



THE IMAGE OF QUEENS IN UZBEK HISTORICAL LITERATURE AND THEIR TRANSLATION: LEXICAL, STYLISTIC, AND SEMANTIC PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The representation of women in historical literature is a central concern in both literary criticism and translation studies. In Uzbek historical novels, female figures, particularly queens, function not only as participants in political and social events but also as symbolic embodiments of morality, spirituality, and cultural values. This paper examines the image of queens in Pirmul Qodirov's celebrated historical novel *Yulduzli tunlar* (*Starry Nights*), focusing on the lexical, stylistic, and semantic peculiarities of their depiction. Through comparative analysis of the Uzbek original and its translations, the study highlights how female characters are reinterpreted in cross-cultural contexts. The findings reveal that while Qodirov constructs queens such as Qutlug Nigar Khanum, Khanzada Begim, and Robiya as multidimensional figures, translations often simplify their images, reducing moral dignity to physical beauty and spirituality to fragility. The paper concludes that greater cultural sensitivity and translator awareness are needed to preserve the authenticity of female representations in Uzbek historical literature for international readers.

Introduction

The act of translation, particularly in the domain of historical literature, is more than the mechanical transfer of words; it is a cultural negotiation where identities, symbols, and ideologies are reimagined. Among the many elements that undergo transformation, the representation of women occupies a particularly significant place. Female characters in historical works are not only literary constructs but also bearers of moral values, family traditions, and cultural continuity (Bakhtin, 1981; Karimov, 2005).



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In Uzbek historical novels, women often appear as queens, princesses, and noblewomen whose roles transcend domestic spaces and extend into political, diplomatic, and cultural domains. These women are portrayed as negotiators of peace, patrons of the arts, and moral anchors of dynasties. Their representation thus embodies broader social and ideological discourses.

This paper takes Pirmqul Qodirov's *Yulduzli tunlar* (*Starry Nights*) as a case study. Widely recognized as one of the most important Uzbek historical novels, it narrates the fall of the Timurid dynasty and the tumultuous political events of the 15th–16th centuries. Within this historical framework, Qodirov devotes particular attention to the queens of the Timurid household, whose voices and images reflect both the grandeur and fragility of their times.

Literature Review

Translation studies has long emphasized the importance of culture in shaping translations. Susan Bassnett (2014) and André Lefevere (1992) argue that translation is a form of rewriting that inevitably reflects the target culture's literary norms and ideological frameworks. Similarly, Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory (1990) suggests that translations function within the cultural system of the target society, often adapting texts to fit its expectations. Hans Vermeer's skopos theory (1989) underscores that translation choices are guided by the purpose (skopos) of the text in the target culture.

In the Central Asian context, Shirinova (2025) draws attention to the divergence between Eastern and Western depictions of women: while Eastern traditions often present women as guardians of spirituality and morality, Western representations tend to foreground autonomy and individuality. This divergence directly impacts the translation of Uzbek historical texts, where queens and princesses embody collective values rather than individual desires.

Methodology

This study employs a **comparative qualitative approach** grounded in descriptive translation studies (Toury, 1995). The methodology consists of three steps:



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1. **Textual Analysis** – Examining the lexical, stylistic, and semantic features of queens' portrayals in the Uzbek original of *Yulduzli tunlar*.
 2. **Comparative Translation Study** – Analyzing Russian and English translations (Carol Ermakova's *Babur: Starry Nights*) to trace lexical, semantic, and cultural shifts.
 3. **Contextual Interpretation** – Evaluating how translation choices reflect broader cultural assumptions and gender ideologies.
- The analysis incorporates direct textual examples from Qodirov's original and their translations to illustrate specific transformations.

Findings

1. Lexical Features of Queens' Representation

Lexical choices are crucial in establishing the historical atmosphere and defining characters' roles. Qodirov's narrative employs archaic words, honorific titles, and culturally specific terminology to situate queens within the feudal order.

For instance:

- “*Axsi qasri tun og‘ushida tog‘ qoyasiga o‘xshab qorayib ko‘rinadi.*” (Qodirov, 2015, p. 24)

“Perched on a high hill, the Akhsi fortress looms darkly like a jagged cliff in the inky blackness of the night.” (Ermakova, p. 36)

Here, the word “*qasr*” denotes not only a fortress but also a political center and symbol of power. The translation renders it as “fortress,” which conveys the architectural meaning but not its symbolic weight as the heart of political life.

Another example:

- “*Mirzoning birinchi xotini Fotima Sulton, ikkinchi xotini Qutlug‘ Nig‘or xonim, o‘n sakkiz yoshlik qizi Xonzoda begim va o‘n yashar o‘g‘li Jahongir mirzo – hammasi o‘sha tanobiy uyga yig‘ilgan edilar.*” (Qodirov, 2015, p. 25)

“His first wife, Fatima Sultan, his second wife, Qutlug Nigar Khanim, his seventeen-year-old daughter, Lady Khanzada Begim and his ten-year-old son, Prince Jahangir, were already there.” (Ermakova, p. 36)



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Here, the Uzbek terms *mirzo*, *begim*, *xonim*, *sulton* are heavily charged with historical and cultural nuance. The translation replaces them with “prince,” “lady,” and “khanim,” thus partly flattening the hierarchy of Timurid titles.

Such lexical reductions risk misrepresenting the queens’ status, as the Uzbek terms carry connotations of power, lineage, and cultural prestige that are absent in their English counterparts.

2. Stylistic Refinement of Women’s Speech

Queens in *Yulduzli tunlar* are portrayed with refined and delicate speech patterns, characterized by courtesy, spirituality, and restraint. This aligns with feminist linguistic observations that women’s speech often emphasizes politeness, metaphor, and emotional nuance (Lakoff, 1975; Coates, 2013).

For example:

- “*Tangrim sizni ham panohida asrasin, Tohir og‘a!*” (Qodirov, 2015, p. 3)
“May the Almighty preserve you, Tahir...” (Ermakova, p. 17)
- “*Mening ham sizdan yiroqqa ketgim yo‘q... Lekin ne qilay... Qo‘rqaman!*” (Qodirov, 2015, p. 5)
“I don’t want to go, either. But what can I do? It’s dangerous here...!” (Ermakova, p. 18)

Robiya’s speech demonstrates tenderness and humility, contrasting with the directness of male characters. The translation, however, reduces the religious nuance of “*Tangrim sizni panohida asrasin*”, rendering it as a neutral blessing rather than a culturally embedded expression of piety.

3. Semantic Symbolism

In Qodirov’s text, queens are not merely defined by beauty but by moral dignity, spirituality, and resilience. For example, Qutlug Nigar Khanum is portrayed as a figure balancing personal emotions with the responsibilities of dynasty and state. Yet translations often reframe this symbolism. Words denoting resilience or moral strength are rendered with connotations of fragility or passivity, aligning with Western romantic ideals of femininity. This shift demonstrates how translation



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reshapes the semantic value of female characters, moving from Eastern ideals of social responsibility to Western notions of individual beauty.

Discussion

The analysis reveals that the translation of queens' images involves significant cultural reinterpretation. Lexical flattening reduces historical specificity, stylistic simplification diminishes the richness of women's voices, and semantic shifts alter the ideological weight of female representation.

This process reflects broader tendencies in translation. Lawrence Venuti (1995) describes domestication as the adaptation of foreign texts to target cultural norms, often erasing cultural difference. In the case of *Yulduzli tunlar*, domestication results in the transformation of queens into more conventional Western female figures.

At the same time, the translator's agency is evident. By choosing to emphasize beauty over dignity or by simplifying religious expressions, the translator reshapes the ideological dimensions of the text (Lefevere, 1992). The result is a translation that is linguistically accurate but culturally misaligned.

Conclusion

The queens in Qodirov's *Yulduzli tunlar* embody the complex interplay of politics, morality, and culture in Uzbek historical literature. Their representation is deeply rooted in the socio-historical context of the Timurid era and reflects Eastern values of dignity, spirituality, and responsibility.

Translation, however, often transforms these images. By reducing nuanced lexical items, simplifying stylistic expressions, and altering semantic symbolism, translations risk reshaping queens into figures that fit Western gender ideologies.

This study underscores the need for translators to engage in culturally sensitive practices that preserve the integrity of women's representation in historical literature. Future research might expand this inquiry by comparing multiple translations of Uzbek historical texts, exploring how different translators negotiate the tension between cultural fidelity and accessibility.



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