



THE INFLUENCE OF KHOJA AHMAD YASSAWI AND SULAYMAN BOQIRGANI'S WORKS ON TATAR LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article explores the influence of the Yassawi Sufi order, founded by Khoja Ahmad Yassawi, and his devoted disciple Sulayman Boqirgani on the literary development of the Volga region, particularly in Tatar literature. The paper analyzes how themes of divine love, spiritual purification, and social justice expressed in Yassawi's teachings are reflected in Sulayman Boqirgani's work and continued in Qul Ali's epic Qissayi Yusuf. The study highlights the tradition of literary succession within Turkic-Tatar literature.

Keywords: Yassawi order, Sulayman Boqirgani, Qul Ali, Tatar literature, hikmat, qissa, Sufism, divine love, literary succession.

Introduction

Among the Sufi poets who left a profound mark on the history of Eastern literature and mystical thought, Khoja Ahmad Yasawi and his devoted disciple Sulayman Baqirgani hold a distinguished place. The Yasawiyya order, founded by Yasawi, spread widely not only among the peoples of Central Asia but also among the Turkic communities of the Volga region, particularly the Tatars, exerting a deep influence on their religious, educational, and literary life. The ideological foundations of this Sufi order were rooted in spiritual purification, love for God, and the principles of social justice, and these features are distinctly reflected in the classical works of Tatar literature.



It is natural to assert that the origins of Turkic–Tatar literature trace back to the great Sufi poet Ahmad Yasawi. For centuries, our people have read his works and drawn inspiration from them in their own creativity. In madrasas, Yasawi’s *hikmats* were memorized, and his books continued to be published in Kazan even in the early twentieth century without interruption [7, p. 15]. This demonstrates the significant creative influence Yasawi and his followers had on the development of Tatar literature. A vivid example of this is Sulayman Baqirgani, one of Yasawi’s renowned khalifas. Known under the names *Hakim Ata*, *Hakim Khoja*, *Sulayman Ata*, and *Baqirgani Ata*, he was Ahmad Yasawi’s third khalifa and an eminent representative of Sufi literature. As a disciple of Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, Baqirgani composed *hikmats* in his master’s style and disseminated the essence of the Sufi order to the people, fulfilling his principal mission.

The theme of divine love (*‘ishq-i ilohiy*) occupies a special place in Ahmad Yasawi’s oeuvre. True love, in his conception, is not subject to bargaining, profit-seeking, or greed. The gnostic (*‘arif*) who sets foot on the path of divine love turns away from the fleeting desires of this worldly life. Hence, in his *hikmats*, one frequently encounters a supplication to God, such as: “Har ne qilsang, oshiq qilg’il Parvardigor (*Whatever You do, make me Your lover, O Lord*)”

“Ishq bozori ulug’ bozor, savdo – harom,
Oshiqlarga sendan o’zga g’avg’o – harom,
Ishq yo’lig’a kirganlarga dunyo – harom,
Har ne qilsang, oshiq qilg’il Parvardigor”. [3, 21]

The theme of divine love (*‘ishq*), so profoundly celebrated in Ahmad Yasawi’s poetry, continued to resonate in the works of Sulayman Baqirgani as well.

“Manim jonim, saning ishqing bilodir,
Tanam ojiz, vale jonim o’lodir.
Bu ishq gar bo’lmasa, man netgay erdim,
Qamug’ ohim manim ishqim qilodir”. [2, 13]

In this verse, the poet’s philosophical reflections on divine love are vividly manifested, which clearly demonstrates that Hakim Ata was, in the truest sense, a devoted disciple of Ahmad Yasawi. At the same time, Sulayman Ata not only continued Yasawi’s spiritual and literary traditions but also enriched them. Among the representatives of this Sufi order, Sulayman Baqirgani stands out as



the author of the earliest narrative poems (*qissas*). His literary heritage primarily consists of *hikmats* and narrative poems. Works such as *Ismoil Qissasi*, *Mi'rojnoma*, *Bibi Maryam*, *Sabit Qissasi*, and *Akhirzamon* may all be classified as short epics.

Ismoil Qissasi comprises 37 quatrains, *Akhirzamon* 49, *Mi'rojnoma* 57, *Sabit Qissasi* 34, and *Bibi Maryam* 53 quatrains. If we also include the poem devoted to the Prophet, the total amounts to 245 quatrains, or nearly one thousand lines [4, p. 37]. The presence of a work in the same genre—*Qissayi Yusuf*—in the oeuvre of the Tatar poet Qul Ali further indicates that he was creatively influenced by Sulayman Baqirgani as well as by Ahmad Yasawi.

The first literary work dedicated to the story of Yusuf is Abulqasim Ferdowsi's epic *Yusuf and Zulaykha*. This was followed by a work of the same title by Abdurrahman Jami. In Turkic literature, the earliest work created on the basis of the Yusuf narrative is *Qissayi Yusuf*, an epic composed in the 13th century by Qul Ali [6].

Literature review and method

Information about the author of this work is rather scarce and contradictory. His full name was Muhammad-hoji Ali ibn Mirkhoja, and he was born in Volga Bulgaria. He received his initial education in a local madrasa and later continued his studies in Khwarazm. The poet spent many years traveling through the major cultural centers of the Muslim East, including Ghazna, Herat, Syria, Jerusalem, and Mecca. For a long period, he lived in Bilyar and Bulgar (the capitals of Volga Bulgaria), as well as in the cities of Olabuqa, Nur-suvar, and Kashan.

Scholar N. Rakhmonov, in his *History of Uzbek Literature*, states that no sources have preserved reliable information about Qul Ali's biography and creative activity. However, the well-known Tatar historian Tojiddin Yalchig'ul og'li, in his *Tawarikh-i Bulgaria*, provides genealogical and biographical data on Qul Ali. These accounts are partly based on family traditions and partly on written sources that have since been lost. Tojiddin Yalchig'ul og'li claims to be a direct descendant of Qul Ali on his father's side. According to his narrative:

- Qul Ali's grandfather was originally from Bulgar and, after being expelled, settled in the city of Kashan;



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- His father, Mirkhoja, was born in Kashan and lived there until the age of 30;
 - Later, Mirkhoja moved to a village located at the confluence of the River Zay with the River Kama, where Qul Ali was born;
 - According to tradition, Qul Ali was born in 1183 [11, p. 31].
 - Based on the above information, it can be concluded that Qul Ali, having studied in the most renowned intellectual centers of his time, acquired comprehensive knowledge, which enabled him to confidently undertake the composition of *Qissayi Yusuf*.
 - The first stage of the poem's scholarly investigation was initiated by the Tatar poet and thinker A. Utiz Imaniy. In 1824, he prepared a composite text of *Qissai Yusuf* by collating nearly ten manuscripts. This version was subsequently published in 1839 by the Tatar educator R. Amirkhanov. In 1831, the German Orientalist G. L. Fleischer catalogued the manuscript of the poem preserved in the Dresden Library within the collection of Oriental manuscripts. Later, in 1889, the Dutch scholar M. Houtsma analyzed several manuscripts, focusing on the work's plot and linguistic features.
 - In 1885, Sh. Marjani examined the poem and noted, in the first volume of his *Mustafad al-akhbar fi ahval-i Qazan wa Bulgar*, that the language of the *Qissayi Yusuf* did not differ from the language used in the epitaphs of Volga Bulgaria. In 1917, the German Orientalist C. Brockelmann attempted to determine the national affiliation of the poem, describing it as a Turkish composition. In 1918, the Turkish scholar F. Köprülüzade analyzed its poetic features and associated its structural form with genres that were traditional in early Turkic folk poetry [9].
 - By this period, the poem had been reprinted more than eighty times. According to J. Almaz, by 1960 scholars had identified thirty-three ancient copies of the work, all written by Tatar scholars [11, p. 33]. However, no copies of the poem have been discovered in Azerbaijan or Uzbekistan.

Results

Qul Ali's work traditionally begins with praise to Allah, blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and commendation of the caliphs.

Maqto'v va shukrlar bo'lsin bir Allohga,

Mulki doim, o'zi mangu ul mavloga.



Mulklarining ichida yo‘q tengdosh anga,
Ani boqiy ham buyuk deb bildik emdi.

As we can see, this narrative is constructed on the repetition of verses composed in twelve syllables. This very feature is also observed in Sulaymon Boqirg‘oniy’s “*Oxirzamon*” quintain.

4 4 4

Odam ato / o‘zi yig‘lab / yugrub kelgay, 12
Muso kalim / mursallarni / boshlab kelgay, 12
Muhammadning / bo‘yin quchib / qardosh tegay, 12
Ondin ortuq / taqi ajib / donglari vor [2, 59]. 12

When commencing his work, Qul Ali appeals to God, asking to be guided to the path of wisdom and to be granted the strength to utter words of wisdom.

4 4 4

Quvvat ber sen / hikmat yo‘li/dan borarga, 12
Aqlli qullar/ning ko‘nglin / boyitarga, 12
Yusuf savchi / holin so‘ylab / anglatirga, 12
Ilmim komil, / so‘zim go‘zal / bo‘lsin emdi. 12

From the above analysis, several important conclusions can be drawn:

1. **The influence of Yassavī tradition:** Khwāja Ahmad Yassavī and the Yassavī order he established exerted a profound and lasting influence on the literary traditions of many Turkic peoples, shaping both their spiritual worldview and poetic expression.
2. **Continuity through Qul ‘Alī:** Qul ‘Alī, though indirectly, can be regarded as a follower of Sulaymān Bāqirgānī, thereby continuing the Yassavī tradition in his own creative work. This positions him within the broader framework of Turkic Sufi literary heritage.
3. **Religious poetic convention:** As with most religious maṣnavīs, this work begins with praise (ḥamd) to God and blessings (na‘t) upon the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), followed by commendation of the caliphs. This reflects the conventional introductory structure of classical Islamic poetry.
4. **Preservation of form as well as content:** Not only the thematic substance but also the formal structure of the work preserves earlier traditions. The repetition of 11- and 12-syllable lines demonstrates continuity with



established poetic meters, showing that Qul ‘Alī consciously adhered to both the spiritual and stylistic models of his predecessors.

Conclusion

The literary and spiritual legacy of Khoja Ahmad Yasawi and his disciple Sulayman Baqirgani left a profound imprint on the intellectual and cultural life of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia and the Volga region. The core principles of the Yasawiyya order—divine love, spiritual purification, justice, and devotion to God—were further developed and artistically embodied in Baqirgani’s *hikmats* and narratives, thereby shaping the literary environment of the Tatars in innovative ways.

Qul Ali’s *Qissayi Yusuf* represents a significant continuation of this heritage, not only preserving thematic and spiritual traditions but also maintaining formal poetic structures characteristic of Yasawi’s legacy.

Thus, the works of Ahmad Yasawi and Sulayman Baqirgani occupy an essential place in the formation of Tatar literature, illustrating the continuity of literary and spiritual succession within the broader tradition of Turkic literature.

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