



LEXICAL-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF FRUIT PLANT NAMES IN THE BABURNAMA

Muxtorjon Amonov

Associate Professor, Fergana State University

Abstract

This article examines the names of fruit trees and plants mentioned in the “Baburnama”, focusing on their lexical and semantic features. Special attention is given to the analysis of fruit names cultivated in Movarounnahr, Afghanistan, and India.

Keywords: “Baburnama”, Movarounnahr, Afghanistan, India, Samarkand, Margilan, Isfara, Andijan, fruit, fruit tree, orchard.

Introduction

Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur’s Baburnama is invaluable not only as a historical work but also as a linguistic and ethnobotanical source. In it, the author not only describes the political events, social life, and geographical regions of his time in detail, but also provides important information on fruit-bearing trees, melon crops, and vegetable cultivation across various lands. Through Babur’s observations, one can gain insight into the agrarian culture of the 15th–16th centuries, the types of crops cultivated, their productivity, and their regional characteristics. This article focuses on the lexico-semantic features of certain fruits mentioned in Baburnama, exploring their linguistic aspects, historical nomenclature, and socio-cultural significance.

Review of Literature

Both local and foreign scholars have studied Baburnama from various perspectives. For instance, V. V. Bartold and A. Yu. Yakubovskii analyzed the historical and geographical significance of the work, while N. L. Korovkov and A. Khabibullaev examined its ethnographic observations. From a linguistic perspective, research into the fruit and plant names in Babur’s text highlights their



etymological origins, phonetic and morphological adaptation processes, and semantic development (e.g., norunj – orange, turunj – citron, kayla – banana, etc.). Moreover, ancient sources such as Abu Rayhan al-Biruni's Saydana provide classifications and descriptions of fruits that are especially valuable for comparative study with Babur's own observations.

Methods and Methodologies

The study applies comparative-historical, lexico-semantic, and cultural-linguistic approaches:

1. Comparative-historical method – fruit names in Baburnama were compared with those in other historical sources, including works by al-Biruni, Galen, as well as Arabic and Persian lexicographic texts.
2. Lexico-semantic analysis – the semantic differentiation, synonymic layers, and naming strategies of the fruits were examined. For instance, the expression sebi Samarqand ("apple of Samarkand") is formed through the Persian izafa construction, while oluyi Bukhari ("Bukhara plum") is marked as a localized designation.
3. Cultural-linguistic approach – fruit names were analyzed in their regional, climatic, and cultural contexts, focusing on their role in societal development, trade, and cultural exchange.

The Main Part

In his masterpiece "Baburnama", Babur provides fascinating information about fruit-bearing plants whenever he describes various countries, provinces, and districts. In particular, when speaking about Andijan, he notes: "It is the capital of the Fergana province. Grain is abundant, fruits are plentiful, and its melons and grapes are of excellent quality. During melon season, it is not customary to sell melons at the fields. There is no pear better than that of Andijan" [1, p. 6]. The work also mentions the names of numerous orchards.

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Describing Margilan, the author notes: “There is another town, Margilan. It lies to the west of Andijan, at a distance of seven yighoch (about 28 km). It is a fine township, rich in produce: its pomegranates and apricots are exceptionally good. There is a variety of pomegranate, called ‘donai kalon’ (the large seed), whose sweetness is slightly tinged with the flavor of apricots. It can even be preferred over the Samnan pomegranates. There is also a variety of apricot whose pit is removed and replaced with a kernel, dried and called ‘subhoniyy’; it is exceedingly delicious.” [1, p. 7].

Regarding the fruits of Isfara, Babur writes: “There is also a town called Isfara. It has flowing waters and delightful gardens. ... Fruit-bearing trees are abundant, but in its orchards almond trees predominate.” [1, p. 7].

On Khojand, he notes: “There is also Khojand. ... Its fruits are plentiful and of very fine quality. Its pomegranates are renowned for their excellence. Just as one says ‘the apples of Samarkand,’ so too they say ‘the pomegranates of Khojand.’ Yet, in this period, the pomegranates of Margilan are considered far superior.” [1, p. 7]. In this passage, while praising the pomegranates of Khojand, Babur simultaneously emphasizes that the pomegranates of Margilan surpass them in quality.

On Kanibadam (Konibodom), Babur provides equally interesting information, which can be easily understood from the following passage: “Next to it lies Kandibodom. Although it is not a large town, it is still a fairly good-sized settlement. Its almonds are of excellent quality. For this reason, the town has been given this name (‘City of Almonds’). Its almonds are exported entirely to Hormuz and to India.” [1, p. 7].

Writing about Samarkand, Babur praises its fruit trees and melon fields: “The grapes, melons, apples, and pomegranates of Samarkand — indeed, all its fruits — are excellent. Yet two fruits of Samarkand are especially famous: the apple of Samarkand (sebi Samarqand) and the peach of Samarkand (sohibiyi Samarqand).” [1, p. 44]. In this sentence, the phrase sebi Samarqand (apple of



Samarkand) is expressed through a Persian izafa construction, emphasizing the renown of the Samarkand apple.

When describing Bukhara, Babur writes: “Bukhara has several districts. Its fruits are abundant and excellent, and its melons are of very fine quality. In all of Transoxiana, there are no melons as numerous and as good as those of Bukhara. Although in the province of Fergana there is a type of melon from Aksī known as the ‘Mir Temuri,’ which is sweeter and more delicate than the melon of Bukhara, yet in Bukhara every kind of melon grows in great quantity and with great excellence. Furthermore, the ‘oluyi Bukhari’ (Bukhara plum) is renowned. Nowhere else are plums like those of Bukhara. Their skins are removed, they are dried, and, considered a blessing, they are transported from province to province.” [1, p. 44].

In 1514, Babur created a large garden called Bāgh-i Wafā in the south of the fortress of Odenapur in Kabul province. That same year, after defeating Pahar Khan and conquering the cities of Lahore and Dipalpur, he brought bananas from these regions and planted them in the garden, where they produced good yields. A year earlier, he had also introduced sugarcane into the garden, which likewise grew well. Subsequently, sugarcane was sent from Kabul to Bukhara and Badakhshan. About this, the author writes: “On the south side of the fortress of Odenapur, on an elevated ground, in the year 914 (1514), I built a chahār-bāgh (four-part garden). It was named Bāgh-i Wafā, with a flowing canal, located between the river and the fortress. It had abundant orange, sour orange, and pomegranate trees. In the year that I subdued Pahar Khan and conquered Lahore and Dipalpur, I brought bananas (kīlā) and planted them there; they grew well. A year earlier, I had planted sugarcane, which grew excellently. From that sugarcane, supplies were sent to Badakhshan and Bukhara. ... On the western and southern side of the garden, there is also a rectangular pool, surrounded entirely by orange trees, and there are also pomegranate trees. Around the pool, all is planted with cypresses.” [1, p. 121]

On fruits, vegetables, and melon crops, Babur expresses fascinating comparative observations about their varieties and qualities: “The grapes of Ghazni are superior to those of Kabul. Its melons are also better than those of Kabul, and its apples as well are excellent, so that they are exported



to Hindustan. Cultivation here requires much toil: for whatever land they sow, they cover the entire surface with fresh soil. Yet the yield of their crops surpasses those of Kabul. They cultivate rūyān (flax or cotton), all of which is exported to Hindustan. The best produce of this land is rūyān.” [1, p. 126].

In the following passage, norunj [2, 103]—the orange fruit—is described in the context of its harvesting from the trees: “On Monday we departed from the garden. I walked about one pahr and ordered some of the oranges to be picked. Two orange trees were presented as a gift to Shah Hasan. To some of the beks, one tree of oranges was bestowed, while to others, two persons shared the yield of a single tree. Since there was an intention to undertake a winter excursion to Lamghan, I commanded that about twenty orange trees around the pool be maintained for cultivation” [1, 224].

Discussing the natural environment, climate, geographical features, and mountains of Kabul province, Babur also provides his reflections on the region’s fruit cultivation as follows: “In the towns of Kabul, among the cold-climate fruits, there is an abundance of grapes, pomegranates, apricots, apples, quinces, guavas, peaches, plums, elaeagnus (oleaster), almonds, and walnuts. I personally brought and planted cherry saplings, which yielded fine fruits and were still in the process of development. Among the warm-climate fruits, such as oranges (norunj), citrons (turunj), jujube (amluk), and sugarcane (nayshakar), they are imported from Lamghan. Sugarcane was planted as well and produced excellent yields. Pine nuts (chilghoza) are brought from Nijrow. Kabul’s produce is remarkable, and its quinces and plums are also of high quality. Its cucumbers are likewise excellent.”

From these examples, it becomes clear that Babur classified fruits according to two ecological-climatic categories: **Cold-climate fruits:** grapes, pomegranates, apricots, peaches, quinces, plums, almonds, and walnuts. **Warm-climate fruits:** oranges (*Citrus sinensis*), citrons (*Citrus medica*), jujube (*Ziziphus jujuba*), and sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*).

Babur, describing the valley of Darai Nur in the Lamghan province of Afghanistan, writes as follows: “There is a place called Darai Nur. It has oranges (norunj), citrons (turunj), and other warm-climate fruits. There are also a few date palms. On both banks of the stream beside the fortress, the land is entirely covered



with trees, most of which are jujube (emluk). Some Turks call this fruit qora yemish ('black fruit'). It grows abundantly in Darai Nur, but nowhere else is this fruit observed. Grapes also grow here, and the vines are entirely trellised upon trees" [1, 122].

Long before Babur, the fruit turunj (citrus) had been described by Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, nearly four centuries earlier. In his lexicographic treatise "Saydana", he devotes the thirteenth chapter to the word utrung (turunj). He notes that in Nishapur and in common parlance it is often called turunj, while in Syriac it is known as atruka, in Persian as bodrang, and in Latin as citron. He further explains that if Persians call cucumber xiyirom, they analogically call the citron xiyyir-i badrang. Abu Hanifa records that utrung in Arabic is mutk, and that this word also occurs in the Qur'an. Galen remarks that the Greeks referred to the citron as the "Median apple" (malum medica), while apricot was called the "Armenian apple." Al-Biruni then proceeds to describe how utrung grows in Egypt, Tabaristan, and Jurjan, noting its size, shape, and taste. To reinforce his argument and ensure the concept remained vivid in the reader's memory, he cites poetic excerpts from eight different poets [3, 18].

It is well known that the Baburnāma offers detailed observations on India's fruit-bearing and ornamental plants, flowers, and agricultural crops. For each plant Babur records its name and supplies the reader with ample information. Regarding the **anbā** (mango), he provides the following characterization: "It is peculiar to Hindustan; there is a fruit called anbā. Most people of Hindustan pronounce the letter **bē** without a vowel (**be-harakat**), and because this yields an improper pronunciation, some call it **nag'zak**, as Khwāja Khusraw says: ..."

Nag'zaki mo nag'z kuni bo'ston ,

Nag'ztarin mevai Hinduston [1,260].

On this fruit, Babur provides the following additional remarks: "The best ones are indeed very good and generally edible, yet the finest are rare. Most are picked while still unripe and ripen at home; in their unripe state they make an excellent accompaniment to yogurt. The preserve (murabba) of the unripe fruit is also delicious. In truth, this is Hindustan's finest fruit. The trees are abundant and grow tall. Some people praised the mango to such a degree that they preferred it above all fruits save the melon. However, it is not quite as they describe. It bears



a certain resemblance to the peach. It ripens in the rainy season (pashkol). Two varieties are consumed: one is squeezed, pierced, and its juice sucked out; the other is eaten peeled, like the peach of Cordova. Its leaves somewhat resemble those of the peach, though the tree itself is ungainly and ill-formed.” [1, 260]. From this description it is evident that the mango (anbā) exists in two main varieties, ripening during the rainy season, that is, in autumn (pashkol). Although its appearance may not be pleasing, its taste is described as sweet and highly esteemed.

“There is also the **kayla**, which the Arabs call mavz (banana). Its tree is not very tall, and in fact it can hardly be called a tree at all; it is something intermediate between a herb and a tree. Its leaves resemble those of the amonqaro plant, yet the kayla’s leaf is two cubits in length and one cubit in width, with a heart-like stalk in the center from which the bud emerges. The great bud is the size of a sheep’s heart, and as its bracts open, at the base of each appear rows of six or seven flowers; these rows of flowers form the kayla. As the heart-like stalk continues to extend, the bracts of the great bud open, and successive rows of kayla flowers are revealed. Each kayla plant is said to bear fruit only once. The kayla has two particular excellences: first, its skin is easily peeled; second, it has no stone or pit. The fruit is somewhat longer and narrower than the eggplant, though not very sweet. The bananas of Bengal, it is said, are much sweeter. The plant itself is quite attractive, with broad, flat, brightly green leaves that present a pleasing appearance.” [1, 260].

“Among the famous fruits are also the **noranj** (orange) and **limu** (lemon). Oranges are plentiful in Lamghanat, Bajaur, and Sawad. The Lamghanat orange is smaller in size and has a navel-like form, but it bears no comparison to the oranges of Khurasan districts. Because of their delicacy, when they are brought from Lamghanat to Kabul—a distance of some thirteen to fourteen yighoch—some of the oranges spoil on the way. By contrast, the oranges of Astarabad are transported to Samarqand—a distance of some 272 to 280 yighoch—and do not spoil as much, owing to their thicker skin and lesser delicacy. The Bajaur oranges are as large as quinces; their juice is abundant, yet somewhat more sour than that of other oranges. Khwaja Kalon recounted that in Bajaur, from a single tree of this kind of orange, they once harvested seven thousand fruits. I recall often



reflecting that the word **noranj** is of Arabicized form. The people of Bajaur and Sawad call the fruit entirely **norang**.” [1, 263].

“Another fruit similar to the **noranj** (orange) is the **sangtor** (citron-like fruit). In color and shape it resembles the **turunj** (citron), yet it is extremely tart. Its peel is smooth and not uneven, and it is somewhat smaller than the ordinary citron. The tree itself grows tall, about the size of an apricot tree, with leaves resembling those of the orange. It possesses a fine sourness, and its juice is both pleasantly flavored and palatable. This fruit, like the **limu** (lemon), is considered to have strengthening properties, though it is not as potent as the **noranj**.” [1, 263].

In conclusion, this article examined the lexico-semantic properties of selected fruit names attested in Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur’s Baburnama. The textual evidence demonstrates that the work documents, in considerable detail, the nomenclature, semantic differentiation, and historical–dialectal variants of fruits cultivated across Transoxiana, Afghanistan, and India. Babur’s observations further illuminate the phonetic and morphological accommodation of fruit names, as well as the synonymic and variational relations between loanwords and indigenous terms.

Conclusion

The above analysis demonstrates that the classification of fruits in Baburnama is significant not only for understanding agrarian culture but also for linguistic development. Fruits such as pomegranate, grape, peach, apple, almond, mango, banana, orange, citron, sugarcane, and others are described in detail, providing rich material for historical lexicology. Babur’s accounts also reflect the cultivation of fruits under two climatic conditions: cold-climate fruits (grapes, pomegranates, apricots, peaches, quinces, plums, almonds, walnuts) and warm-climate fruits (oranges, citrons, jujube, sugarcane). Thus, Baburnama should be regarded not only as a historical memoir but also as a cultural-linguistic source of enduring value.

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