

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF “TAZKIRAT ASH-SHUARO” AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20532310>

Abstract: This article examines Tazkirat ash-Shuaro by Davlatshah Samarqandi as a significant historical and literary source for the study of Central Asian and Iranian cultural history between the 9th and 15th centuries. Using historiographical and source-critical approaches, the paper analyzes the structure, content, sources, and scholarly value of the tazkira. Particular attention is given to its role in reconstructing socio-political processes, including the Sarbadar movement in Khorasan and the cultural environment of the Timurid period. The study concludes that despite certain inaccuracies, Tazkirat ash-Shuaro remains a crucial primary source for both literary and historical research.

Key words: Tazkira, historiography, Davlatshah Samarqandi, Central Asia, Sarbadars, Timurid period, historical sources

Introduction. The study of medieval Central Asian history relies heavily on narrative and biographical sources, among which tazkiras occupy a special place. One of the most prominent examples is Tazkirat ash-Shuaro, written by Davlatshah Samarqandi in the late 15th century. This work emerged during a period of remarkable cultural and intellectual development in Transoxiana and Khorasan, particularly under the Timurid dynasty. The 15th century witnessed a revival of scientific and literary traditions, influenced by earlier intellectual achievements of the Islamic Golden Age. Figures such as Alisher Navoi and Abdurahman Jami contributed to the flourishing of cultural life, while Ulugh Beg advanced scientific knowledge. Within this context, Davlatshah's work represents both a continuation of earlier tazkira traditions and an original contribution to historiography. The aim of this article is to analyze Tazkirat ash-Shuaro as a historical source by examining its structure, sources, thematic scope, and historiographical significance.

Literature review and methodology. The present study is grounded in a comprehensive review of both classical and modern scholarship related to tazkira literature, with particular emphasis on the historiographical tradition of Central Asia and the broader Persianate world. Previous studies have highlighted the dual nature of tazkiras as both literary anthologies and repositories of historical information. Among the earliest and most influential works in this genre is Lubab al-Albab by Muhammad Avfi, which serves as a foundational comparative source for understanding the development of biographical writing on poets. In addition, a range of historical chronicles, geographical treatises, and biographical compilations consulted by Davlatshah Samarqandi are taken into account in order to contextualize his methodology and intellectual framework.

This research employs an interdisciplinary methodological approach combining historiographical analysis, comparative source criticism, and close textual analysis. Historiographical analysis is used to situate Tazkirat ash-Shuaro within the broader evolution of historical writing traditions, examining how the author constructs narratives about the past and how these narratives reflect the intellectual climate of the 15th century. Comparative source criticism allows for the identification of parallels, borrowings, and divergences between Davlatshah's work and earlier as well as later tazkiras, thereby assessing the originality and reliability of the information presented.

Textual analysis is applied to examine the internal structure and content of the work. Particular attention is devoted to the structural organization of the text, which consists of a preface, seven thematic sections (tabaqat), and a concluding part. This structure is analyzed not only as a formal feature but also as a reflection of the author's conceptual framework in organizing historical and literary knowledge.

Furthermore, the study evaluates the range and nature of sources utilized by Davlatshah Samarqandi. These include earlier tazkiras, historical chronicles, geographical works, and oral or contemporary accounts. By identifying these sources, the research assesses the extent to which the author relied on established authorities versus his own observations, especially in sections dealing with contemporaries.

A comparative assessment is also conducted between Tazkirat ash-Shuaro and other tazkiras from different periods. This comparison highlights both continuity and innovation within the genre, demonstrating how Davlatshah expanded the chronological scope and thematic depth of earlier works while influencing subsequent biographical compilations.

Another key aspect of the methodology involves identifying historical data embedded within literary narratives. Although the work is primarily literary in form, it contains valuable information on political events, social structures, cultural life, and intellectual networks. Extracting and analyzing such data requires careful critical reading to distinguish between rhetorical embellishment and factual content.

Finally, the study examines the manuscript tradition, printed editions, and translations of the work in order to understand its transmission and reception across different regions and time periods. By analyzing how the text has been preserved, edited, and interpreted, the research provides insight into its enduring scholarly significance and its role in shaping modern understandings of medieval Central Asian history.

Results and discussion. The analysis demonstrates that Tazkirat ash-Shuaro is a carefully structured and systematically organized work, reflecting a deliberate authorial approach to the classification and presentation of literary-historical material. The composition consists of three principal components: a preface (muqaddima), seven thematic sections (tabaqat), and a concluding part (khatima). This tripartite structure is not merely formal but also indicative of a coherent intellectual framework through which Davlatshah Samarqandi sought to arrange the literary heritage of the Persianate world in a chronological and hierarchical order.

The work contains biographical and literary information on approximately 150–155 poets, spanning a broad historical period from the 7th to the 15th centuries. Such extensive chronological coverage distinguishes Tazkirat ash-Shuaro from many earlier tazkiras, which were often more limited in scope. The preface serves a programmatic function, outlining the author's aims and methodological considerations while introducing early Arabic poets who represent the foundational phase of classical poetic tradition in the Islamic world.

The first and second sections focus primarily on poets of the 10th and 11th centuries, with particular attention to figures from Iran and Transoxiana. These sections highlight the formative period of Persian literary culture and reflect the consolidation of poetic traditions under early Islamic dynasties. The third, fourth, and fifth sections expand the scope to include poets associated with the Khwarazmshah, Ilkhanid, and Muzaffarid periods. In these parts, the author integrates literary biography with broader historical developments, thereby providing insight into the cultural transformations that accompanied political change.

The final sections, together with the conclusion, are devoted to the Timurid era, which represents the author's own historical context. These chapters are especially valuable due to their proximity to the events described and their inclusion of near-contemporary figures such as Abdurahman Jami and Alisher Navoi. In this regard, the work acquires particular historiographical significance, as it combines retrospective compilation with elements of eyewitness observation and personal familiarity.

One of the most important findings of this study is the extent to which Tazkirat ash-Shuaro relies on a wide range of earlier sources. These include historical chronicles, geographical treatises, and previous literary anthologies. The integration of such diverse materials demonstrates Davlatshah's broad scholarly engagement and his attempt to synthesize multiple strands of knowledge into a unified narrative. At the same time, this reliance raises questions regarding the transmission and transformation of information, necessitating careful source criticism.

Beyond its primary function as a biographical dictionary of poets, the work contains substantial historical data embedded within its literary narratives. It offers valuable insights into political events, social hierarchies, patronage systems, and cultural life across different periods. A particularly notable example is the detailed account of the Sarbadar movement in 14th-century Khorasan. Davlatshah provides information on its leaders, military activities, internal divisions, and ideological motivations, making this section an important supplementary source for the study of regional political history.

The discussion also highlights the transmission and reception of the work across time and space. Tazkirat ash-Shuaro has been preserved in numerous manuscript copies and later printed editions produced in major intellectual centers such as Bombay, London, Tehran, and Istanbul. Its translation into several languages, including Uzbek, Turkish, and Azerbaijani, further attests to its enduring relevance and wide scholarly appeal. This broad dissemination has facilitated its incorporation into both regional and global historiographical traditions.

In sum, the results confirm that Tazkirat ash-Shuaro occupies a unique position at the intersection of literary and historical writing. While certain inaccuracies and inconsistencies can be identified, the richness of its content, the breadth of its chronological scope, and the diversity of its sources make it an indispensable resource for the study of medieval Central Asian and Iranian history. The work not only preserves literary heritage but also serves as a valuable lens through which the socio-political and cultural dynamics of the pre-modern Islamic world can be examined.

The findings of this study underscore the distinctly dual character of Tazkirat ash-Shuaro as both a literary compilation and a historical source. Unlike purely poetic anthologies that are limited to the preservation of verses and aesthetic evaluation, Davlatshah Samarqandi's work integrates a wide range of biographical, cultural, and political information. This multidimensional nature significantly enhances its scholarly value, making it an important resource not only for literary studies but also for historical, cultural, and interdisciplinary research. Through its narrative structure, the text provides insight into the intellectual milieu, systems of patronage, and broader socio-political contexts in which poets lived and worked.

In comparison with earlier tazkiras, Davlatshah's work demonstrates a notable expansion in both scope and ambition. It encompasses a broader chronological range, extending from the early Islamic centuries to the author's own time in the 15th century, and includes a substantially larger number of literary figures. This expansion reflects a conscious effort to systematize and preserve the literary heritage of the Persianate world in a more comprehensive manner. As such, Tazkirat ash-Shuaro can be regarded as both a continuation and a significant development of the tazkira tradition, building upon earlier models while introducing greater inclusivity and historical depth.

At the same time, the study identifies several important limitations that must be taken into account. Certain chronological inconsistencies and inaccuracies are evident in the text, particularly in relation to dates and sequences of events. Additionally, there are instances of misattributed authorship, where specific literary works are incorrectly assigned to particular poets. These issues highlight the necessity of approaching the text with a critical perspective and corroborating its claims with other historical and literary sources. Such limitations are not uncommon in pre-modern historiographical works and should be understood within the broader context of medieval scholarly practices.

Despite these shortcomings, the overall richness and diversity of the material presented in Tazkirat ash-Shuaro substantially outweigh its deficiencies. The work offers a wealth of information on cultural and intellectual life, including details about literary circles, educational backgrounds, and interpersonal networks among scholars and poets. Particularly valuable are the sections dealing with figures contemporary to the author, where firsthand observations and personal familiarity contribute to a higher degree of reliability and immediacy.

Furthermore, the historiographical significance of the work is evident in its lasting influence on subsequent scholarship. It has served as a foundational source for later tazkiras and historical studies, shaping the way literary history has been recorded and interpreted in the Persianate and Central Asian traditions. Its continued use by modern researchers, especially in Uzbekistan and other regions with a shared cultural heritage, attests to its enduring relevance. In this regard, Tazkirat ash-Shuaro remains not only a monument of classical literature but also a vital tool for reconstructing the historical and cultural landscape of the medieval Islamic world.

Conclusion. Tazkirat ash-Shuaro by Davlatshah Samarqandi represents a major contribution to the historiography of Central Asia and Iran. It serves as a comprehensive source for studying literary history, while also providing significant insights into political and social developments from the 9th to the 15th centuries. Although the work contains some inaccuracies, its broad scope, detailed narratives, and integration of multiple sources make it indispensable for researchers. Its accounts of movements such as the Sarbadars and its portrayal of the Timurid cultural environment are particularly valuable. Future research should focus on producing critical editions, modern translations, and comparative analyses with other historical sources to further enhance our understanding of this important text.

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