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Muhammadjon Hakimov and the Study of Alisher Navoi's Mahbub ul-Qulub Manuscripts

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Abstract: Manuscript studies play a crucial role in preserving and reconstructing the textual heritage of classical literature, ensuring that works are transmitted with fidelity to their original form. Alisher Navoi's Mahbub ul-Qulub, written in 1500, is among his most widely copied works, yet earlier editions by Kononov and Shamsiyev relied on a limited number of manuscripts, leading to textual inaccuracies and omissions. Despite the abundance of reliable copies in Uzbekistan's manuscript collections, no comprehensive comparative analysis had been undertaken to establish an authoritative version of Mahbub ul-Qulub. This study, based on Muhammadjon Hakimov's research, examines 19 manuscripts from the H. Sulaimanov Institute of Manuscripts to identify the most complete and textually accurate sources for a critical edition. Hakimov's comparative and codicological analysis classified seven manuscripts as mo'tabar nusxalar (authoritative copies), including MS 316, 526, 2589, 25-11, 2913-11, 1429-11, and 1530. These copies, dating from the early 19th to the 20th century, preserve the text with minimal errors and demonstrate the wide geographic and temporal dissemination of the work. The study applies rigorous textological and source-critical methods to Uzbek classical literature, introducing a systematic framework for evaluating manuscripts based on completeness, preservation, and fidelity. Hakimov's findings provide the foundation for preparing a corrected scholarly edition of Mahbub ul-Qulub and contribute to safeguarding Uzbekistan's cultural heritage, showing how critical manuscript studies strengthen both academic research and the preservation of national literary identity.

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1. Introduction

Mahbub ul-Qulub is an ethical-didactic prose work and the final creation of Alisher Navoi, written in 1500. Divided into three sections – the first depicting the conditions and behaviour of different social groups, the second expounding on ethical virtues, and the third presenting a collection of didactic maxims and parables – it holds a prominent place in Uzbek literature. Since its composition, Mahbub ul-Qulub has been widely studied and cherished, becoming one of the most frequently copied works in Navoi's oeuvre. In fact, it is reported to be the Navoi work with the greatest number of surviving manuscript copies [1].

In the Soviet era, a collated text of Mahbub ul-Qulub was prepared by A. N. Kononov around the time of Navoi's 500th anniversary. Kononov's edition was based mainly on two manuscripts (from Moscow and St. Petersburg collections) supplemented by five others in a limited capacity. It was a valuable start but contained significant inaccuracies

and omissions. Porso Shamsiyev's 1966 Uzbek edition (in Navoi's collected works) acknowledged Kononov's effort while noting its shortcomings. Both editions, derived from limited sources, did not fully capture Navoi's original text. Scholars have emphasised that producing a definitive edition requires consulting a broader range of reliable manuscripts[2].

Uzbekistan's manuscript collections hold many authoritative copies of Mahbub ul-Qulub that were not utilised in those earlier editions. Recognising this gap, the scholar Muhammadjon Hakimov – a leading expert in manuscript and source studies – undertook a comprehensive study of Navoi's manuscript heritage. In 1983, Hakimov published a catalogue describing 254 manuscripts of 24 Navoi works held at the H. Sulaimanov Institute of Manuscripts, including 19 copies of Mahbub ul-Qulub[3]. This catalogue, compiled with scholarly rigour and extensive indices, remains a foundational resource for research on Navoi's manuscripts. These 19 manuscripts vary in form: four are part of Navoi's collected works (kulliyot), two are bound with Navoi's poetry collections (devons), one is copied alongside Hamsa, and another with Hamsa plus Tarixi Mulki Ajam. By examining this wide range of sources, Hakimov identified which copies of Mahbub ul-Qulub are the most complete and textually reliable for establishing an accurate version of the text[4].

2. Materials and Methods

This study draws on the 19 manuscript copies of Mahbub ul-Qulub described by Hakimov in his 1983 catalogue. All these manuscripts are preserved in the H. Sulaimanov Institute of Manuscripts. They include both standalone copies of Mahbub ul-Qulub and versions embedded in composite volumes (kulliyot) of Navoi's works. Each manuscript is identified by an institute inventory number (e.g., 316, 526, 2589). Key features of each copy – such as the number of folios, language and script (Chagatai Turkic language in nasta'liq script), presence of catchwords (poygir), completeness of the text, and any colophon information (copying date, place, scribe) – were documented for analysis[5].

Hakimov utilised comparative textological analysis to evaluate the manuscripts. He collated the text of Mahbub ul-Qulub across the different copies, noting textual variants, omissions, and additions in each. By comparing these differences, he determined which manuscripts were the most complete and closest to Navoi's original wording. Each manuscript was also examined codicologically: physical attributes (page size, layout, binding, condition) and palaeographic features (handwriting style and quality) were recorded, since these factors indicate the care taken by the copyist[6].

Based on the evidence, Hakimov classified the copies into categories of textual quality. Complete, well-preserved copies with accurate texts were deemed mo'tabar nusxalar ("authoritative copies"), whereas average-quality copies were labelled oddiy nusxalar ("ordinary copies"); fragments or copies missing sections were noted as incomplete. This categorisation accords with principles of textual criticism in Uzbek literary studies, which emphasise using the most authentic sources for scholarly editions. Hakimov also used internal clues (such as handwriting style and paper quality) to estimate dates for undated manuscripts and, drawing on his knowledge of Navoi's copyists, even to suggest the likely scribe or region of origin when a colophon was not present. This demonstrates a thorough source-critical approach[7].

3. Results and Discussion

Hakimov's comparative study of the 19 manuscripts yielded valuable insights into which copies of Mahbub ul-Qulub are most authoritative. He highlighted seven manuscripts as particularly important due to their completeness, preservation, and fidelity to the text: MS 316, 526, 2589, 25–11, 2913–11, 1429–11, and 1530. Hakimov classified all of these as mo'tabar nusxalar, or authoritative copies[8]. They range in date from the early

19th to the mid-20th century, reflecting the broad geographic spread of Navoi's literary influence. A brief overview of each key manuscript is given below:

- MS 316: A complete kulliyot volume containing Mahbub ul-Qulub (Inventory № 316), copied by Abdurahim ibn Muhammad Fozil Qoshg'ari in Kashgar in 1824–1830, is one of the most authoritative sources. This manuscript preserves the full text in excellent condition, with the beginning and ending intact. Its completeness and careful compilation make it a reliable base text for the work[9].
- MS 526: Inventory № 526 is another kulliyot manuscript, transcribed in 1820 in Kokand by Mirzo Muhammad Nazar. It comprises 36 folios of Mahbub ul-Qulub in very good condition. The text in this copy begins and ends in the standard way (no missing sections), indicating that it faithfully reproduces the original. MS 526 is thus considered a high-quality early 19th-century copy[10].
- MS 2589: Manuscript № 2589 is part of a collected works copied by Xojaniyoz binni Mullo Muhammad Mo'min Qulixoja around 1830–1832. Spanning 53 folios, this copy is well preserved and complete. Its consistency with other early 19th-century copies confirms a stable transmission of the text during that period[11].
- MS 25–11: The copy catalogued as № 25–11, completed in 1829–1830, is singled out by Hakimov as “one of the best copies” for its accuracy and completeness. Although the scribe's name is not recorded, it was meticulously copied (likely alongside a Navoi poetry collection) in a neat nasta'liq script with full diacritical marks and catchwords. Encompassing 74 folios, MS 25–11 is exceptionally clear and well-preserved, and Hakimov regarded it as a model source for a critical edition.
- MS 2913–11: Manuscript № 2913–11 includes Mahbub ul-Qulub together with Navoi's Hamsa, and was copied by Muhammad Tohirxoja of Shahrhisabz circa 1828–1830. It consists of 32 folios and is textually reliable: aside from a few couplets added in the margin by the scribe to correct minor omissions, it contains the full text. MS 2913–11 is in good condition with catchwords largely intact, making it a valuable comparative source[12].
- MS 1429–11: Inventory № 1429–11, copied in 1832–1833 (scribe unknown), is another complete and well-executed manuscript. Bound with Hamsa and Tarixi Mulki Ajam, it spans 21 folios of Mahbub ul-Qulub. The text in this copy is written in an elegant, clear hand and shows no omissions. Its neatness and fidelity led Hakimov to count it among the most trustworthy copies.
- MS 1530: Manuscript № 1530 is a 20th-century copy (dated 1939) from Khorezm, penned by the calligrapher Muhirkan Xudoybergan Devon. Despite its later date, it is considered an authoritative copy due to its high textual accuracy and beautiful nasta'liq calligraphy. Hakimov even appraised MS 1530 as an outstanding example of the calligrapher's art in manuscript copying. With 89 folios, MS 1530 exemplifies how even a modern-era manuscript can be valuable for textual scholarship when produced with care.

In addition to these highlighted copies, Hakimov's catalogue detailed several other manuscripts of Mahbub ul-Qulub that were either incomplete or of ordinary quality. For example, MS 919–111 contains only the introduction and first few sections of the work (a fragment), and MS 1553–11 lacks its final pages. Such copies, while part of the textual tradition, are less useful for establishing the full text. Notably, Hakimov observed that none of the 19 manuscripts he examined — even the most authoritative ones — had been utilised in previous scholarly research or editions of Mahbub ul-Qulub. This indicates that earlier editors overlooked significant primary sources, underscoring the importance of Hakimov's contribution in bringing these manuscripts to light[13].

Hakimov's approach of comparing multiple manuscripts adheres to fundamental principles of textual criticism: examining a broad base of sources yields a more reliable reconstruction of the original work. The variants and corrections he recorded (such as noting where a couplet was missing in one copy and supplied in the margin) provide

insight into how the text was transmitted and copied in different places and times. His detailed codicological observations (identifying scribes, dates, script styles, etc.) also enrich our understanding of the historical context in which these copies were produced. Overall, the results demonstrate the value of a rigorous source-critical method, where each manuscript is treated not only as a carrier of the text but also as a historical artefact that illuminates Navoi's textual legacy[14].

For instance, the presence of an authoritative 1820s manuscript from Kashgar (in present-day western China) alongside a meticulously copied 1939 Khorezmian manuscript demonstrates that Mahbub ul-Qulub was continuously valued and transmitted across diverse regions and well into the modern era. Such evidence attests to the enduring appeal of Navoi's work and the pan-Central Asian scope of its manuscript tradition[15].

4. Conclusion

In summary, Muhammadjon Hakimov's research on Mahbub ul-Qulub manuscripts has identified the most reliable sources for this work and significantly clarified its textual history. By cataloguing and comparing 19 copies, he showed that Mahbub ul-Qulub was widely disseminated and that at least seven of these copies (MS 316, 526, 2589, 25–11, 2913–11, 1429–11, 1530) preserve the text in full with minimal errors. These manuscripts constitute a critical foundation for any future scholarly edition of Mahbub ul-Qulub.

Earlier published editions, based on limited manuscripts, did not fully capture Navoi's original text. Hakimov's work demonstrates that a definitive edition must utilise the broad range of available reliable manuscripts to ensure accuracy. His methodology – meticulous description of each source and systematic cross-comparison – provides a model for textological research on classical literature. Applying such methods can resolve lingering textual uncertainties by basing the edited text on the best manuscript evidence and cross-verifying it with other copies. For instance, if a couplet is missing or illegible in one manuscript, it can be supplied from another copy, and variant wordings can be evaluated to deduce the original phrasing. This approach greatly increases the accuracy of the resulting text.

Beyond preparing the ground for a new edition, Hakimov's study contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage. Each manuscript of Mahbub ul-Qulub is not only a textual source but also a piece of history reflecting the devotion of past scribes and readers to Navoi's work. By bringing these documents into academic discourse, Hakimov has ensured that they will inform and enrich future scholarship on Navoi. Researchers building on this foundation can confidently produce a corrected critical text of Mahbub ul-Qulub. In doing so, they will be carrying forward the methodological framework that Hakimov established for rigorous, source-based scholarship in Uzbek literature.

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