

Issues Of Historical Space And Time In The Novels “Navoiy” And “Alisher Navoiy”

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ABSTRACT

Maqolada Oybekning “Navoiy” (1944) va Isajon Sultonning “Alisher Navoiy” (2021) romanlarida tarixiy makon va davr (xronotop) talqini qiyosiy aspektda tadqiq etiladi. M.M.Baxtinning xronotop nazariyasi asosida har ikki asarda tarixiy zamonning qamrovi, zamonni tashkil etish tamoyili, makon tipologiyasi hamda tarixiy haqiqat va badiiy to‘qima nisbati aniqlanadi. Tahlil natijasida Oybek romanida zamon 1469–1501-yillardagi ijtimoiy-siyosiy voqealar bilan chegaralangani, makon esa Hirot saroyi va shahar muhiti atrofida jamlangani; Isajon Sulton romanida esa zamon qahramonning butun umrini qamrab olib, “Xazoyin ul-maoniy” devonlarining to‘rt bosqichli tuzilishiga muvofiq tashkil etilgani, makon esa ichki-ruhiy va ramziy qatlamlar bilan boyitilgani asoslab beriladi.

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Аннотация. В статье в сравнительном аспекте исследуется интерпретация исторического пространства и времени (хронотопа) в романах Айбека «Навои» (1944) и Исажона Султона «Алишер Навои» (2021). На основе теории хронотопа М.М.Бахтина определяются охват исторического времени, принцип организации художественного времени, типология пространства, а также соотношение исторической правды и художественного вымысла в обоих произведениях. Обосновывается, что в романе Айбека время ограничено общественно-политическими событиями 1469–1501 годов, а пространство сосредоточено вокруг гератского двора и городской среды; в романе Исажона Султона время охватывает всю жизнь героя и организовано в соответствии с четырёхчастной структурой «Хазайин ал-маани», а пространство обогащено внутренне-психологическим и символическим пластами.

Ключевые слова: исторический роман, хронотоп, историческое пространство, художественное время, Айбек, Исажон Султон, образ Алишера Навои, историческая правда, художественный вымысел.

Abstract. The article offers a comparative study of the representation of historical space and time (the chronotope) in Oybek’s novel “Navoiy” (1944) and Isajon Sulton’s novel “Alisher Navoiy” (2021). Drawing on M. M. Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope, the study identifies the temporal scope, the principle of organising artistic time, the typology of space and the balance between historical fact and artistic invention in both works. It argues that in Oybek’s novel time is confined to the socio-political events of 1469–1501 and space is concentrated around the Herat court and the urban milieu, whereas in Isajon Sulton’s novel time spans the hero’s whole life and is organised according to the four-part structure of Navoi’s “Khazayin ul-maani”, with space enriched by inner psychological and symbolic layers.

Keywords: historical novel, chronotope, historical space, artistic time, Oybek, Isajon Sulton, image of Alisher Navoi, historical truth, artistic invention.

Introduction

The historical novel is one of the most complex forms of interpreting the past through literature and conveying it to contemporary readers. In this genre, the writer assumes a dual responsibility: to remain faithful to historical facts while recreating the past as a living, psychologically convincing fictional world. As G. Lukács observes, what matters in the historical novel is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic “awakening” of the people who took part in them [4]. The literary value of a historical work therefore depends to a considerable extent on how its author reconstructs historical space and time.

In Uzbek literature, the figure of Alisher Navoiy has long been one of the subjects that places the greatest responsibility on a writer. Oybek began writing “Navoiy” in 1940, completed it in 1942, and published it in 1944. The novel is recognised as the first major epic work to portray the great poet and thinker; it received the State Prize in 1946 and has been translated into many languages. Nearly eighty years later, in 2021, Isajon Sulton’s “Alisher Navoiy” was published [2]. The two works can be viewed as examples of two literary periods that differ in their historical context, aesthetic principles, and approach to Navoiy as a person.

Several studies have examined these novels. D. Umaraliyeva compared the portrayal of Navoiy in the two works, particularly the episodes concerning the protagonist’s youth [5]; G. Nurullayeva analysed the composition and linguistic features of Isajon Sulton’s novel [6]; M. Qodirova demonstrated the methodological possibilities of studying the two novels comparatively [7]; and B. Karim explored the ideological and artistic substance of Isajon Sulton’s work [8]. However, existing research has not comprehensively examined historical space and time—that is, the chronotopic systems of the works—as a distinct subject of study. Yet it is precisely the literary model of space and time that determines the interpretation of character, the nature of conflict, and the author’s conception in a historical novel.

The aim of this study is to compare the literary interpretation of historical space and time in Oybek’s “Navoiy” and Isajon Sulton’s “Alisher Navoiy” and to identify the chronotopic model characteristic of each work. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were established:

- 1) to identify the scope of historical time represented in the novels;
- 2) to explain the principles governing the organisation of narrative time;
- 3) to develop and compare a typology of space;
- 4) to assess the relationship between historical truth and fictional invention.

Materials And Methods

The study draws on the texts of Oybek’s “Navoiy” (Tashkent: Sharq, 2004) [1] and Isajon Sulton’s “Alisher Navoiy” (Tashkent: Adabiyot, 2021) [2]. Its theoretical framework is M. M. Bakhtin’s conception of the chronotope. Bakhtin defines the chronotope as the intrinsic interconnectedness of spatial and temporal relationships as represented in literature, treating it as a category that encompasses both literary form and content [3]. The study also draws on works by Uzbek scholars on literary theory and classical poetics [9; 10; 11].

The following methods were used: the comparative-typological method to identify similarities and differences between the two works; the biographical-historical method to compare events in the novels with dates in Navoiy’s life recorded in historical sources; structural-semantic analysis to examine composition, the arrangement of parts and chapters, and the semantics of titles; and hermeneutic interpretation to explain the meaning of symbolic images and details. The analysis was conducted according to four criteria (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research design and analytical criteria

The prominence of spatial layers was assessed using a three-level qualitative scale (“limited”, “moderate”, and “dominant”). The assessment considered each type of space in terms of its function in plot development, the attention devoted to its portrayal, and its significance in revealing the character’s inner life. It should be stressed that this assessment is based on the author’s interpretation.

Results

3.1. Scope of historical time

The events in Oybek's novel begin with Husayn Boyqaro's accession to the throne of Herat (1469) and Alisher's consequent return from Samarkand to Herat, and end with the poet's death (1501). The work thus covers approximately thirty-two years, encompassing the protagonist's maturity and old age, from the age of twenty-eight to the end of his life. Navoiy's childhood and youth are not directly depicted in the plot.

Table 1
Comparative characteristics of the novels

Criterion	Oybek, "Navoiy"	Isajon Sulton, "Alisher Navoiy"
Year of publication	1944 (written: 1940–1942)	2021 (Tashkent: Adabiyot)
Literary period	Soviet period, 1940s	Period of independence
Scope of historical time	1469–1501 (≈32 years)	1441–1501 (≈60 years)
Stages of the protagonist's life	Maturity and old age	Childhood, youth, middle age, old age
Compositional structure	Linear chronological sequence	Four parts corresponding to the collections in "Khazoyin ul-maoniy"
Principal setting	Herat (court and city)	Herat and the settings along the protagonist's life journey
Factor organising time	Socio-political events	Seasons of life; stages of spiritual maturation

In Isajon Sulton's novel, by contrast, time encompasses the protagonist's entire life: the sixty years from his birth in 1441 to his death in 1501 (Table 1, Figure 2). As a result, the scope of historical time is almost twice that of Oybek's novel (60 years compared with 32).

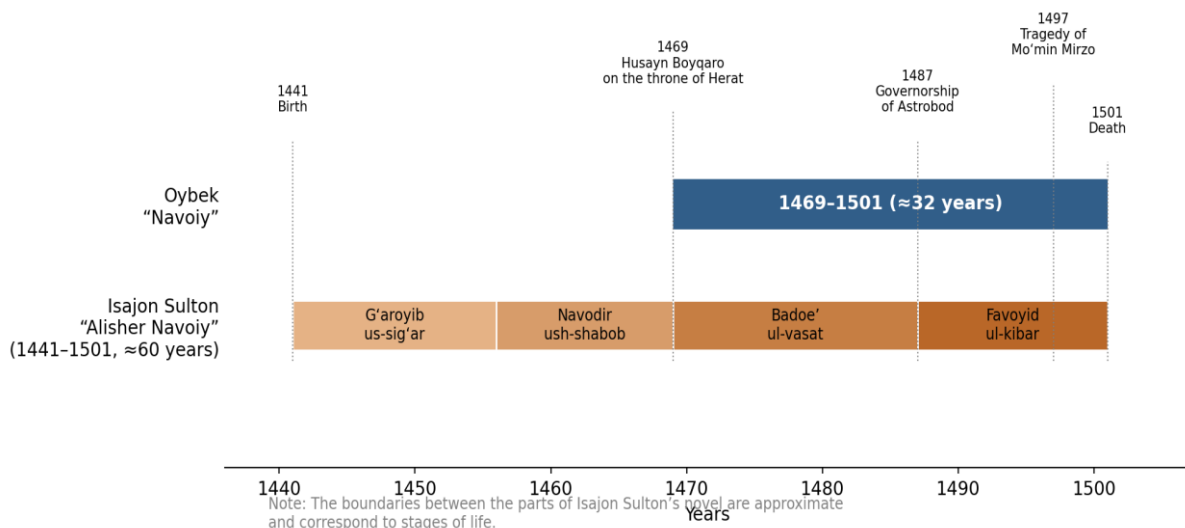


Figure 2. Scope of historical time in the novels (chronological diagram)

3.2. Principles governing the organisation of narrative time

In Oybek's novel, time follows a linear chronological principle. Events unfold in historical sequence, while political changes, intrigues, and social tensions at court determine the rhythm of time. Here, time is primarily socio-historical: the protagonist's inner experiences are also revealed mainly through his responses to events in the life of the state and society.

In Isajon Sulton's novel, time is structured according to a different principle: the seasons of life. The work consists of four parts named after the four poetry collections in Navoiy's "Khazoyin ul-maoniy":

“G‘aroyib us-sig‘ar” (“Wonders of Childhood”), “Navodir ush-shabob” (“Rarities of Youth”), “Badoe’ ul-vasat” (“Marvels of Middle Age”), and “Favoyid ul-kibar” (“Benefits of Old Age”). The novel’s time thus follows the model of “lifetime” that the poet himself used to organise his poetic legacy: historical chronology is integrated with the stages of individual spiritual maturation. Researchers also note the work’s well-developed structure and composition [6].

Time in Isajon Sulton’s novel is also enriched by a symbolic layer. For example, in the depiction of Mo‘min Mirzo’s tragedy, the image of night becomes the dramatic climax of events: in the writer’s words, “the witch of night, once the hour had passed the night prayer, spread her web of deceit and intrigue” wide, while a “bird of calamity” seemed to hover over the palace [2]. Here, natural time (night and the time of the night prayer) acquires moral and symbolic meaning, bringing time and space together within a single system of imagery.

3.3. Typology of space

Herat is the central setting in both novels, but its literary function differs. Oybek presents Herat as a broad social panorama: the court, madrasas, markets, the lives of artisans, and the everyday life of the people form a single “urban organism”. The court is a space of power, intrigue, and political struggle, while the city is the social arena in which Navoiy’s work for the people becomes visible. The Astrobod episode is interpreted as a space of the protagonist’s removal from court, or political separation; Samarkand is mentioned mainly as the starting point of the plot (Figure 3a).

In Isajon Sulton’s novel, space expands across the protagonist’s entire life journey. Alongside Herat, Samarkand emerges as a setting in its own right; this feature is also noted in a study devoted specifically to the interpretation of Navoiy’s activities in Samarkand [12]. Since the novel’s chronological scope includes the poet’s childhood and youth, its literary geography can also connect with other places recorded in biographical sources (Mashhad, Taft, and Astrobod) (Figure 3b).

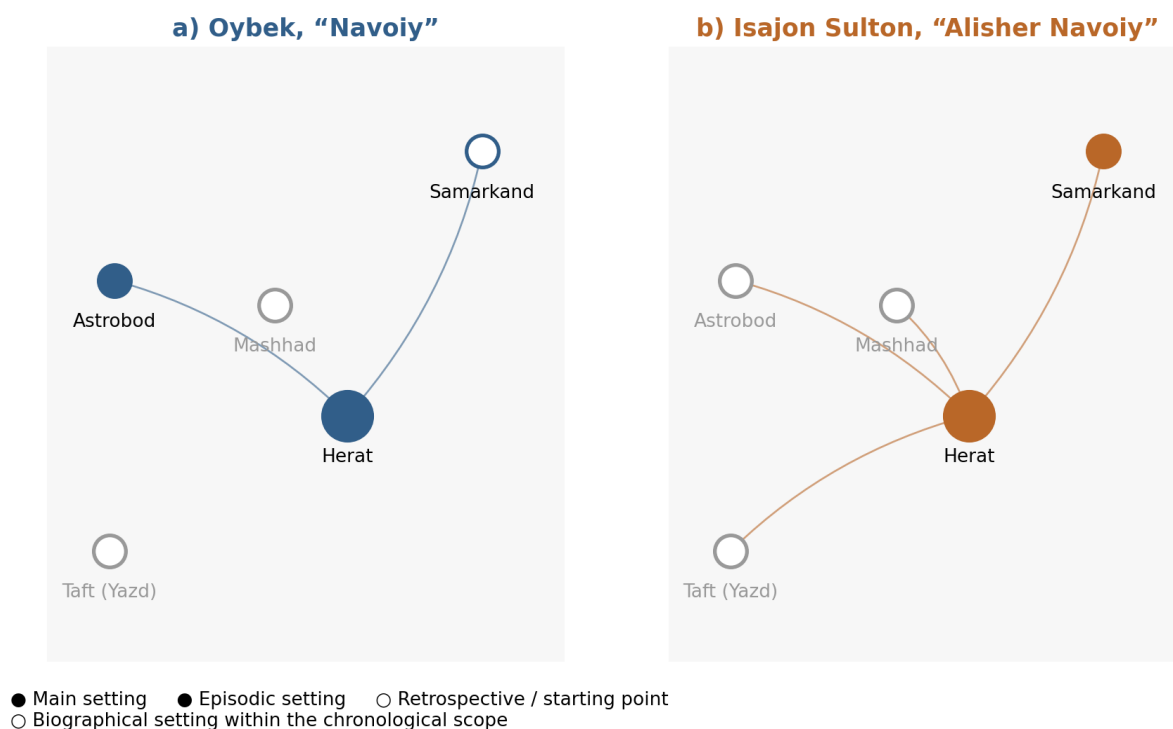


Figure 3. Geographical diagram of historical space in the novels: a — Oybek; b — Isajon Sulton (the positions of the points are based on approximate coordinates)

Analysing space by layers makes the fundamental difference between the two works clearer (Table 2, Figure 4). In Oybek’s novel, geographical space and the space of social and everyday life are dominant. Inner psychological space is revealed through the protagonist’s reflections and interior monologues, while symbolic space is relatively limited.

	Oybek "Navoiy"	Isajon Sulton "Alisher Navoiy"
Geographical space	Dominant	Dominant
Social and everyday space (court, market, madrasa)	Dominant	Moderate
Inner psychological space (heart, memory, dreams)	Moderate	Dominant
Symbolic space (night, road, symbolic detail)	Limited	Dominant

Figure 4. Prominence of spatial layers in the novels (author's assessment)

In Isajon Sulton's novel, inner psychological space (the heart, memory, and dreams) and symbolic space (night, the road, and symbolic details) occupy a dominant position alongside physical space. Studies devoted to the role of landscape in plot development and in revealing the spirit of the period [13] also support this conclusion.

Table 2
Typology of space and its literary function

Type of space	Oybek, "Navoiy"	Isajon Sulton, "Alisher Navoiy"
Geographical	Herat, Astrobod; Samarkand as the starting point	Herat, Samarkand, and other cities along the poet's life journey
Social and everyday	Court: an arena of intrigue and political struggle; market, madrasa, and artisans: a panorama of the people's lives	Court: an arena of spiritual trials; the social background is subordinated to the protagonist's inner life
Inner psychological	Interior monologues and reflections; primarily responses to social issues	The heart, memory, and dreams: the principal space of the character's existence
Symbolic	At the level of individual details	Night, the road, and symbolic details: images conveying moral and philosophical meaning

3.4. Relationship between historical truth and fictional invention

In Oybek's novel, fictional characters such as Arslonqul, Dildor, and Sultonmurod play an important role alongside historical figures (Navoiy, Husayn Boyqaro, Abdurahmon Jomiy, Kamoliddin Behzod, Mirxond, Xondamir, Majididdin, and Nizomulmulk). Through them, the writer brings the life of the people, the destinies of ordinary individuals, and social tensions into the work. Historical space consequently expands to include the lower strata of society.

In Isajon Sulton's novel, the range of historical figures expands through the inclusion of the protagonist's early life: for example, Gavharshodbegim, an influential woman of the Timurid dynasty, also appears in the work. The writer fills the gaps between historical facts through psychological analysis, symbolic episodes, and literary language close to classical prose. This accords with the broader tendency towards a stronger emphasis on literary psychologism in contemporary Uzbek fiction [14].

Discussion

The findings show that the interpretation of historical space and time in the two novels is not arbitrary, but is linked to the aesthetic expectations of the period in which each work was written and to the author's

conception. Oybek's novel was written in the 1940s, when socialist realism was the dominant method, historical subjects were expected to be approached from a class perspective, and the circumstances of the Second World War intensified patriotic feeling. The writer therefore presents Navoiy primarily as a statesman devoted to the people and a patron of justice and enlightenment; the novel gives more attention to his socio-political activities than to his creative process as a poet. The concentration of historical space around the court and the city, and the measurement of time through socio-political events, arise from this conception.

Isajon Sulton's novel was written during the period of independence, amid a reassessment of the national spiritual heritage free from ideological constraints. The writer does not limit Navoiy to a social function, but portrays him as a person with a rich inner life, a poet and thinker, and an embodiment of the ideal of the perfect human being. B. Karim describes the work as "a novel written in praise of the sun of humanity" [8]. The organisation of time around the seasons of life and the enrichment of space through inner psychological and symbolic layers are literary expressions of this conception.

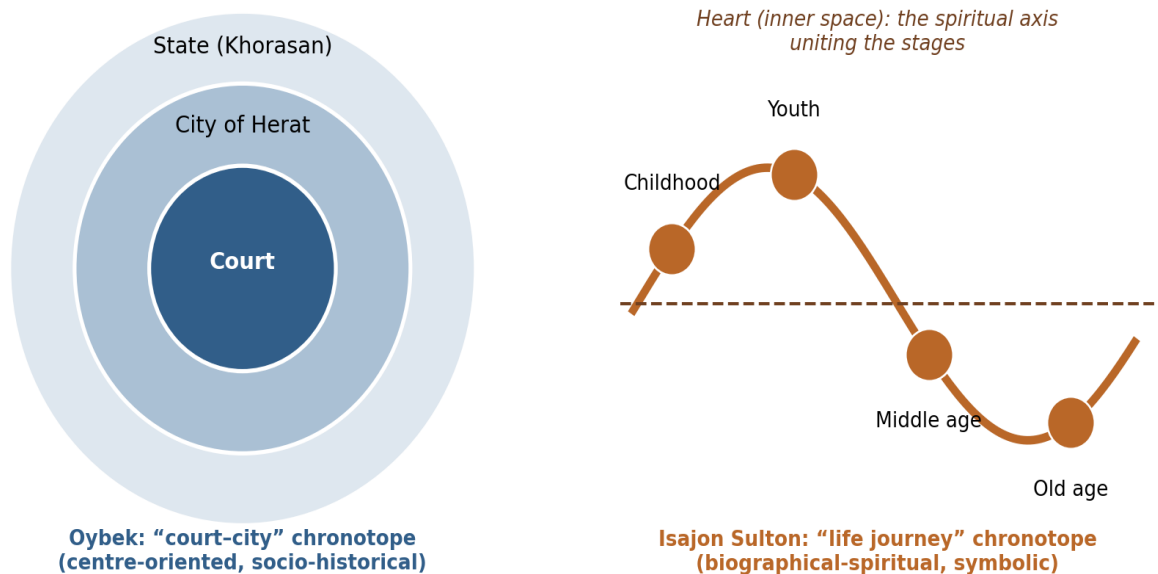


Figure 5. Chronotopic models in the novels (conceptual diagram)

From the perspective of M. M. Bakhtin's theory, the socio-historical chronotope—the "court-city" chronotope—dominates Oybek's novel: space has a concentric structure oriented towards the centre (the court), while time moves as a chain of historical events. In Isajon Sulton's novel, a "life journey" chronotope emerges, combining elements of the "road" chronotope described by Bakhtin with biographical time: space unfolds across the stages of the protagonist's life, which are united by the heart—his inner spiritual space (Figure 5, Table 3).

Table 3
Comparative characteristics of the chronotopic models

Parameter	"Court-city" chronotope (Oybek)	"Life journey" chronotope (Isajon Sulton)
Structure of space	Concentric, oriented towards the centre (the court)	Unfolding in stages, taking the form of a journey
Type of time	Socio-historical time	Biographical-spiritual time
Principal conflict	Individual and court environment (external conflict)	Heart and world (internal conflict); individual and environment (external conflict)
Protagonist's status	Statesman; patron devoted to the people	Poet and thinker; the perfect human being
Principle of historicity	Factual accuracy; broad social panorama	Synthesis of fact and symbol; psychological depth

The findings complement the conclusions of D. Umaraliyeva [5] and G. Nurullayeva [6]. Whereas their comparisons focus mainly on character and composition, this article systematises the differences between the two works at the level of the chronotope—that is, the spatial and temporal foundations of the fictional world. At the same time, the study has certain limitations: the assessment of spatial layers is based on qualitative criteria and relies on the author's interpretation. Future research could explore this issue further through corpus analysis of the texts, particularly quantitative analysis of vocabulary relating to space and time.

CONCLUSION

In Oybek's "Navoiy", historical time covers the years 1469–1501 of the protagonist's life, whereas in Isajon Sulton's "Alisher Navoiy" it encompasses 1441–1501, or the thinker's entire life, thus almost doubling the historical scope. Furthermore, while time in Oybek's novel is organised around the sequence of socio-political events, Isajon Sulton's novel is governed by the seasons-of-life principle, in accordance with the structure of the poetry collections in "Khazoyin ul-maoni".

The works also differ in their portrayal of space and environment: geographical space and the space of social and everyday life prevail in Oybek's novel, while inner psychological and symbolic space occupy an important place in Isajon Sulton's novel. These features show that the two novels develop two distinct chronotopic models: the socio-historical "court-city" chronotope and the biographical-spiritual "life journey" chronotope. These differences clearly reflect a shift in the interpretation of Alisher Navoiy from a social and humanistic orientation towards a spiritual and ethical one centred on the ideal of the perfect human being.

The findings of this study can be used effectively in Uzbek literature classes at higher education institutions and specialised schools, as well as in specialised courses on the poetics of the historical novel.

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