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THE CONTRIBUTION OF ZAHIRIDDIN MUHAMMAD BABUR TO THE SCIENCE OF HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

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Baburnama, a unique and remarkable example of Uzbek prose of the 16th century, encompasses knowledge from many fields of science. Japanese scholar Eiji Mano describes it as “a treasury of information on the Uzbek language and on Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India in the 15th–16th centuries” [1, pp. 19]. Among the works that provide vivid testimony about ancient Transoxiana (Mawarannahr) and the life of its peoples, Baburnama stands out distinctly. Created by Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur—an outstanding lyric poet and a representative of Uzbek classical literature after Alisher Navoi—this work is truly a rich source of socio-historical, natural-scientific, and literary-linguistic information. It describes events that took place in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India from 1494 to 1530. In Baburnama, the prominent statesman Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur provides detailed accounts of the history, socio-economic conditions, nature, ethnography, geography, and even medicine of the Fergana Valley, Afghanistan, and India. In particular, he presents precise information about the mountains of Fergana and India, the rivers originating from them, as well as forests, pastures, gardens, flora, and fauna, often comparing these data with one another.

One of the main purposes of Baburnama is the comprehensive study of materials related to the natural resources of the region. When describing the natural conditions of his homeland, Babur pays special attention to its history, geographical location, nature, climate, and natural wealth, evaluating these features with great precision. Describing the Fergana Valley, Babur notes that it is surrounded by mountains on all sides, with only the western side open, where



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the Khujand gate is located. He also points out that even at that time, the Khujand wind was an essential feature of the Fergana Valley's climate. Praising the fertility of the soil, he writes that everything can be cultivated there with the help of water. In addition, Baburnama mentions nearly a thousand geographical objects—countries, villages, cities, fortresses, steppes, mountains, passes, valleys, rivers, bridges, crossings, lakes, springs, gardens, pastures, meadows, and other places. Babur also refers to distant lands such as Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan, Rome, Tibet, China, and Kashgar [2, p. 192], which demonstrates the breadth of his geographical knowledge. However, it should be noted that some of the place names mentioned by the author may have changed over the centuries.

Babur was particularly fascinated by the beauty of India. He describes its plants, trees, nature, people, and customs as astonishing. Especially noteworthy is his masterful depiction of the area around the Khoja Siyaron spring in Afghanistan, which continues to amaze admirers of art to this day.

The prestige of any region is largely determined by its natural resources. From this perspective, Baburnama also has great economic significance. While discussing the mineral wealth of the Fergana Valley, Babur notes that turquoise, iron, copper, and other minerals were extracted there. In this regard, he writes: "In the later period of Umar Shaykh Mirza, red and white decorative stones appeared in these mountains; they are used for knife handles, belts, and other items, and they are of very good quality" [3, p. 84]. He also describes remarkable objects such as the "Sang-i Ayina" near Rishtan, the giant stone mentioned in Temurbek tarixi, and the mysterious "lak-lak" domes. Writing about Samarkand, he notes that "the finest paper in the world is produced here," and that it is famous for its "crimson velvet."

"After conquering India," Babur writes, "a famous diamond was found. This diamond is equal to the expenses of the entire world for two and a half days, or



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weighs eight miskals.” Interestingly, this historical diamond still exists today and is known as Koh-i-Noor (“Mountain of Light”). It is currently preserved among the royal jewels of the British monarchy. After being recut twice, it now weighs 106 carats and continues to attract global admiration. It is also connected with the historical and political relations between India and England.

It is well known that the Ganges River is the lifeline and a sacred river for the people of India. Babur notes, however, that it is also a place where impurities are disposed of. Reading Baburnama, we can also learn about diseases that were widespread at that time. One such disease is malaria, which Babur associates with the climate and the abundance of mosquitoes in the region.

In his work, Babur also describes several natural phenomena. One of these is an earthquake. He refers to the consequences of an earthquake that occurred in 1505 north of Kabul [4, p. 33]. He writes that during the month of Muharram, the earthquake caused massive rocks to fall from the mountains, water to emerge from the ground, buildings to collapse, and the earth to split in some places to a depth reaching a person’s waist. Based on his descriptions, this earthquake can be estimated to have measured 9–10 on the intensity scale. Such earthquakes are explained as natural phenomena that occur periodically.

There are many similar natural events that people have traditionally associated with divine forces. In Babur’s time, it was believed that if something impure was thrown into a spring near Ghazni, it would cause unrest among the people. However, Babur writes: “I observed carefully every night in Ghazni, but no such sign appeared from that spring” [3, p. 92].

He provides another similar example: in the city of Lamata in India, it was believed that if a person was sinful, a sign would appear when the corpse was being carried away. According to Babur, such phenomena had no connection with any divine power and were mere misconceptions. He explains that these



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occurrences depend on human perception and are related to the nerves (asab), rather than any supernatural cause [3, p. 228].

Baburnama, by its very essence, is undoubtedly an invaluable source on the history, geography, nature, ethnography, and culture of our region. With this work, Babur made a significant contribution to the development of world culture and science. During their 350-year rule, Babur and the Baburids sought to unite Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India under a single state, which represents a remarkable contribution to the historical development of these peoples.

What distinguishes Babur from other rulers is that wherever he went, he established new cities, palaces, madrasas, mosques, gardens, roads, canals, and irrigation systems. For example, "...after conquering Kabul, Babur treated it as his homeland, initiating construction, urban development, and the advancement of crafts and agriculture. He ordered the construction of gardens such as Bagh-i Shahara, Bagh-i Kalan, Orta Bagh, Bagh-i Wafa, Bagh-i Safa, and Bagh-i Babur" [7, p. 205].

At the same time, Z. M. Babur paid great attention to the development of science and culture. He collected extensive information about the peoples of India, Central Asia, and Afghanistan, including their ethnic origins, characteristics, customs, distribution, languages, sciences, and architecture. Babur skillfully describes the remarkable places and natural landscapes of Afghanistan, often comparing them with his homeland—Andijan and Fergana.

Babur also attached great importance to the cultivation and propagation of flowers, ornamental plants, and fruit trees in India and Central Asia. He attempted to grow certain plant species in regions where they had not previously been cultivated. He also provided considerable information about fruit trees that did not grow in other parts of India and Afghanistan. Another notable aspect is Babur's deep appreciation of the art of hunting. In his view, hunting was not



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intended for the destruction of wild animals, but rather for studying them, utilizing them, increasing the number of rare species, and controlling harmful ones.

According to the renowned orientalist Ámin Vámbéry, “Babur’s Baburnama occupies a prominent place in world literature, comparable to Julius Caesar’s Commentaries” [6, p. 65].

Baburnama belongs to the category of great works that encompass the history, socio-economic conditions, nature, ethnography, and geography of regions such as Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India. The work has been translated into numerous languages, including Arabic, Persian, Indian languages, English, German, French, Japanese, Turkish, Urdu, Hindi, and others [7, p. 204]. It is worth noting that many manuscripts of the work are preserved in libraries in St. Petersburg, Calcutta, Agra, Hyderabad, Manchester, London, Edinburgh, Paris, Amsterdam, and Istanbul.

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