other studies, N. Shodmonov states that the epic Yusuf va Zulayxo belongs to Ahmad Jom of Jand, who died in 906 AH (1501–1502 CE), and that it was written on the occasion of Husayn Bayqaro's accession to the throne. Among the evidence he cites are the existence of a separate chapter praising Husayn Bayqaro in the Istanbul, Paris and Berlin manuscripts and the abjad date of 874 AH (1469 CE).



However, when we examine the manuscripts preserved in the Institute of Oriental Studies and the Bukhara “Hazora” copy, we see that none of them contains the chapter praising Husayn Bayqaro. N. Shodmonov himself acknowledges this and explains it as follows: “Indeed, the praise of Sultan Husayn Bayqaro is preserved in the rare manuscripts; it is natural that it would have been omitted in later copies produced during the Shaybanid and Ashtarkhanid periods, when the Timurids were to some extent opposed.” [5, 15]

Yet this explanation raises further questions. For example, if the chapter was removed for political reasons, why was the author’s name also concealed or altered in later copies? In the manuscripts found in Uzbekistan, the couplet “Qolgʻay uchun safhasida yodigor, Sendin oʻtub Ahmad bil roʻzgor” appears as “Qolgʻay oxir safhasida yodgor, Sendan oʻshal qissa oʻtub roʻzgor.”

Furthermore, if the epic had really been written in honour of Sultan Husayn Bayqaro, why does Alisher Navoiy – who provides information about Ahmadi Jom in *Majolis un-nafois* – never mention that Ahmadi Jom wrote a *Yusuf va Zulayxo*? The same puzzling situation arises when reading Navoiy’s *Tarixi anbiyo va hukamo*. In the section devoted to Prophet Yusuf, Navoiy lists some of the poets who previously treated this theme:

“The story of Yusuf (peace be upon him) is more famous than to require detailed exposition, for because of its wondrous and sweet nature, great writers both in verse and prose have composed commentaries upon it and displayed their magic. Among them are Firdawsiy of Tus and His Excellency Mawlana Nuriddin Abdurrahman Jami – may Allah illuminate his grave – just as the beauty and perfection of Yusuf (peace be upon him) needs no description, so too his excellence and perfection require no praise. Also Khoja Masʻud of Iraq composed it in verse and gave voice to eloquence. And other noble ones have likewise occupied themselves with it. Notwithstanding all these, this humble servant also...” [6, 120]

As can be seen, Navoiy mentions Abulqasim Firdawsiy of Tus, Abdurrahman Jami and Masʻud of Iraq with the highest praise. If Ahmadi Jom had also written an epic on this theme – and dedicated it to Husayn Bayqaro – it would be reasonable to expect Navoiy to mention his name alongside the others. Moreover, the fact that the work was composed in the Turkish language should have attracted Navoiy’s particular attention, because the author himself states that one of his literary intentions was to render the Yusuf story “in the Turkish language”:

“Bor edi koʻngulda burundin bu azm, Turki tili birlamu qilsam nazm.”

At that time, most works on the Yusuf and Zulaykha theme were written in Persian.

In conclusion, had Navoiy been aware of the existence of *Yusuf va Zulayxo*, he – who strongly encouraged literary creation in Turkish – would surely have referred to this epic in several places in his works. The complete absence of any mention by Navoiy of a work allegedly dedicated to Sultan Husayn Bayqaro is also strange. All of this casts serious doubt on theories that link the 15th-century *Yusuf va Zulayxo* to Navoiy himself or to any of his contemporaries.

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