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THE REDISCOVERY OF MIRZO ULUGBEK'S IMAGE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Annotation: This study examines the renewed interpretation of Mirzo Ulugbek's image in contemporary literature, highlighting the transformation of his historical, scientific, and philosophical legacy in the modern cultural context. The analysis explores how post-Soviet national revival, expanded historical research, and global scholarly attention have contributed to a deeper understanding of Ulugbek as a multifaceted figure—an astronomer, mathematician, statesman, and humanist. Contemporary writers reinterpret his character with psychological nuance, philosophical depth, and a focus on intellectual freedom, emphasizing the enduring relevance of his scientific achievements, particularly the *Zij-i Jadid-i Kuragoni*. The study demonstrates that Ulugbek's image has evolved from a tragic historical figure into a universal symbol of enlightenment, rational inquiry, and cultural identity.

Keywords: Mirzo Ulugbek, contemporary literature, rediscovery, historical image, Timurid Renaissance, astronomical heritage, scientific legacy, cultural identity, *Zij-i Jadid-i Kuragoni*, psychological interpretation, national revival, intellectual history.

ПЕРЕОТКРЫТИЕ ОБРАЗА МИРЗО УЛУГБЕКА В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ

Аннотация: В данной работе рассматривается обновлённое осмысление образа Мирзо Улугбека в современной литературе, а также анализируется трансформация его исторического, научного и философского наследия в контексте современной культуры. Исследование показывает, что постсоветское культурное возрождение, расширение исторических исследований и международное внимание учёных способствовали более глубокому пониманию Улугбека как многогранной личности — астронома, математика, правителя и гуманиста. Современные писатели трактуют его образ с психологической глубиной, философской многослойностью и акцентом на интеллектуальную свободу, подчёркивая актуальность его научных достижений, особенно *Зидж-и Джадид-и Курагони*. Работа демонстрирует, что образ Улугбека развивается от трагической исторической фигуры до универсального символа просвещения, рационального познания и культурной идентичности.

Ключевые слова: Мирзо Улугбек, современная литература, переосмысление, исторический образ, Тимуридский Ренессанс, астрономическое наследие, научное наследие, культурная идентичность, *Зидж-и Джадид-и Курагони*, психологическая интерпретация, национальное возрождение, интеллектуальная история.



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The figure of Mirzo Ulugbek, the eminent 15th-century astronomer, mathematician, statesman, and cultural patron, has undergone a profound and multifaceted reinterpretation in contemporary literature, particularly within the intellectual climate that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent cultural revival in Uzbekistan. The rediscovery of his image has been shaped by new ideological paradigms, renewed access to historical sources, and a resurgence of national consciousness that seeks to understand the cosmopolitan, scientific, and humanistic dimensions of Ulugbek's legacy. Although classical literature of the early 20th century—represented by writers such as Abdulla Qodiriy, Oybek, and later Maqsd Shayxzoda—had already begun to reconstruct the intellectual and tragic essence of Ulugbek, the contemporary era has broadened this reconstruction with deeper psychological, philosophical, and epistemological interpretations.

The modern reevaluation of Ulugbek's personality owes much to the expansion of historical research in the post-Soviet period, including the works of scholars like Edward S. Kennedy, A. P. Youschkevitch, and George Saliba, whose studies on the Timurids' scientific traditions have influenced literary conceptualizations. Ulugbek's famous "Zij-i Jadid-i Kuragoni," completed in 1444, has regained international academic recognition as one of the most accurate astronomical catalogs of the pre-telescopic era, containing precise measurements of 1,018 stars. Contemporary literature increasingly emphasizes that these scientific achievements were not isolated acts of observation but the result of a highly advanced intellectual culture flourishing in Samarqand. This perspective positions Ulugbek not only as a ruler and scientist but as a symbol of the historical continuity of scientific rationalism in the region.

One of the most defining features of Ulugbek's modern literary rediscovery is the shift from a predominantly political-tragic portrayal toward a more sophisticated representation of his internal conflicts, philosophical reflections, and moral dilemmas. In early Soviet portrayals of the 1930s–1950s, which often reflected the ideological constraints of the period, Ulugbek was constructed primarily as a "martyr of science," a figure whose devotion to knowledge opposed the dark forces of religious conservatism. While this theme remains important, contemporary writers reinterpret it through psychological depth and cultural plurality. Post-independence literature, in particular, underscores that Ulugbek's conflict with his son, Abdullatif, was not merely a struggle between rationalism and fanaticism, but also a tragic manifestation of political fragmentation inherent within the Timurid dynasty and the shifting sociocultural landscape of the 15th century.

The influence of Maqsd Shayxzoda's 1961 drama "Mirzo Ulug'bek" continues to echo in modern literary thought because of its powerful dramaturgical exploration of betrayal, faith, and scientific destiny. Yet contemporary writers reinterpret Shayxzoda's vision through new philosophical lenses. While Shayxzoda concentrated on the tragic inevitability of Ulugbek's downfall, authors of the late 20th and early 21st centuries tend to depict his legacy as a triumph of intellectual endurance. The narrative emphasis is no longer on his physical execution in 1449 but on the survival and global dissemination of

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his scientific ideas. This approach aligns with the writings of the Uzbek historian and public intellectual Ibrohim Mo‘minov (1918–1978), who argued that Ulugbek’s scientific worldview predated aspects of the European Renaissance, particularly the mathematical innovations of Regiomontanus (Johannes Müller, 1436–1476). Modern literature integrates such historical arguments to emphasize Ulugbek’s global relevance.

In contemporary novels and essays, Ulugbek is increasingly presented as a multidimensional human being rather than a one-dimensional heroic symbol. The psychological complexity of his leadership, his doubts, his intellectual loneliness, and his emotional connection to the observatory he built in 1428–1429 become central narrative features. Writers explore how Ulugbek—despite being a monarch—lived a life governed more by the pursuit of knowledge than by political ambition. In this sense, Ulugbek is portrayed as an “intellectual king,” a rare archetype in world literature that aligns with characters such as Marcus Aurelius or Akbar the Great. Modern literary scholars like N. Komilov and Abduqodir Hayitmetov have highlighted the spiritual dimensions of Ulugbek’s thinking, describing him as a figure whose scientific rationality coexisted with profound metaphysical curiosity. This synthesis increasingly appears in literary depictions that focus on Ulugbek’s inner meditations beneath the night sky, transforming him into both a historical figure and a literary-philosophical motif.

The rediscovery of Ulugbek’s image is also shaped by contemporary cultural discourse on national identity. After Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, a vast body of literature emerged emphasizing the continuity of scientific and cultural development from the Timurid Renaissance to the modern era. This provided fertile ground for a renewed narrative in which Ulugbek symbolizes enlightenment, intellectual liberty, and cultural pride. Writers reflect on how the reconstruction of the Ulugbek Observatory in the 20th century—first partially excavated by V. L. Vyatkin in 1908 and later restored after 1964—serves as a metaphor for the revival of historical memory itself. In this sense, the observatory becomes a literary symbol of rediscovered identity: a material embodiment of the nation’s scientific past that anchors modern cultural aspirations.

The global dimension of Ulugbek’s reevaluation extends beyond Uzbek literature. In English-language scholarship, authors such as David King, C. B. Boyer, and S. M. Raza have contributed detailed studies of Islamic astronomical mathematics, giving Ulugbek a prominent place in world scientific history. These works influence contemporary writers who situate Ulugbek within a broader network of early modern scientific cultures, drawing comparisons with the observational precision later achieved by Tycho Brahe (1546–1601). The fact that Ulugbek’s stellar measurements deviated by only seconds of arc from modern values becomes a literary motif symbolizing the timeless accuracy of human intellect. Through such references, contemporary literature elevates Ulugbek’s character into a bridge between Eastern and Western scientific traditions.

In modern novels, short stories, and historical essays, Ulugbek’s relationships with historical figures such as Qozizoda Rumi (1364–1436), G‘iyosiddin Jamshid al-Kashi (d. 1429), and Ali Qushchi (1403–1474) receive increased narrative attention. Contemporary writers explore their intellectual companionship and dialogues, often reconstructing

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imagined scenes of scholarly debate in the Samarqand madrasa or the observatory. These depictions highlight the collaborative nature of scientific discovery and present Ulugbek not as an isolated genius but as a leader of a vibrant intellectual community. Such portrayals reflect modern interdisciplinary approaches that emphasize scientific teamwork, thus aligning historical fiction with contemporary academic values.

Another critical aspect of Ulugbek's modern literary image involves the moral and existential themes anchored in his tragic fate. Contemporary literature frequently explores the psychological shock he endured after the death of al-Kashi in 1429, as recorded in the astronomer's final letters. Writers reinterpret these letters as windows into Ulugbek's emotional world, emphasizing the human vulnerability behind the majestic façade of a ruler. His assassination in 1449, orchestrated by political factions supporting Abdullatif, is depicted not only as a personal tragedy but as a symbolic fracture between reason and power, between intellectual legacy and temporal authority. Yet, unlike earlier portrayals which focused heavily on victimization, contemporary narratives emphasize resilience: Ulugbek's legacy outlived political violence, inspiring generations long after the extinction of the Timurid dynasty.

The philosophical image of Ulugbek in contemporary literature is also reshaped by postmodern narrative techniques, which explore multiplicity, temporal layering, and alternative histories. Several modern works—especially in the 2010–2025 period—imagine conversations between Ulugbek and modern astronomers, create meditations on the meaning of cosmic measurement, or depict metafictional journeys in which Ulugbek's spirit observes the modern world. These literary strategies reflect contemporary global trends in historical fiction, where rigid chronology gives way to narrative plurality. Through such techniques, Ulugbek evolves into a timeless symbol of scientific curiosity and ethical reflection.

Importantly, the rediscovery of Ulugbek's literary image is intertwined with technological and cultural modernity. With the digital era's expansion of scientific communication, contemporary literature often reflects on how Ulugbek's astronomical methods—such as the use of the 40-meter meridian arc at the observatory—foreshadowed modern instrumentation. The juxtaposition of medieval observational astronomy and digital telescopic technology creates narrative bridges that emphasize continuity in human intellectual pursuit. Writers use Ulugbek's character to explore universal themes: the search for order in the cosmos, the ethical responsibilities of knowledge, and the tension between enlightenment and ignorance.

Contemporary literary representations also emphasize Ulugbek's pedagogical ideals. Modern educational discourse frequently quotes fragments attributed to him, such as his belief in the importance of rational inquiry and moral responsibility. Literature often situates Ulugbek as a precursor to modern scientific humanism, presenting him as a ruler who saw knowledge not merely as an instrument of power but as a moral duty to future generations. This interpretation highlights his establishment of the Samarqand madrasa in 1420, which contemporary writers depict as an intellectual sanctuary that prefigures today's universities.

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In summary, the rediscovery of Mirzo Ulugbek's image in contemporary literature is characterized by an intricate fusion of historical scholarship, psychological exploration, philosophical reflection, and cultural renaissance. Modern writers reinterpret Ulugbek as a symbol of scientific enlightenment, intellectual courage, and humanistic integrity, while simultaneously acknowledging the political and personal struggles that shaped his life. His character transcends historical boundaries, emerging as a timeless figure who embodies the universal quest for knowledge. This multidimensional literary reconstruction reflects the evolving relationship between memory, identity, and intellectual heritage in the contemporary world, illustrating how Ulugbek's legacy continues to inspire new generations across diverse cultural and scientific landscapes.

Conclusion

The contemporary literary rediscovery of Mirzo Ulugbek reveals a profound transformation in the understanding of his historical and intellectual legacy. Modern writers no longer view him solely as a tragic ruler or a victim of political betrayal but as a multidimensional figure whose life synthesized science, philosophy, humanism, and leadership. Through renewed scholarly research, post-Soviet cultural revival, and the rise of national consciousness, Ulugbek's image has been reinterpreted with greater psychological depth and philosophical richness. Contemporary literature emphasizes the universal relevance of his scientific achievements—particularly the *Zij-i Jadid-i Kuragoni*—and highlights his role as a pioneer of observational astronomy whose measurements remain remarkably accurate even by modern standards.

Writers increasingly focus on Ulugbek's intellectual courage, his devotion to rational inquiry, and his commitment to cultivating a vibrant community of scholars, including Qozizoda Rumi, al-Kashi, and Ali Qushchi. His tragic death is presented not as an endpoint but as evidence of the enduring tension between knowledge and power, enlightenment and fanaticism. Yet, in today's literary imagination, Ulugbek ultimately triumphs through the longevity of his ideas, which continue to shape global scientific history and cultural identity. Thus, the contemporary portrayal of Mirzo Ulugbek transcends the limits of historical biography and enters the realm of philosophical reflection and universal symbolism. He emerges as a timeless embodiment of intellectual resilience, scientific vision, and the human quest for truth—a figure whose legacy continues to inspire modern generations and whose rediscovery enriches both national culture and world literature.

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