



FOLKLORE STUDIES IN THE SAMARKAND SCHOLARLY ENVIRONMENT OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract. *This article examines folklore studies in the Samarkand scholarly environment of the early twentieth century. It analyzes how oral tradition became an object of scholarly attention through collection, recording, classification, interpretation, and academic circulation. The study focuses on Jadid intellectual networks, G'ozī Olim Yunusov's expeditions, Hodi Zarif's terminology and classification of bakhshi schools, the role of Samarkand educators, the use of folklore in textbooks, and the institutional contexts that connected oral creativity with literary history. The article argues that Samarkand folklore studies were not merely collecting activity, but a methodological process that transformed oral heritage into a scholarly source for Uzbek literary historiography and national cultural memory.*

Keywords: *Samarkand scholarly environment; folklore studies; oral tradition; Uzbek folklore; collection; classification; interpretation; folk epics; source criticism; national literary heritage.*

Annotatsiya. *Maqolada XX asr boshlaridagi Samarqand ilmiy muhitida folklorshunoslik izlanishlari tahlil qilinadi. Unda xalq og'zaki ijodi materiallarining to'planishi, yozib olinishi, tasniflanishi, talqin qilinishi va ilmiy muomalaga kiritilishi jarayoni yoritiladi. Tadqiqotda jadid intellektual tarmoqlari, G'ozī Olim Yunusov ekspeditsiyalari, Hodi Zarifning folklor terminologiyasi va baxshichilik maktablari tasnifi, Samarqand pedagoglari faoliyati, darsliklarda folklordan foydalanish hamda og'zaki ijodni adabiyot tarixi bilan bog'lagan institutsional*

sharoitlar ko'rib chiqiladi. Xulosa qilinishicha, Samarqand folklorshunosligi oddiy to'plovchilik emas, balki og'zaki merosni o'zbek adabiy tarixshunosligi va milliy madaniy xotira uchun ilmiy manbaga aylantirgan metodologik jarayon bo'lgan.

Kalit so'zlar: *Samarqand ilmiy muhiti; folklorshunoslik; og'zaki an'ana; o'zbek folklori; to'plash; tasniflash; talqin; xalq dostonlari; manbashunoslik; milliy adabiy meros.*

Аннотация. *В статье анализируются фольклористические исследования в самаркандской научной среде начала XX века. Рассматривается процесс превращения устной традиции в объект научного внимания через собирание, запись, классификацию, интерпретацию и введение в академический оборот. Особое внимание уделяется джадидским интеллектуальным связям, экспедициям Гози Олима Юнусова, терминологии и классификации бахшичиликских школ Ходи Зарифа, деятельности самаркандских педагогов, использованию фольклора в учебниках и институциональным условиям, связавшим устное творчество с историей литературы. Делается вывод, что самаркандская фольклористика была не простым собирательством, а методологическим процессом превращения устного наследия в научный источник для узбекской литературной историографии и национальной культурной памяти.*

Ключевые слова: *самаркандская научная среда; фольклористика; устная традиция; узбекский фольклор; собирание; классификация; интерпретация; народные эпосы; источниковедение; национальное литературное наследие.*

INTRODUCTION. Folklore studies in the Samarkand scholarly environment of the early twentieth century should not be understood as a simple activity of gathering old songs, tales, proverbs, or epic fragments. It was part of a larger intellectual transformation in which oral tradition began to be treated as evidence: evidence of collective memory, folk poetic thinking, local cultural identity, educational reform, and the deeper historical foundations of Uzbek literary culture.

When a proverb entered a textbook, when a bakhshi's performance was written down, when a local intellectual helped an expedition locate performers, or when a scholar classified epic schools, folklore ceased to be only a living oral practice and became a scholarly source.

The Samarkand environment was especially important because it joined several layers of cultural life. It was a center of Jadid reform, new-method education, bilingual literary exchange, publishing activity, and local scholarly networks. Mahmudxo'ja Behbudiy, Abduqodir Shakuriy, Hoji Muin, Sadriddin Ayniy, Vadud Mahmud, G'ozzi Olim Yunusov, Hodi Zarif, and other figures appear in the available evidence not as isolated individuals but as participants in a dense intellectual milieu where education, literature, folklore, journalism, and cultural reform were intertwined [Islamova, 2020, p. 364; Qurbonova, 2025, p. 114–116; Ortiqov, 2025, p. 407–408]. The source base used in this article documents that interaction between Samarkand's educational and literary networks and the early scholarly treatment of folklore.

The central research problem is methodological: how did oral tradition become a scholarly object in Samarkand-related intellectual practice? The available sources show several connected stages. First, folklore was valued by Jadid intellectuals as a means of public education and national awakening [Almazova, Kemper, 2024, p. 205; Akbarov, Tojimatova, 2021, p. 22]. Second, it was collected in the field, especially through early expeditions led by G'ozzi Olim Yunusov to Sirdaryo and Samarkand [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 2]. Third, it was classified through the concept of bakhshi or epic schools, especially in Hodi Zarif's distinction of Qo'rg'on, Bulung'ur, and Shahrisabz schools [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 3]. Fourth, it was interpreted as literary, pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural evidence [Shomurodova, 2024, p. 382; History of Uzbek Folklore, n.d., p. 1–3].

This article argues that folklore studies in the Samarkand scholarly environment formed through the interaction of collection, textual recording, genre classification, scholarly interpretation, publication culture, and institutional support.

Oral tradition became part of academic knowledge only when it was recorded, attributed, preserved, classified, commented upon, and linked to literary history and national heritage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS. The materials used in this study include scholarly articles on the Jadid movement, Samarkand educational reform, Sadriddin Ayniy's pedagogical activity, G'ozī Olim Yunusov's expeditions, Hodi Zarif's role in Uzbek folklore studies, local lore research, museum and ethnographic materials, Shashmaqom studies, and general studies on Uzbek folklore. The evidence includes page-specific data on early twentieth-century folklore collection, Jadid education, Samarkand intellectual networks, folklore in textbooks, the emergence of the term "folklore", and the classification of bakhshi schools [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 1–3; Ortiqov, 2025, p. 407–408; Qurbonova, 2025, p. 114–116; Shomurodova, 2024, p. 380–382].

The study uses source criticism to distinguish between direct evidence, later interpretation, institutional description, and broader contextual sources. For example, Ruzieva's article provides direct evidence on the collection of folklore materials by G'ozī Olim Yunusov and the role of Samarkand intellectuals in that process [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 1–2]. Qurbonova and Shomurodova provide evidence for the Samarkand educational environment and Sadriddin Ayniy's engagement with textbooks, pedagogy, and folklore-based didactic material [Qurbonova, 2025, p. 114–116; Shomurodova, 2024, p. 381–382]. Almazova and Kemper provide a broader conceptual frame for Jadid educational reform and the use of vernacular language and folklore in pedagogy [Almazova, Kemper, 2024, p. 200–205].

The article also uses historical-comparative analysis to connect Samarkand's folklore-related work with broader Turkestan Jadidism, early Soviet academic frameworks, local lore, museum practice, and the development of Uzbek folklore studies. Genre-typological analysis is applied to epic schools, proverbs, oral tales, songs, ritual elements, and Shashmaqom where the sources support such discussion [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 3; History of Uzbek Folklore, n.d., p. 1–3; Shashmaqom, n.d., p. 1–2]. Contextual analysis helps interpret folklore not as a passive remnant of the past

but as a material shaped by educational reform, national identity, local networks, and scholarly institutions.

RESULTS. 1. The Samarkand scholarly environment and the rise of folklore studies. The Samarkand scholarly environment of the early twentieth century developed from overlapping educational, literary, and reformist networks. The evidence identifies Mahmudxo‘ja Behbudiy, Abduqodir Shakuriy, and Saidahmad Siddiqiy Ajziy as important Jadid figures in the Samarkand region who contributed to the spread of enlightenment [To‘xtanazarov, 2025, p. 16]. Behbudiy himself was born near Samarkand and is described as one of the founders of the Jadid movement in Turkestan, an Islamic scholar, educator, and dramatist [Akbarov, Tojimatova, 2021, p. 21]. Jadids opened new-method schools, wrote textbooks, published newspapers and journals, and organized theatre groups to spread their ideas among the people [Akbarov, Tojimatova, 2021, p. 21].

This context matters because folklore studies did not emerge in isolation from educational and literary reform. Jadidism is described by historians as a broad socio-cultural reform movement involving education and the press, directed against older methods and superstition [Almazova, Kemper, 2024, p. 200]. Jadids expressed their ideas in modern genres and mass media using a vernacular language understandable to the people [Almazova, Kemper, 2024, p. 201]. This vernacular turn created a favorable environment for the scholarly and pedagogical use of oral tradition, because folklore already belonged to the expressive world of ordinary speech, popular memory, and moral instruction.

In Samarkand, the educational environment was reinforced by figures such as Shakuriy, Hoji Muin, and Ismatulla Rahmatullayev. Shakuriy promoted new-method schools and worked to supply them with textbooks and manuals [Ortiqov, 2025, p. 407–408]. In 1901 he introduced a local practice of educating boys and girls in separate classes within the school he founded [Ortiqov, 2025, p. 408]. Ismatulla Rahmatullayev produced the alphabet book “Rahbari maktab”, while Hoji Muin published “Rahnamoyi savod” and other pedagogical works [Ortiqov, 2025, p. 408].

These developments formed an environment in which folklore could enter education as moral example, linguistic material, and national cultural content.

2. Oral tradition as a source for literary scholarship

Folklore became significant because it was understood as more than entertainment. The Jadid movement used literature, oral stories, proverbs, and pedagogical texts to influence the moral and intellectual development of students. Almazova and Kemper note that within the Jadid reform of education, literature and oral folk materials such as stories and proverbs were used as important pedagogical tools for developing children's minds [Almazova, Kemper, 2024, p. 205]. This is a crucial point: folklore entered modern education not simply as "old tradition" but as structured material for intellectual and ethical training.

Behbudiy and his followers emphasized the rational use of national values and folk oral stories in the education of the complete human being [Akbarov, Tojimatova, 2021, p. 22]. Behbudiy's works in Samarkand are described as valuable not only for literary scholars but also for researchers of folk culture and pedagogical history [Akbarov, Tojimatova, 2021, p. 23–24]. This shows that early twentieth-century Samarkand intellectual culture treated folklore as a multi-disciplinary source: it could serve literature, pedagogy, cultural history, and social reform.

Sadriddin Ayniy's textbook practice further shows how folklore became educational material. Shomurodova notes that Ayniy's skill as a textbook writer was supported by his poetic ability, his strong command of literary and Sufi sources, and his appropriate use of folk oral creativity, especially proverbs [Shomurodova, 2024, p. 382]. His "Tahsib us-sibyon" was republished in Samarkand in 1917 under the patronage of the "Ma'rifat" library, and a copy is preserved in Ayniy's Samarkand house-museum [Shomurodova, 2024, p. 382]. Such evidence shows how folklore, literary sources, pedagogy, and publication culture intersected in the Samarkand scholarly environment.

3. Collection and recording of folklore materials. The collection of folklore materials became more systematic in the early 1920s. Ruzieva states that Abdurauf

Fitrat, G'ozil Olim Yunusov, and Elbek occupied a special place in collecting, classifying, and studying examples of Uzbek oral creativity [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 1]. The same study records that in the early 1920s G'ozil Olim Yunusov organized expeditions to Sirdaryo and Samarkand, during which examples of folklore were written down directly from folk performers [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 2]. This evidence is central: it marks the movement from oral performance to written scholarly record.

The recording process depended on local collaboration. G'ozil Olim Yunusov, in his article "O'zbeklar ichida oshnolik ishi", thanked Samarkand intellectuals such as Zarif Qodirov and Vadud Mahmudov for helping with folklore collection [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 2]. This detail demonstrates that folklore collection was not an abstract academic operation imposed from outside. It involved local knowledge, social networks, trust, and the mediation of intellectuals who knew performers, places, and traditions.

The sources also indicate that the early Soviet period redirected some Jadid intellectuals toward relatively "neutral" scholarly fields such as folklore and linguistics, though this did not protect them from repression [Yakhshiboev, 2020, p. 7]. This statement should be interpreted cautiously, but it helps explain why folklore studies could become a field where national heritage, language, and culture were studied under changing political conditions. Folklore collection thus carried both scholarly and cultural significance.

4. Institutional conditions and scholarly networks. The institutional side of Samarkand-related folklore studies was shaped by schools, periodicals, commissions, museums, and universities. One source notes that in 1921 a scientific commission for studying the life of Turkestan's indigenous population supported systematic folklore expeditions in the Zarafshan Valley and neighboring regions [Folklore Studies in the Samarkand Scholarly Environment, 2024, electronic source]. Although this is an electronic source without exact pagination, it corresponds to the broader evidence of organized fieldwork in the early 1920s [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 2].

Sadriddin Ayniy's Samarkand connections show the institutional density of the environment. In spring 1908 Ayniy and Hamidxo'ja Mehriy first came to Samarkand, where Ayniy met Abduqodir Shakuriy, Ismatulla Rahmatullazoda, and Mahmudxo'ja Behbudiy [Qurbonova, 2025, p. 114]. Ayniy visited Shakuriy's new-method school in Rajabamin near Samarkand and later regularly attended its annual examinations [Qurbonova, 2025, p. 114]. He applied the educational methods learned from Jadid schools in Samarkand and Tashkent to his own school [Qurbonova, 2025, p. 115]. These facts show that pedagogical experimentation, literary education, and local cultural materials circulated between cities and institutions.

In 1927, Sadriddin Ayniy and Abdurauf Fitrat played important roles in the establishment of the Higher Pedagogical Institute in Samarkand, especially in founding the Department of Uzbek Classical Literature [Qurbonova, 2025, p. 115]. Later, Ayniy worked at Samarkand State University from 1946 to 1950, chaired the literature department, and helped train many scholars [Qurbonova, 2025, p. 116]. Although this latter period goes beyond the earliest phase of folklore collection, it illustrates the continuity from Jadid educational networks to academic humanities institutions.

5. Classification: terminology and bakhshi schools. Folklore studies become scholarly when collected material is organized. One of the key moments in Uzbek folklore studies was the introduction of terminology and classification. Ruzieva records that in 1932 Hodi Zarif introduced the term "folklore" into Uzbek folklore scholarship and titled his first book for university students "O'zbek folklori" [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 3]. This is not simply a lexical fact. Naming the field helped define the object of study, separate it from general literature or ethnography, and prepare it for academic teaching.

Hodi Zarif also classified epic performance traditions. He identified that each epic performer or group of performers had its own path and style, conditionally calling these groups bakhshi schools and distinguishing Qo'rg'on, Bulung'ur, and

Shahrisabz schools [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 3]. This was a major conceptual step. It meant that a folk epic was no longer treated as a single anonymous text. It had performers, schools, styles, regional affiliations, and transmission histories.

The concept of a school is important because folklore is simultaneously stable and variable. According to one general account of Uzbek folklore, oral works pass from mouth to mouth and from master to disciple, preserving relative stability in both text and performance style [History of Uzbek Folklore, n.d., p. 3]. Yet every performance is also a specific variant, recreated in the act of performance and entering new life circumstances [History of Uzbek Folklore, n.d., p. 3]. Zarif's classification of bakhshi schools can be understood as a way of managing this tension between continuity and variation.

6. Folklore, textbooks, and written literary culture. Folklore in the Samarkand scholarly environment was closely connected with written education. Shakuriy, Hoji Muin, Ismatulla Rahmatullayev, and Ayniy were not only reformers of schooling; they were also creators and mediators of texts [Ortiqov, 2025, p. 407–408; Qurbonova, 2025, p. 114–115]. Their work suggests that folklore moved into written culture through primers, textbooks, reading books, moral stories, and pedagogical examples.

Ayniy's textbook "Tahsib us-sibyon" is a good example. It combined secular and religious knowledge, practice and theory, prose and verse [Shomurodova, 2024, p. 382]. It also drew on proverbs and other oral materials where appropriate [Shomurodova, 2024, p. 382]. This reveals the mixed structure of early twentieth-century educational texts: they did not separate literary instruction, moral education, folk wisdom, and religious-cultural knowledge as sharply as later disciplinary systems might.

Jadid pedagogy more broadly valued the use of understandable language and vernacular forms. Jadidism demanded the introduction of phonetic teaching methods and alphabets in the mother tongue [Almazova, Kemper, 2024, p. 205]. In such a setting, folklore and oral language were useful because they were close to the speech

world of learners. Folklore therefore functioned as both content and method: it transmitted values and helped bridge oral familiarity with written education.

7. Folklore and written literature. Samarkand folklore studies also developed through awareness of the relationship between oral tradition and written literature. Jadid prose and drama used oral traditions and the possibilities of folk language to expose social problems and educate the people [Yakhshiboev, 2020, p. 30]. Behbudiy's "Padarkush" is identified as a drama that founded a new genre in Uzbek literature and exposed not only the consequences of ignorance but also social hierarchy and mentality [Yakhshiboev, 2020, p. 26]. Although "Padarkush" is not folklore, it shows how vernacular speech, social custom, and public performance became part of new literary forms.

Behbudiy also criticized excessive ceremonial spending in weddings and funerals that led many families into poverty [Yakhshiboev, 2020, p. 27]. This is relevant to folklore studies because rituals, customs, and oral narratives were not treated only as sacred tradition; they could also be critically examined. Jadid intellectuals did not simply preserve folk culture; they evaluated it, selected from it, and sometimes argued for reform.

The sources also point to Shashmaqom as a major oral-musical tradition connected with Central Asia, especially Bukhara and Samarkand [Shashmaqom, n.d., p. 1]. Its poetry was based on classical lyric poetry and folk songs [Shashmaqom, n.d., p. 1]. From the early twentieth century, Shashmaqom was written down in musical notation, published in collections, studied scientifically, and introduced into modern music education [Shashmaqom, n.d., p. 1]. This shows that the transformation of oral tradition into scholarly and educational material was not limited to verbal folklore; it also included musical heritage.

8. Local lore, museums, and the preservation of folk culture. Folklore studies in Samarkand were also linked with local lore and museum practice. Local lore studies examine small territories – cities, villages, and regions – using historical, ethnographic, social, and other forms of evidence [Urinov, 2021, p. 178]. From this

perspective, folklore and folk applied art are not secondary materials; they are essential sources for understanding local cultural identity [Urinov, 2021, p. 179].

Urinov states that local events, concrete information, and examples of folklore and folk applied art are systematically studied and collected in local lore research [Urinov, 2021, p. 178]. He also notes that ethnographic and folklore materials collected by local historians broaden young people's worldview and contribute to the socio-cultural development of a region [Urinov, 2021, p. 178]. This helps explain why folklore collection in Samarkand should be understood not only as philological activity but also as regional cultural documentation.

Museum evidence strengthens this interpretation. Samarkand's local history museum developed under different names, including the Samarkand Statistical Committee Museum from 1896 to 1911 and the Samarkand City Museum from 1911 to 1918 [Yuldasheva, Soliev, 2024, p. 326]. Museum collections in Uzbekistan include archaeological, ethnographic, numismatic, and material-cultural objects that reflect historical and cultural heritage [Yuldasheva, Soliev, 2024, p. 324]. Museums are described as cultural "gene pools" that help restore collective memory [Yuldasheva, Soliev, 2024, p. 323]. This institutional context is important: folklore materials did not circulate only in books and classrooms; they were part of a broader culture of collecting, preserving, and interpreting heritage.

DISCUSSION. The evidence shows that folklore studies in the Samarkand scholarly environment developed through a sequence of interrelated stages: performance, collection, recording, classification, interpretation, publication, and academic circulation. These stages should not be collapsed into one another. A folklore performance is a living event. Collection selects the performance and brings it into contact with scholarship. Recording transforms the oral event into a written or notated object. Classification places it into genre, school, or regional categories. Interpretation gives it literary, historical, pedagogical, or cultural meaning. Publication and archival preservation make it available for future research.

Collection was therefore never neutral. When G‘ozi Olim Yunusov organized expeditions to Sirdaryo and Samarkand and wrote down folklore directly from performers, he made choices about where to go, whom to listen to, what to record, and how to preserve the performance in writing [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 2]. His gratitude to Samarkand intellectuals such as Zarif Qodirov and Vadud Mahmudov shows that collection depended on local mediation [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 2]. The collector’s network shaped the archive.

Classification also shaped interpretation. Hodi Zarif’s distinction of Qo‘rg‘on, Bulung‘ur, and Shahrisabz schools was not a mere label [Ruzieva, 2024, p. 3]. It organized performance traditions into scholarly categories and allowed researchers to discuss style, continuity, region, and transmission. The concept of bakhshi schools transformed epic performance into a structured object of study. It also made possible later comparisons between performers, regions, and variants.

Interpretation gave folklore its place in literary history and cultural memory. In Jadid pedagogy, stories and proverbs were useful for moral and intellectual education [Almazova, Kemper, 2024, p. 205]. In Behbudiy’s reformist context, folk stories and national values could be used for the education of a morally complete person [Akbarov, Tojimatova, 2021, p. 22]. In Ayniy’s textbook practice, proverbs and oral materials entered written pedagogy [Shomurodova, 2024, p. 382]. In Shashmaqom, oral musical tradition was written down, published, studied, and institutionalized [Shashmaqom, n.d., p. 1]. These examples show that folklore was interpreted not only as “heritage” but also as a tool of education, literary formation, and cultural self-understanding.

The relationship between Jadid heritage and Soviet-era scholarly frameworks should be treated carefully. Jadid intellectuals valued vernacular expression, education, national self-awareness, and the critical reform of social customs [Almazova, Kemper, 2024, p. 201, 205, 208; Yakhshiboev, 2020, p. 26–30]. Early Soviet institutions created new possibilities for commissions, archives, departments, and academic study, but they also existed within political pressures [Yakhshiboev,

2020, p. 7]. The available evidence supports a cautious conclusion: Samarkand folklore studies emerged from the convergence of Jadid cultural interest in folk creativity and the institutionalization of scholarship in the early Soviet period.

The Samarkand scholarly environment was thus not merely a place where folklore was “collected”. It was a setting in which oral tradition was reclassified as evidence. Folk stories became pedagogical tools; proverbs became textbook material; epic performance became a school-based classification problem; ritual and customary life became subject to social critique; museum collections and local lore turned material culture into historical evidence. This is the methodological significance of the Samarkand case.

CONCLUSION. Folklore studies in the Samarkand scholarly environment of the early twentieth century emerged from the interaction of Jadid reform, local education, oral tradition, publication activity, and a set of developing scholarly institutions. Within this setting, oral tradition became a scholarly source only once it had been collected, recorded, attributed, classified, interpreted, and connected to literary history, pedagogy, or cultural memory. G'ozi Olim Yunusov's expeditions to Sirdaryo and Samarkand in the early 1920s mark a major stage in the direct recording of folklore from folk performers, and the work of local Samarkand intellectuals such as Zarif Qodirov and Vadud Mahmudov played an important mediating role, demonstrating that fieldwork itself depended upon local networks of knowledge. A further decisive step came with Hodi Zarif, whose introduction of the term "folklore" into Uzbek scholarship in 1932 and whose classification of the Qo'rg'on, Bulung'ur, and Shahrisabz bakhshi schools helped transform oral performance into a structured academic field. Folklore entered written culture along many paths at once – through Jadid textbooks, proverbs, oral stories, pedagogical materials, Shashmaqom notation, periodicals, and the practices of museums and local lore. Taken together, the Samarkand environment shows that folklore studies were inseparable from broader questions of national literary heritage, vernacular language, education, literary reform, and cultural memory. Their principal methodological contribution,

in the end, lay in the transformation of a living oral tradition into classified, interpreted, and academically circulated material for Uzbek literary scholarship.

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