A group of people posing for a photo in front of a statue

Description automatically generatedREVOLUTION, RENAISSANCE AND REBRANDING: TEMURID FIGURES IN UZBEKISTANI NATION-BUILDING

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MA Thesis (20 ECTS)

MA Russian and Eurasian Studies

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June 2021

Word count: 21,998

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Leiden University and my supervisor Dr Henk Kern for the opportunity to write this thesis. I am deeply thankful to the Sidney Perry Foundation and the Sir John Plumb Charitable Trust for their greatly appreciated financial support and trust during the pandemic. I would also like to thank my father George for passing on his alienation and his love of words that led me towards and across many lands, including the one which inspired this work. Thank you to Yang and Jake for the conversations. Thank you also to my mother Susan for her hard work and love raising three troublesome children, and the inspiring resilience she showed whilst fighting bowel cancer during the writing of this work. Thank you to Viv for the gift of being part of our family and supporting us on our paths.

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**Abbreviations**

**Abbreviations**

AoS - Academy of Sciences

BUS – British-Uzbek Society

C. – Circa

CA – Central Asia

CD – Cultural diplomacy

CFE – Conservative Friends of Eurasia

FSU – Former Soviet Union

KMODS - Committee of Interethnic Relations

MFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoC - Ministry of Culture

MP – Member of Parliament

RoU – Republic of Uzbekistan

SSR – Soviet Socialist Republic

SU – Soviet Union

UBTIC - Uzbek-British Trade and Industry Council

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

UWU – Uzbek Writer’s Union

UzSSR – Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic

WWII – Second World War

**Notes on translation and transliteration**

**Translations and notes from the Uzbek:**

Where names of figures or places that are repeated throughout this work are used, I have preferred the use of Uzbek rather than Russian names, such as Toshkent rather than Tashkent, Andijon rather than Andizhan, Buxoro rather than Bukhara and so on. Uzbek terms have been italicised. I have preferred the spelling “Alisher Navoiy” rather than “Alisher Navoi”, and Amir Temur (Temurid for the era) rather than Amir Timur, however spellings vary in quotations.

The Uzbekistani legislative documents which are referenced in the post-Soviet part of the work are assigned decree numbers in Latin or Cyrillic, and these are often prefaced by PQ, № (number) or ПФ (PF) and so on, e.g.: PQ-4977-son. Those in Cyrillic have been transliterated, and the decree titles from both languages have been translated into English in the bibliography.

The demonym “Uzbekistani” is used to denote the inhabitants of a particular state, and the ethnonym “Uzbek” for the ethnic group. Hence the Uzbekistani state rather than Uzbek state, though this may vary in quotations.

Mistakes in the English used in any sources such as news sources or literature of foreign origin have been corrected for ease of reading rather than verbatim quoting. American English has been changed to British English for harmony with the author’s style. Their content has not been changed.

**Translation from Russian:**

Transliteration from Russian has followed the BGN-BGCN system.

Unless otherwise stated, any translations of decrees, speeches, articles and so on from Russian are by the author.

**AOB:**

The word count of 21,998 is excluding the bibliography and footnotes, as per Dr J.H.C Kern’s instructions.

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Map

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Figure 2 – A map of Soviet-era Uzbekistan in 1938.

(Wikimedia Commons, 2011). The main cities listed from left to right are Nukus, Urganch, Buxoro, Samarqand, Termiz, Toshkent and Ferghana.

Map

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Figure 3 – A map of modern-day Uzbekistan.

(World Atlas, 2021).

**1.1 - Introduction**

**Introduction**

The idea for this work was born from an interaction in Buxoro, Uzbekistan in November 2019 and others like it that I experienced when travelling through Central Asia (CA), where people expressed their affiliation with or preference for Russian language and/or culture. Buying onions at a small vegetable stand in a *mahalla[[1]](#footnote-1)*, I was complimented by the elderly seller on my Russian:

*“How do you know our language so well?”*

*“But you’re Uzbek, isn’t your language O’zbekcha?”*

*“Well… yes and no”.*

This example and many others like it are demonstrative of the complex dynamics of Soviet and post-Soviet identity, and raise interesting questions regarding the nature of the Soviet and post-Soviet experience across the Former Soviet Union (FSU) space. Since the creation of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (UzSSR) in October 1924 under the early Soviet policy of land delimitation, Uzbekistan has undergone a process of nation-building which has been tied with the domestic and international legitimisation of the Soviet and post-Soviet state, the latter which can be divided into the Karimov era from 1991-2016 and the Mirziyoyev era from 2016 to present. This process, one that was echoed across Soviet Central Asia and which continues today, warrants academic attention, as cultivating an understanding of the processes of Soviet and post-Soviet nation-building offers grounds for developing a sense of how the Soviet experience has influenced and framed the nature of post-Soviet nation-building practices.

In the Uzbekistani case, two figures from the Temurid era (1370-1507), the Turco-Mongolic medieval conqueror Amir Temur bin Taragay Barlas (1336-1405), often known as Timurlane, and Chagatai-Turkic poet and statesman Nizam-al-Din Ali-Shir Herawi, commonly known as Alisher Navoiy (1441-1501), have been pillars of this process. To offer short biographies of the two figures, Temur was born into Barlas, a nomadic confederation in the Roman-named Transoxiana, or Arab-named Mawarannahr (in modern Uzbekistan), and led military campaigns across CA, the Caucasus, Southern Russia and Persia, defeating the Mamluks, the emerging Ottoman Empire, and fighting in India before dying in 1405 whilst leading a campaign to China. He envisioned himself as a restorer of the Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khan (1158-1227), and created the Temurid Empire (1370-1507) with its capital in the now Uzbekistani city of Samarqand (Dale, 1998; Soucek, 2000; Manz, 2002), which fractured soon after his death due to internecine conflict and territorial partitioning, leaving behind a period of artistic and scientific flourishing referred to as the Temurid Renaissance. Navoiy was born into the elite in Herat (in modern Afghanistan), then part of the Temurid Empire, and, after studies, served the Temurid ruler of Herat, Husayn Bayqarah, for four decades as an administrator and advisor. Navoiy also wrote poetry, primarily in Chagatai, including Sufist works, a comparative assessment of Persian and Chagatai for poetry that ruled in favour of Chagatai, a guide to poetry composition and more.

The fundamental contention of scholarship which will be outlined in the literature review is that the domestic and international historical gravitas associated with Temurid heritage; Temur as a conqueror and ruler, and Navoiy as a Turkic-language poet and statesman, and their respective territorial, architectural and linguistic links to Uzbekistan, led to them being canonised during Soviet rule to promote a sense of ethno-linguistic-territorial Uzbek identity, a process which has continued as a Soviet heritage due to independent Uzbekistan’s need for a new legitimising ideology. In line with this contention, the aim of this thesis will thus be to analyse the how, the what, the who and the why of this phenomenon – in other words, the forms (books, lectures, forums, celebrations) that these figures have taken, the content of these representations (what they say about these figures), the networks involved (the institutions and actors that spread the content) and the function(to what end the content is employed)that their usage has performed.

The work will illustrate the background of this phenomenon in the early creation and building of Uzbekistan, the Soviet imperative of representation and function for these Temurid figures to legitimise this nation-building that was challenged in the 1960s, and the conditions of late communism which paved the way for the post-independence era. The latter is what the work will focus on in-depth, with the Karimovian drive for a new ideology and national figure in Temur and a strong state-building image, and the Mirziyoyevian reforming and rebranding drive and its use of Navoiy for domestic and international legitimisation. The fundamental question that the thesis aims to answer is the following:

*What have been the forms, content, network and political functions of the representations of Temurid figures in Uzbekistan since 1924, and to what degree and why have they changed?*

Furthermore, it offers an inspection of novel post-Soviet data in order to contribute to existing scholarship on the topic – said data is introduced below. Chronological in form, each period presents distinct historical and socio-political landscapes which provide grounds for sustained comparative analysis. As such, the work hopes to demonstrate the shifting forms and content of the production of meaning and function related to these figures.

**1.1 – Methodology**

Firstly, the thesis will provide an overview of the English-language academic literature on Soviet and post-Soviet Uzbekistani nation-building, giving a research background and context for the subsequent analysis, grounding this analysis and its terminology in the context of said literature, and highlighting the way in which this work may contribute to it. It will then present a background of Soviet history and its relevance to the thesis’ main discussion, based on Russian and English-language Soviet and post-Soviet academic literature, detailing the evolution of the process of Uzbekification and Sovietisation in the Soviet canonisation of the two figures and its relevance to the process of Uzbekistani nation-building, with an emphasis on early Soviet policies and the movement towards independence in the 1980s.

The thesis will then turn to a detailed examination of the Karimov era and the 660th anniversary of Amir Temur in 1996. Within this frame, a group of presidential decrees related to the 660th anniversary, such as architectural renovations, a museum opening, statue unveilings, an Order of Amir Temur, a UNESCO exhibition and more will be analysed, relating these measures to Karimov’s speeches, after which the thesis will analyse the form, content and network and function of a literary publication; a 1996 UNESCO English-language co-publication of *Amir Timur in World History*. It will be argued that although a structural continuation exists, there is a differentiation in the move from “Sovietisation and Uzbekification” to what I call “Uzbekification and Universalisation”[[2]](#footnote-2) in themes of territory, sovereignty and culture. These sources have been chosen for two reasons. Firstly, for the fact that many of them, though extremely relevant, have hitherto not been analysed in detail, such as the Order of Amir Temur and particularly the book publication, and thus provide an opportunity to contribute novel data to the field, as well as the data showing continuity with the Mirziyoyevian data, as we shall see. Secondly, because the relationship with UNESCO and the legitimacy and cultural capital connected to them serves as an illustration of the relationships of actors and institutions to state legitimisation and cultural diplomacy, as Paskaleva (2015) illustrates in her analysis of Temurid architecture and UNESCO’s role there. Presenting the forms and content within the frame of the network (from decree to activities) gives shape to the analysis of the content and allows a clear, substantiated and revealing link to be made between these factors and their function.

Finally, the thesis will analyse Mirziyoyevian forms, content, network and functions for the two figures. It aims to contextualise post-Karimovian national rebranding and the shifting function of meaning within a case study of the 580th anniversary of Navoiy’s birth, celebrated in 2021, and its relationship to cultural diplomacy. Employing the same methodology as for the Karimov era, after an overview of the context of the period, a presidential decree related to the 580th anniversary will be examined, contextualising the network within which the forms and content of canonisation arise. Then our attention will turn to the results of this decree, with new measures and institutions, and an online event organised by the British-Uzbek Society (BUS), “580th anniversary of Alisher Navoi”(BUS, 2021). These sources have been chosen as they are emblematic of the cultural diplomacy that the Uzbekistani government has sought to emphasise as part of its post-Karimovian reformist branding (Cornell and Starr, 2018; Imamova, 2020), is extremely current at the time of writing, and, echoing the function of the role of UNESCO in cultural diplomacy and legitimisation mentioned above, illuminates the role of the network of actors involved in this process. With a focus in this section on Navoiy rather than Temur, it will be argued that the idea of “Uzbekification and Universalisation” applies to the Mirziyoyev era too, demonstrating the potential of both Temurid figures for nation-building, but with Navoiy representing a change towards reform and rebranding (rebuilding) from the state-building image of Temur employed under Karimov.

The how, the what, the who and the why of the nation-building phenomenon – the forms that these figures have taken, the content of these forms, the networks involved and the functionthat their usage has performed, echoes the definitions and framework of Adams and Rustemova’s (2009) comparative analysis of post-independence Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where the authors emphasise the expression of domestic power relations through the productive aspect of power, which produces discourse, forms knowledge and induces pleasure. Their work, drawing on Dean’s (1999) framework for analysing governmentality, explores form, content, network and function, albeit with a different vocabulary. In their words, the end is fulfilling the national idea (function), the “fields of visibility” are how they illuminate what they wish to expose (network), and the techne and episteme of government, that is the power dimension that “entails the means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies” (forms and content) is what is used to understand truth and how knowledge is constructed (Dean 1999: 31, cited in: ibid: 1252). This work has gravitated towards a similar methodological approach, grounded in a clear and concise vocabulary.

Turning to definitions, as has been outlined, cultural diplomacy (CD) is posited as an important element of nation-building. Drawing on Carta, CD is understood as the strategic representation of collective cultural agency curated through narrative construction – an overarching discursive framework which gives meaning to actors and messages, and which leverages an organisational field of functionally interconnected public and private organisations (Carta and Higgott, 2019: 5-7). Within this, a distinction of “thematic priorities” is made between domestic and international CD (ibid: 7). For the latter, its goal is to “win ‘foreigners’ voluntary allegiance*”* (Schneider, 2006: 3, cited in Carta and Higgott, 2019: 7). through “mutual understanding” (Cummings, 2003: 1, cited in: ibid), a term we will see echo in the work. Furthermore, cultural narratives are understood as a means to extend influence, by “manipulating cultural materials and personnel for propaganda purposes” (Barghoorn 1960: 10, cited in: ibid) which is where both the international and domestic element are placed in both Soviet and post-Soviet Uzbekistan. I would also add to the concept for the purposes of this work that said narratives and manipulation of materials can be positive or negative; the legitimisation of a certain narrative entails the delegitimisation of another, as we shall see in varied representations of Navoiy and Temur in Soviet times, and in post-Soviet denigration of Soviet historiography. As CD is thus understood as the manipulation of cultural materials for domestic and international propaganda, this work may be seen as a case study of CD related to Temurid figures, and how this propagandises and legitimises the state.

As indicated above, another interrelated concept that this thesis will employ is legitimisation. Paskaleva’s (2015) analysis of Temurid architecture places it within the construction of an ethno-national identity, national values and post-Soviet societal transformation and the acceptance of history, which legitimises the nation and the state as an entity domestically and internationally. This is the background of factors which state legitimisation is linked to in this work, though at some points the term state-building is employed, and at some points nation-building. This is because of their symbiotic relationship - the legitimisation of the idea of the Uzbek nation legitimises the Uzbekistani state/regime as an enactor of this identity, and the legitimisation of the state enables it to engage in the process of the legitimisation of the nation, of itself and the ruling elite, in which CD plays an integral domestic and international role.

Lastly, we have three terms related to the representation and functions of Temurid figures. The first two, “Sovietisation” and “Uzbekification” are more familiar terms and will figure prominently; “Sovietisation” is understood to connotate the Soviet process of associating Temurid figures with linguistic, territorial and ethnic notions of identity and moulding their historiographies to Marxist-Leninist doctrine in order to legitimise the Soviet nation-building project and Soviet rule. “Uzbekification” is relevant to both the Soviet and post-Soviet era: a process wherein Temurid figures such as Temur and Navoiy were and are associated with Uzbek linguistic, cultural and territorial heritage, and are thus anachronistically “Uzbekified”. The third term is a novel one employed in this work: “Universalisation”. There are two elements to this definition; it is explained firstly as the attribution of worldwide historical-cultural significance and relevance to Temurid figures, seen in notions of Navoiy’s contribution to global spiritual and literary developments under Mirziyoyev, or Temur’s globally admired and recognised cultural heritage under Karimov. Secondly, it is explained as the drive to popularise these figures not only domestically but internationally, which is explored in depth in the work. This relates to the idea of CD as a legitimising measure, and also links back to the idea of “Uzbekification” – both domestically and internationally, when these figures are being promoted, it is as Uzbek exports: the father of Uzbek literature, the progenitor of a strong Uzbek state, figures of Uzbek identity and pride. This reiterates the process of “Uzbekification” and means that “Universalisation” and “Uzbekification” enjoy a symbiotic relationship in the function of legitimisation.

Having established and contextualised the topic, and having detailed the methodological framework, the work will now turn to a detailed examination of the state of the field of post-Soviet Studies which this work is situated in and general scholarship on nation-building in Uzbekistan since 1924 and on Temurid figures specifically, in order to situate the work and its potential contribution to current academia.

**1.2 - Literature review**

This literature review aims to acquaint the reader with considerations and qualifications to be made in post-Soviet Studies and Central Asian Studies that hope to balance the work, and to accommodate the reader with relevant differences in themes and approaches to the topic of Uzbekistani Soviet and post-Soviet nation-building and the specific theme of Temurid figures within that vein. It will then identify the possibility for this work’s contribution to said corpus.

**Post-Soviet?**

Western academic debate has differed on the definition and the practices of Soviet nation-building, as well as the definition and practices of post-Soviet nation-building in Uzbekistan. Scholars disagree on how to define the Soviet presence and nation-building in CA, as Khalid (2007) highlights – was it a coloniser (Ludwig, 2020) and an empire like the Tsarist one before it, (Naby, 1993; Suny: 1993; Martin, 2001, Northrop 2001, 2004) or was it already a postcolonial regime (Teichmann, 2007)? Or, drawing on Moore, (2001) who criticises Western scholarship’s privileging of the Western colonisation model as standard and moves towards a more global postcolonial critique, has this dualism of empire and colony been deconstructed by recent scholarship?[[3]](#footnote-3) Taking this to the post-Soviet period, can we agree with what Liu (2012: 172) calls the “postcolonial question” of achieving international recognition as an independent state? Is “post-Soviet” perhaps a reductionist or a Russocentric label? (Gurin, 2020). Asking a question that highlights the inadequacy of a catch-all post-Soviet label due to differing FSU vectors of development, is Russia now in a post-post-Soviet era? (Kobrin, 2016).

In relation to this debate, this work takes the view that the post-Soviet label, broadly and superficially applied without deeper examination of the particularities of the 15 FSU countries, can be reductionist, as Gurin (2020) argues, in ignoring some of the varied vectors of Soviet and post-Soviet development that these countries have taken. However, though acknowledging the validity of Moore’s (2001) argument, this work acknowledges and explores the significance of the Soviet experience to the topic in a colonial and post-colonial understanding, aiming for its findings relating to continuity and change to nuance these notions and provide a substantiative analysis. As such, it uses the Soviet and post-Soviet labels as a framework to contextualise, understand, structure and examine the particularities of the Soviet and post-independence experience in Uzbekistan, emphasising the developing framework of Uzbekistani national development and contributing novel data to a national, regional and wider FSU corpus. This helps to counteract the reductionism of the label and, through the case study, to contribute to developing more nuanced understandings of post-independence experience that move beyond this intellectual foundation.

**Positionality**

Another issue worth mentioning related to the above discussion is the Western-centric knowledge production which this work forms part of, and the discussion of positionality and inclusivity that this warrants. A series of articles by Central Asian scholars illustrates this issue well. Marat and Aisarina (2021) highlight how regional academic and non-academic knowledge production can be appropriated, ignored or undermined on gendered or intellectually subjective bases due to hierarchies of knowledge (Kim, 2019; Suyarkulova, 2019; Arystanbek, 2019) and how this limits the perspective of Western academic knowledge production. CA, like other areas of the so-called Global South examined by Western academic institutions, is often understood as a periphery under a “coloniality of knowledge production” (Sultanalieva, 2019), and for Russia, “vestiges of imperial attitude towards borderlands” remain (Sekerbayeva, 2019). This is a significant issue, and like for the post-Soviet label, accountability via reflection and discussion helps to move towards a more equal field.[[4]](#footnote-4) In this work, the integration of regional English and Russian language scholars aims to contribute to inclusivity and reciprocity in the field, as well as to fully represent the relevant scholarship.

**Interrogating academia**

In addition to an interrogation of the self, an interrogation of the motivations of the actors and institutions involved in nation-building is vital; two examples illustrate this well. In the early Soviet period, Aleksandr Iakubovskii was responsible for the creation of the image of Temur as a strong and powerful leader in relation to the early program of establishing national identities (Paskaleva, 2015: 422), showing the link between academia and the diffusion of state narratives. Another illustrative and post-Soviet example of the same link can be found in relation to the 2005 Andijon massacre in Uzbekistan, where hundreds of protestors who were killed were post-factum labelled as Wahabbist terrorists by the state.[[5]](#footnote-5) The academic Shirin Akiner (Akiner, 1990; 1996; 1996) was involved the diffusion of these claims, using Uzbekistani and British media appearances to defend the regime’s actions in Andijon (Akiner, 2005, С4, 2005; Akhborot-Plus, 2005; Fergana, 2019), which generated complaints to her employer SOAS University from a former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Human Rights Watch and other human rights campaigners (HRW: 2005, 2008; Murray, 2005). Furthermore, her controversial report on the massacre was published by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of John Hopkins University (CACI).

When mentioning the post-Karimovian reform of discourse in the introduction, one reference was from Cornell and Starr (2018), and a foreword to Akiner’s report was written by the latter. Starr and Cornell (respectively Chairman and Director of CACI) have been criticised for conflicts of interest related to consulting for and financing from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan – for example from the European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS), Baku’s main lobbyist organisation, whose whitewashing PR measures or “caviar diplomacy” are outlined by the Corporate Europe Observatory (2015: 22-26). They have also been criticised for their biased representation of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War (Silverstein, 2006; Ames, 2008; Bruckner, 2010). These links are a cause for concern and merit close attention. Regardless of what conclusions one draws, this interconnected network of narrative diffusion highlights academia’s ability to support and legitimise repression, and to generally support state narratives, highlighting both the need for caution and the strong relevance of these networks to the diffusion of narratives, which relates to this thesis topic.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Top-down or bottom up: The topic of nation-building and approaches to it**

Before addressing the topic of Temurid figures specifically, the overarching idea of nation-building in the literature will be addressed. In the first chapter, the work will address the Soviet historiography of Uzbek ethnogenesis and Temurid figures in detail; for the purposes of this literature review, then, it is more salient to outline perspectives on Uzbekistani nation-building generally.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Broadly speaking, there are two approaches to the topic of nation-building in Uzbekistan. Nation-building may be said to be both a top-down and bottom-up process. A significant corpus, which this work will form part of, explores the network of top-down construction of narratives in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in order to build and legitimise an idea of the Uzbek nation.[[8]](#footnote-8) The arguments of this corpus focus on components such as the use of Temurid architecture and public space generally to project narratives (Paskaleva, 2015), the use of nationalism to legitimise the post-communist regime (Akbarzadeh, 1996), the use of Temurid figures, linguistic nationalism and the idea of the motherland in the nationalism drive (Kurzman, 1999: 81-87, Manz, 2000: 17-19, 2002: 20-24) and the use of a hegemonic post-independence ideology with stabilising national heroes as a legitimising strategy (March, 2002: 373-8). These are counterposed by an embedded ethnographic bottom-up approach which emphasises other factors in identity construction such as community, religious praxis and lived experience. For example, much of the academic literature related to the aforementioned 2005 Andijon massacre highlights the top-down state discourse of danger, as Kendzior (2006, 2007 and 2013) and Edel & Josua (2017) underline in their accounts of the *Akromiya* case in the wake of the massacre. Megoran (2008) and Liu (2012), on the other hand, take a bottom-up approach in examining lived experiences and dialogues of Uzbekistanis and the potential dissent arising from the state narrative through this, highlighting the potential disharmony between the two and the potential limitations of a top-down approach.

Dadabaev (2010), Rasanayagam (2011), Liu (2012) and Finke (2014) also take a bottom-up ethnographic approach in their examinations of Islamic and Uzbek identity, focusing on interviews and conversations with ordinary people, as does Kudaibergenova (2016) in her analysis of artists whose views contest official views of national identity and nation-building, and Kudaibergenova and Shin (2018) in their analysis of bottom-up democratic movements. Again, with this work analysing data related to the state’s domestic and international cultural identity narrative, it is prudent to note the potential discrepancies between the state line and its reception by a domestic and international audience, and the unavoidably partial, though valuable perspective given by an examination of state-propagated identity.

Overall, regardless of which approach is taken, the topics of language, religion, economics, history, historiography and social networks manifest across the board. The principal narrative that emerges is that of a top-down instituted process of nation-building that began after land delimitation and continued throughout Soviet rule, continued by the early post-independent Uzbekistani state under Karimov’s self-styled Renaissance from 1991 to 2016, with less academic work having been written on Mirziyoyev from 2016 to the present day, but the narrative there being one of a rhetoric of reform and rebranding that takes nation-building in a post-Karimovian direction. Blackmon (2020), for example, writes on domestic legitimation through rural economic reform and post-Karimovian political reform, and this thesis’ emphasis on the role of CD for post-Karimovian legitimisation will complement and build on this idea, strengthening this scholarship. As we will now see, in all three periods, the domestic and international historical gravitas associated with Temur and Navoiy, and their respective territorial, architectural and linguistic links to Uzbekistan, have led to them being promoted and canonised to promote a sense of ethnogenetic, or ethno-linguistic-territorial Uzbek identity.

**Temurid figures**

Although as we have seen, there is a wealth of literature on the topic of Soviet and post-Soviet nation-building in Uzbekistan, there are fewer works on Temurid figures and their relationship to it, though those that do exist are valuable and situate this work well. Manz (2002: 1) notes that the use of Temur as a legitimising figure stretches to long before Soviet and post-Soviet formulations of history back to dynasties in the Middle East and Central and South Asia. Moving towards our period of concern, Paskaleva (2015) convincingly analyses the notions of ideology, nationhood and political power in relation to Soviet and post-Soviet restoration of Temurid architecture in Samarqand, Temur’s capital. She argues that due to the historical legacy associated with the Temurid period, that even before the creation of Uzbekistan the architecture held a symbolic function (ibid: 420). This begins with Tsarist colonisers, whose restoration and study of Islamic architecture placed them as the legitimate inheritor of Temurid heritage. In the Soviet period, conservation and research fitted into “an ethnocentric discourse where these architectural artefacts were regarded as part of Uzbek national heritage.” (ibid: 421), key to whom was the Orientalist scholar Iakubovskii, who developed the ethnogenetic Uzbek narrative in line with Soviet policy.

Shaw (2011) similarly highlights the significance of preservation to Soviet legitimacy in a case study of Temur’s burial place, the Gur-i-Amir mausoleum in Samarqand, as a way of unseating Islam and securing local support, in addition to the diplomatic value of the presentation of a religiously and historically compatible cultured socialism.[[9]](#footnote-9) Paskaleva (2015: 422) remarks that during the 1930s, Amir Temur was celebrated as part of the establishment of national identities. Though much of the focus is on the post-Soviet period, the four-decade gap of the Soviet period does not mention WWII, though the next article to be addressed examines this period.

Continuing with the Soviet period, Shin (2017) writes on the 1948 all-Union Soviet celebration of the Navoiy's 500th anniversary, detailing his Uzbekisation and Sovietisation from the 1920s to the late 1940s and discussing how “shifting visions and institutions of nation-building affected representations of Alisher Navoi as well as the cultural historiography of an Uzbek nation” (ibid: 117). He argues the commemoration affirmed both the writer’s Soviet status in and “the Uzbek people's “national ownership” of the poet and Timurid cultural heritage”. Like Paskaleva, Shin highlights Iakubovskii’s role in the development of a primordialist view of Uzbek identity, but also emphasises that the ideas he used to explain Uzbek ethnogenesis and Navoiy’s link to them were inspired by the Jadids (ibid: 123), a Muslim reformist group of cultural elites largely purged in the 1930s – an idea echoed in Keller (2007: 266). Shin further notes that between 1936-1948, canonisation was systematised and diffused through theatre, celebrations of culture and newspaper articles, with Navoiy’s class origins and Sufism being suppressed in favour of his statesmanship and charitable deeds (ibid: 129). This canonisation was also reflected in public space, with the Committee responsible for the anniversary adopting plans to build landmarks dedicated to Navoiy, all of which exist today in addition to a region and city named after him, a national university, a park in Toshkent and more, a process which Zarkar (2015) adds was repeated for his 525th and 550th anniversaries. Overall, this canonisation symbolised the nationalised Soviet Uzbekistani culture.

Furthermore, covering a period of Temurid figural representation omitted in Paskaleva (2015), Shin (2017) notes WWII catalysed the Uzbekification of regional history due to the task for the cultural elites of promoting Soviet patriotism among the Uzbekistani population, which took a nationalist form[[10]](#footnote-10) and which further helped Uzbekistan make a stronger claim for their national ownership of Navoiy (ibid: 121). Shlapentokh (2019: 82) and Shaw (2011: 44) argue Temur was marginalised in favour of Navoiy and Ulughbek due to the cultural rather than political connotations associated with them as opposed to Temur, though Shaw (ibid) notes that the Temur was disassociated from Temurid architecture, which was still prized. Manz (2002: 17), who agrees with Shaw and Slapentokh in regard to the Soviet preference for Ulughbek and Navoiy, nevertheless makes the qualification like Shin that Soviet historiography’s need to encourage patriotism and glorify military leaders during the WWII led to a renewal of Temur’s prominence.[[11]](#footnote-11) Shaw (2011: 58) also notes the wartime policy of reconciliation with local culture that saw vast sums given to Temurid monument preservation. Temur was, however, later condemned in 1973 as a brutal warlord (Paskaleva, 2015: 421) – at which time Temurid monuments celebrated Uzbek craftsmanship rather than Temur himself, going back to Shaw’s (2011: 44) note that Temurid architecture, which was functionally useful to the Soviets, was thus disassociated from Temur. In showcasing the Soviet historiographical reaction to an attempt to rehabilitate Temur in the 1960s, this work will support and build on these scholars’ view as regards to the marginalisation of Temur.

Moving onto post-independence, Paskaleva argues the Temurid cult replaced Marxist-Leninist doctrine, with Temur being Uzbekified regardless of his Turco-Mongolic ethnicity and his predating the Uzbek presence in Samarqand by two centuries. Temur is “the pivotal figure of Uzbek collective memory” (p.419) and his architecture is a reflection of that, this being employed as a legitimation tactic via collective memory, especially during the 1996 660th anniversary of his birth and the 2750th anniversary of Samarqand in 2007.[[12]](#footnote-12) In a contrary interpretation, Malikov (2018) argues that the view of Uzbekistani nation-building as having a nationalistic primordial idea is reductive, highlighting the need to account for the role of local cultural elites and their dialogue with central authorities, and the multiculturality and multiconfessionality of Samarqand’s politics of memory (such as toponymy, statues to foreign poets and local history) which is argued to demonstrate the falsehood of maintaining the primacy of primordialism. Whilst agreeing that accounting for the dynamic of central authorities and cultural elites is important, I would however argue that, in noting like Paskaleva (2015: 419) the centrality of Temurid restorations to Samarqand and Temur’s 660th anniversary, Malikov (ibid: 135-6) demonstrates the primacy of Temur both within Samarqand and, if we zoom out from Samarqand to Uzbekistan as a whole, to post-independence Uzbekistani nation-building, undermining his criticism of the notion of Soviet primordialism’s primacy in post-Soviet nation-building.

Moving onto UNESCO involvement, Paskaleva also briefly discusses, in principally economic terms, the importance of cultural tourism that UNESCO has contributed to the Uzbekistani economy (p.427) – whilst this is very true, I would additionally argue that cultural tourism fulfils a political function in CD which is legitimised by such organisations’ participation, an idea of which would strengthen the argument related to legitimisation that Paskaleva makes – furthermore, this functional and limited use of UNESCO would explain the fact Paskaleva mentions that “international organisations and scholars such as UNESCO are limited and monitored by the political elite” (p.434). In regard to the UNESCO co-published 1996 *Amir Timur in World History* book that this work will analyse, then, the work intends to build on Paskaleva’s examination of UNESCO’s role in Uzbekistan’s tourism and CD, adding the political legitimisation component to the analysis and thus strengthening our understanding of forms, networks, content and functions of the use of Temurid heritage.

In regard to Navoiy, Shin (2017) links him, like Temur, to post-Soviet national revival and shows the link of language to national identity, noting the making of Uzbek the state language and the decree that founded the Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoiy. Shin’s pertinent analysis of Navoiy’s 500th anniversary in 1948 provides a natural comparison for the 2021 580th anniversary – what can be taken is the methodology of the top-down structure of how canonisation is diffused and the content of this canonisation, and for what purpose; a Moscow directive or a presidential decree trickles down through cultural and literary elites and is enacted in intellectual and public space. This work’s analysis of post-independence 2021 Navoiy celebrations will aim to build on Shin’s notion of the link of language and literature to national identity, and also legitimisation, contributing significantly to a fuller picture of the utilisation of Navoiy over time and a more holistic picture of the use of Temurid figures in CD, especially through the concept of “Universalisation” which will be explored. Overall, Shin, Paskaleva and Malikov demonstrate the role of cultural elites in their work, and an emphasis on these actors is also integral to an understanding of the forms and functions that identity-forming content can take, showing the intertwined nature of the vectors of analysis of this work. In engaging with and building on the ideas of scholarship regarding Soviet and post-Soviet legitimacy and nationhood and its manifestation in the changing uses of Temurid figures, and the forms in public and intellectual space that this has taken, the work hopes to further develop the component of Temurid figures within the topic of Uzbekistani nation-building.

**Conclusion**

Overall, this literature review has established the scholarship’s narrative of the main themes of nation-building in Uzbekistan and the two broad approaches that can be taken towards it, as well as the idea of continuity of nation-building from early Soviet to post-Soviet ideology, a process in which Temurid figures have been central. Furthermore, it has touched on issues relevant to Central Asian Studies and Post-Soviet Studies more generally, and identified the potential to contribute new data to the existing scholarship on the Karimov era in order to consolidate understandings of early post-independence processes of nation-building. In the same vein, it has identified that Mirziyoyev’s reign has been analysed less, and not in relation to the 2021 celebrations, providing an opportunity for a novel contribution to a current and relevant process in comparison with Karimov. More generally, it has identified a lesser amount of literature related to the topic of Temurid figures, and concludes that with a combination of novel data and an analysis posited on cultural diplomacy and a current perspective, there is potential to illuminate the ongoing process of nation-building in Uzbekistan generally and particularly in light of Temurid figures, thus contributing to and furthering existing scholarship.

**I - Creation and change: Uzbekistan in the Soviet Union**

*“He (Navoiy) rose higher than his epoch and recognised that the country and the people could not remain in slavery and oppression for long. His soul ached for his people and his native land.”*

*Hamid Olimjon, head of the Uzbek Writers’ Union (1939-1944). (Shin, 2017: 129).*

*“A particular brand of patriotism and particular image of social events brought Timur – a clever, active and skilful leader, to power.”*

*Ibrohim Mo’minov in “Amir Temur in World History” (1968: 9).*

**1.1 - Early Soviet history**

The creation of the UzSSR in October 1924 was part of the Soviet creation of nations based on a model of ethnoterritorial federalism. It is thus widely acknowledged as the watershed moment in the process of Uzbekistani nation building (Sabol, 1995; Kurzman, 1999: 79-80; Hirsch, 2000; Dadabaev, 2010; 25-6; Matsuzato, 2017; Smith, 2013: 76-77; Finke, 2014: 49).[[13]](#footnote-13)

An idea of burgeoning national identity over the Soviet period is evoked as a consequence of integration into the Soviet model through the nationalities policy – what Martin (2001) coined affirmative action and Slezkine (1994) the communal apartment; first embodied in indigenisation (*korenizatsiya)*, the policy of incorporating locals into the Soviet bureaucratic and political system(Liber, 1991; Slezkine, 1994; Akturk, 2010; Sokolovskiy, 2013; Smith, 2013). It is argued that indigenisation catalysed the emergence of nationalism, leading to the reassertion of centralised control (Liber, 1991; Teichmann, 2007). Said reassertion of control is also linked to Soviet de-Islamisation campaigns, which largely destroyed the infrastructure of Islamic learning and practice, and marginalised the *ulama*’s authority(Northrop: 2000, 2001, 2004; Pianciola and Sartori, 2007; Khalid: 2014).[[14]](#footnote-14)

Other aspects of this policy include the creation of a standardised Uzbek language (Akiner, 1990) and changes in gender and religious policies (Massell, 1974; Northrop, 2000, 2001 & 2004, Khalid, 2014). In relation to historiography, a key figure was Orientalist Aleksandr Iakubovskii, who greatly contributed to the idea of Uzbek ethnogenesis. In a 1941 work tracing “the Uzbek ethnogenesis not to the sixteenth century and the Shaybanids but to the tenth century, with the arrival of Turkic peoples and their settlement under the Kara-Khanid dynasty, which concluded the brilliant early ethnogenesis of the Uzbek”, Iakubovskii reified Soviet ideas of ethnogenetic identity in academia (Laruelle, 2010: 105). Moreover, as Albion (1996: 5) and Paskaleva (2015: 422) remark, Iakubovskii’s assessment of Temur was connected to this ethnogenesis and the nation-building project, with the idea emerging of a talented commander and cultural patron, and the Soviet-friendly idea of a creator of a strong centralised state, placing both Temur and Uzbek identity within a Marxist-Leninist historical narrative. This is where the connection to the topic at hand becomes increasingly evident.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Literary canonisation was also part of this early Soviet task of national categorisation and legitimisation, further showing the emergence of Temurid figures in CD to legitimise the Soviet state and build an Uzbek nation. Shin (2017) notes efforts in the 1920s and 1930s to produce new assessments of Navoiy’s prominence as a Chagatai activist in academic literature and his 500th anniversary celebration in 1925, emphasising the Soviet-Uzbek creation of a Chagatai literary heritage for Uzbekistan, as well as the 1937 celebration of Uzbek national culture which included Navoiy and preparations for the 1948 All-Union Jubilee of Navoiy (ibid: 121). The poet was Sovietised and Uzbekified, being canonised as Soviet-friendly figure of Uzbek literary heritage who was a “prophet of the common people” rather than a “feudal vizier and Sufi thinker” (ibid: 129).[[16]](#footnote-16)

Dynamics related to Temur were more complicated, highlighting the imbalance of Temurid representations – as noted, Shlapentokh (2019: 82) and Shaw (2011: 44) argue Temur was marginalised in favour of Navoiy due to the cultural and less political connotations of the latter. Manz (2002), whose view agrees with Shaw and Slapentokh in regard to the Soviet preference for Ulugbek and Navoiy (ibid: 17), makes the qualification that Soviet historiography’s need to encourage patriotism and glorify military leaders during WWII led to a rehabilitation of Temur (ibid) – moreover, Paskaleva (2015: 422, citing McChesney, 2003: 24), notes that Stalin revered Temur’s military prowess. In terms of content and function, is clear that by the end of WWII, as Shin (2017) argues, Navoiy’s place as the figure of Uzbek language and literature was cemented, and Temur was also firmly cemented in the imagination of Uzbek identity, though other Temurid figures were preferred over Temur in the identity construction process, who was marginalised after a period of usefulness[[17]](#footnote-17). However, as we will now see, an attempt at rehabilitation in the late 1960s addressed this Soviet disregard for Temur, challenging the predominant Soviet representation of Temur and its function as a legitimisation of Soviet policy, incurred a backlash that exhibited in turn what exactly that view was and the need to maintain its force.

**Figures 4 and 5 – Soviet representations of Temurid figures**

A picture containing text, book, stone

Description automatically generatedA statue of a person

Description automatically generated

Figure 4 - Reconstruction of Temur’s face by Gerasimov in 1941 based on his skull (Wikimedia Commons, 2008).

Interest and examination of Temur manifested in the exhumation of his grave in 1941 for a creation of Uzbek identity through physical features (McChesney, 2003: 29, cited in: Paskaleva, 2015: 422).

Figure 5 - Portrait of poet and statesmen Alisher Navoi from Semyonov’s 1940 *Portraits of the era of Navoiy* (Hauser, 2021).

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**1.2 - Reassessment and reaction**

**Reassessment**

Moving on from the early Soviet period, “*The Role and Place of Amir Timur in Central Asian History”*, a Russian-language academic work published in 1968 by historian I. Muminov, forms a significant moment in the changing representation of Temur in Soviet times, reassessing the negative position outlined above and advocating for his rehabilitation through a Marxist-Leninist methodology. This historical reassessment of Temur’s representation emphasises the cultural, scientific and military achievements of the time rather than the cruelty of his campaigns and the uncommunistic, unequal feudal structure of Temur’s empire that we will see underlined in the reaction which followed this work’s publication.

Whilst Muminov’s work operates carefully within the Marxist-Leninist historiographical framework of a “concrete, historical and class-based approach to figures” (Muminov, 1968: 5), with Temur remaining an “expression of the interests of the ruling classes” with “politics aimed at the maintaining of the toiling mass of peasantry and craftsmen in the clutches of feudal exploitation and oppression” (ibid: 2), the revisionist content of Timur’s representation is significant. The emphasis on the cultural, military and scientific achievements is described to have been possible through Temur’s creation of a “united independent state in Maverannahr” which “enabled the development of the economy and culture of all of Central Asia” (ibid: 2), possible through Temur’s talented and clever military approach, and his attentiveness and meticulousness. The text gives examples of how he consulted with scientists before policy decisions (ibid: 12), and how his reign presided over scientific, literary and cultural development, architecture (ibid: 13-17) general urban infrastructure, and so on, whilst not allowing corruption (ibid: 17-22). However, the Marxist-Leninist critical historiographical framework remains; Muminov states how the oppressed toiling mass lived in poverty in spite of noble luxury – this was a class struggle where Soviet historiography’s further work can “show the forms and methods of exploitation of the working mass in the Timurid state” (ibid: 24). Muminov also highlights Temur’s diplomacy with European countries and his popularity there (ibid: 30) and disagrees with the idea that Bartold’s emphasis on Temur’s constructions rather than destructions is an exaggeration (ibid: 32), defending it. It ends by saying that “Timur, the builder and appreciator of culture, is respected by the peoples of Central Asia, and his mausoleum receives much attention in Samarqand” (ibid: 45), and that as Temurid architecture is being restored, so too has Samarqand once again transformed architecturally, this time with car, cotton and chemical factories, reservoirs and dams, plantations and so on.

Overall, though couched in Marxist-Leninist thought and analysis, this was a significant effort at revisionism of Temur, and in equivocating the Temurid and Soviet beautifications of Samarqand as well as framing this reassessment within a Marxist-Leninist framework, we see an attempt at the legitimisation of Soviet power and ideology that promotes rather than marginalises Temur, showing a differentiation in the content of his representation from negative to positive, which is linked back to the function of the legitimisation of power. Indeed, with Muminov claiming that a “particular brand of patriotism and particular image of social events brought Timur – a clever, active and skilful leader to power” (ibid: 9), we see an association of the idea of Temur and patriotism that will be integral to the later Karimovian era and its own historiographical reassessment.

**Reaction**

As Jamalov (2014) illustrates, this reassessment and rehabilitation of Temur’s place in history was met with criticism from historians (Jamalov, 2014: 18-20; Manz 2002: 19-20).[[18]](#footnote-18) One of these responses, which took the form of a Russian-language article by Novoseltsev (1973)[[19]](#footnote-19) on the “Historical Evaluation of Timur”, presents two opposed historiographical representation, one positive and one negative. Novoseltsev explains the positive assessments of Temur by courtiers and descendants as a result of their “expression of the interests of the ruling class” and reflecting “the events of the past in the light of the requests and preferences of their patrons” – “class ideology of feudal lords, or more precisely of certain groups of this class”.

Differing from Muminov and earlier scholars such as Iakubovskii who presented Temur in a positive light, in Novoselstev’s damning assessment, themes of cruelty and inequal feudality predominate; wealth gained from campaigns went to the nobility who inspired and participated in them - as such, the extreme violence and centralisation of the Temurid regime represented a power that could defend the ruling class from internal strife. Novoseltsev argues the image of Temur as a strong, powerful leader was an attractive historical narrative for the ruling classes of other times and places, and by extension, for the chroniclers serving this class.

The author continues by reassessing early Soviet scholars Bartold and Iakubovskii’s idealistic assessments of Temur, arguing they focused too much on cultural renaissance rather than the socio-economic and material conditions which made it possible. Disparaging Mumimov’s reassessment of a strong, progressive leader as in Iakubovskii’s historiography, Novoseltsev highlights Temur as a “cunning and two-faced politician” disposing of unnecessary and dangerous supporters, “drowning in blood” the Serbedars of Maverannahr and even more cruelly and treacherously dealing with the Serbedars of Khorasan, emphasising the razing of Urganch, Sebzevar and the destruction of Damascus. With sometimes “even greater cruelty than Chinggis Khan”, Temur “to strike fear into peoples, destroyed cities and mercilessly massacred their inhabitants in a premeditated manner”, piled skulls, murdered and trapped prisoners in tower walls.

In addition to this content of feudality and cruelty, the content of Temur’s representation on the architectural front, which as we have seen is an important signifier of his legacy, is further attacked from a Marxist-Leninist angle in order to delegitimise Muminov’s historical reassessment, in comments that celebrated Temurid structures were built through the labour of prisoners of war to satisfy and maintain noble support rather than for the common people. Furthermore, the Temurid Renaissance is disconnected from Temur as being the cultural property of later figures such as Ulughbek and Navoiy, whose achievements were far from Temur’s devastating campaigns and bloody executions. Moreover, the historical conditions that gave rise to Temur and his prioritisation of the nobility in this historical context is argued to have in fact catalysed the ending of this Renaissance, as when shifts in power happened after his death, society became primitivised.

Overall, this “impartial analysis of the factual material” shows a plundering and devastating figure who protected his noble supporters, and whose Renaissance was the result of predatory wars and the siphoning of wealth and labour, thus attacking various components of the positive representation of Temur from a Marxist-Leninist angle. Disparaging the figure is this a form of negative CD in which Temur’s delegitimisation supports the Soviet historiographical model and wider project. Overall, as Manz (2002: 20) argues, these prominent public attacks made the inability to praise Temur clear, but also made clear that he could not be omitted, especially due to his architectural legacy. Yet, as the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan condemned Temur in 1973 (Paskaleva, 2015: 423), the reassessing viewpoint of Mumimov’s brochure was condemned, and the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint embodied in Novoseltsev’s article prevailed, meaning Temur remained a key though marginalised figure until the changing nature and fortunes of communism led to the emergence of an independent nationalist ideology and historiography, one in which Muminov’s rehabilitation of Temur prevailed, reflecting a change in the representation and function of Temurid figures whose reasons we will now turn to.

**1.3 - The breakdown of ideology and emergence of independence**

The period of Soviet reform that began in 1983 under Gorbachev, a decade after Temur’s condemnation, “effectively laid the basis for a conservative like Islam Karimov to rise to power” (Fazendeiro, 2017: 411). It in this context that Cucciolla (2017) writes on the 1983-1989 Uzbek cotton affair, and how a drive against corruption, specifically against falsified cotton harvest figures, led to the widespread repression and restructuring of Uzbekistani bureaucracy, which triggered disaffection among the nomenklatura, causing the “local sense of disaffection with the empire” to be “at its height” and the emergence of a “new Uzbek narrative of the country’s Soviet experience” (ibid: 12) amidst the breakdown of communism. It is in this context of disaffection and rising nationalism that Rafiq Nishanov, who had replaced the long-serving Sharof Rashidov in 1983, was replaced by Islom Karimov.[[20]](#footnote-20)

As Fazendeiro (2017: 411) notes, Karimov advocated not only stability but an “Uzbek approach to economic development”. Independence was not particularly desired by the nomenklatura (Cucciolla: 2017: 5), as multiple scholars highlight; Akbarzadeh (1996) remarks that unlike the Baltic states, the CA republics had no grassroots independence movements, and that the Soviet collapse forced independence on political elites and an intelligentsia that were prepared to remain part of the USSR. Cucciolla (2017: 4; 2020) and Kurzman (1999: 77-78) echo this, the latter stating that “unlike most decolonised nations of the twentieth century, Uzbekistan was both created and granted independence at Moscow’s command, not through nationalist mobilisation”. Highlighting the structural factors that led to this, Suny (1993: 156) opines that the Uzbekistani elite “adopted the garb of nationalism” in order to preserve power during the communism’s decline and the subsequent transition. In this light, the idea of national independence and Uzbek particularism became a method to legitimise continued elite rule, and nationalism had a distinctly statist origin in the context of the delegitimisation of Marxist-Leninist ideology after the USSR’s collapse, as we will see in our examinations of the Karimov and Mirziyoyev eras. Temurid figures were part of this – indeed, the rehabilitation of Temur was a tendency denounced in 1986 by the Uzbek Party Central Committee (Manz, 2002: 21).

**Conclusion**

Thus the foundation was laid for Temurid heritage to contribute to the post-independence Uzbekistani state’s national identity project. The basis of Soviet nation-building and the legitimisation of power based on ideas of territory, language and history as the basis of nationality (Smith et al. 1998; Manz, 2002; Mellon, 2010) was the key inheritance in post-independence Uzbekistan, as well as the significance of religious control (Khalid, 2014), monumental propaganda and the usage of historical figures (Zarkar, 2015; Dadabaev, 2016; Malikov, 2018). Lastly, in addition to the infrastructural and ideological inheritance from the Soviet period evoked as contributing to the *substance* of post-independence Uzbek nation-building, it is worth reiterating that the *need* for post-independence Uzbek nation-building was a result of the USSR’s collapse, which created a situation of ideological vacuum and the need to create a narrative to suit its new status (Kumar, 2013: 95). Sovietised and Uzbekified Temurid figures emerged as a tool of this new ideology, becoming instead Uzbekified and Universalised figures as the post-independence Uzbekistani regime navigates a new domestic and international quest for legitimisation.

**II: Karimov – Rehabilitation and The Second Renaissance**

“If one wants to understand who the Uzbek is, what defines the power and strength of the Uzbek nation, where its justice and endless opportunities lie, what it has contributed to global development, and through all this, to understand the nation’s faith in the future – they must remember Amir Temur.”

Islom Karimov at the opening of the Museum of Temurid History, 18th October 1996.

**2.1 - Independence and its challenges**

The Republic of Uzbekistan (RoU) was formed on 31st August 1991, the same year that was declared the Year of Alisher Navoiy in honour of his 560th anniversary (№ UP-139)[[21]](#footnote-21). Independence presented the Karimovian regime with an ideological vacuum caused by the delegitimisation of Soviet ideology, and new economic and political challenges due to the loss of Soviet support. In regard to the former, in this context Adams and Rustemova (2009) highlight the newly independent Uzbekistani state as a paternalistic one where government-crafted discourses about nationhood and moral order shaped the population, including a “backward-looking national idea that draws on essentialist discourses about ethnic and national identity” (ibid: 1250-1) in contrast to unification in post-independence nation-building through a vision of economic prosperity in Kazakhstan.

Adams and Rustemova (2009) emphasise the expression of domestic power relations and the productive aspect of power, which produces discourse, forms knowledge and induces pleasure, rather than acting purely as a negative phenomenon whose function is repression (ibid: 1251, cited from Foucault 1980: 119). This allows an exploration of how relations of power are constructed and how authority is constituted in the president through cults of personality by proxy. This idea has a broad application to the idea of the 660th anniversary celebrations; they may be interpreted as an expression of both domestic and international power relations and the associated production of discourse, knowledge, and authority/legitimisation in the process of post-independence nation-building. As we will see, the focus on national identification through the architectural, cultural and political legacy of Temur in post-independence nation and state-building relates the canonised figure of Temur and Karimov closely, providing both domestic and international legitimisation to the newly emerging post-Soviet state, positing this step in Uzbekistan’s history as the continuation of a Golden Heritage that has broken free of its colonial clutches into rebirth and renaissance. It is in the context that we may now turn to the 660th anniversary of Amir Temur and how and why it was celebrated in Uzbekistan.

**2.2 - 1996: the 660th anniversary of Amir Temur**

An order “On announcing the year 1996 as ‘The Year of Amir Temur’” (PF-1333-son) from 26th December, 1995, signed by Karimov, emphasises the “many proposals received from the public of our country on the occasion of the anniversary” and Temur’s “contribution to the building of statehood, science, education and culture” as well as the “decision of the General Conference of UNESCO in 1996 to widely celebrate the 660th anniversary of Amir Temur” with “international and national events” and “in order to further develop the feelings of national pride and patriotism of the citizens of Uzbekistan and the younger generation”.[[22]](#footnote-22)

This declaration of 1996 as the Year of Amir Temur is the first manifestation of an order from the Cabinet of Ministers dated 29th December 1994, signed by Karimov (630-son) “On the celebration of the 660th anniversary of the birth of Amir Temur”.[[23]](#footnote-23) It approves an organisational committee to organise the anniversary, and tasks the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Academy of Sciences (AoS), with relevant ministries, *hokimiyats* (municipalities) and public organisations, to hold an international conference “Amir Temur and His Place in World History”; the Ministry of Culture (MoC), Uzbektourism, the Ministry of Finance, AoS, and regional and city-level *hokimiyats* to repair, conserve and beautify Temurid architecture and to develop the concept for international tourist routes; the state press to publish new works on Temurid science, culture, art, and the construction of a memorial complex; the State Film company to make television programs on Temur; Toshkent city administration along with the MoC and AoS to determine measures for the construction and development of a Museum of Temurid History; and for various ministries, public organisations and creative associations to develop programs to study, research and promote the role of Temur in world history.

Yet if the Soviet period saw a distinction between the endorsement or lack thereof of Temur and Temurid architecture as seen earlier in Shaw (2011), Karimov’s beautification of Temurid architecture and plans for the construction of a Temurid museum belies the domestic and international applications of the figure and Temurid architecture – the former application being national pride and patriotism through public space, and the latter for tourism and legitimacy, showing the Uzbekification and Universalisation of Temurid architecture *and* Temur in differentiation to the Soviet representation. Adding to this, we see the role of academia in the conferences, programs and planned publications relating to the new historiographical revisionism of Amir Temur as a cunning and intelligent state-builder and patron of the arts rather than the cruel feudal ruler presented in the Soviet historiography.

Figure 6 (top): A statue of Temur in central Toshkent on Amir Temur Square. (AraraTour, 2021)

Figure 7 (bottom): A statue of Temur at Shahrisabz in front of Ak-Saray, the ruins of his summer palace. (Wikimedia Commons, 2021)

**Figures 6 and 7 - Karimovian depictions of Temurid figures**

A large stone castle with a statue in front of it

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Figure 6 (top): A statue of Temur in central Toshkent on Amir Temur Square. (AraraTour, 2021)

Figure 7 (bottom): A statue of Temur at Shahrisabz in front of Ak-Saray, the ruins of his summer palace. (Wikimedia Commons, 2021)

**Public space**

Temur’s famous quote of “Let he who doubts our power and munificence look upon our buildings” (Eurasia Travel, 2021) seems to have been understood by Karimov when the Karimovian regime’s use of public space is examined. This is a well-explored theme in the literature (Albion, 1996; Bell, 1999; Cummings, 2010; Paskaleva, 2015; Malikov, 2018; Zarkar, 2015), but worth examining with the implementation of decrees and speeches. The first post-independence use of Temurid figures in public space was the 1993 construction of a Temur state in central Toshkent (Figure 6) which replaced a bust of Marx, mandated in a decree (322-son) alongside the design and creation of a memorial complex. In a further demonstration of the de-Sovietisation and Uzbekification of space, the square designated for the monument in the heart of Toshkent, “Revolution Square”, is renamed “Amir Temur Square”, a process which occurred throughout Uzbekistan (Malikov, 2018: 137-139).[[24]](#footnote-24)

The historiographical rehabilitation of Temur is a symbol and part of the renaissance of the nation; in Karimov’s speech at the opening of the monument, sculpted by I. Jabborov, and presented in what Albion (1996: 3) calls a horseback tradition of Western kings, presenting Temur as “civilised royalty”, removed of nomadic assortments, on the second anniversary of Uzbekistani independence (Amir Temur in World History, 1996: 11-13), its unveiling is an “unforgettable historical event in the life of the Uzbek people” and Temur is a figure who “laid the foundation of a great state, a strategist who conquered half of the world and whose name has been glorified for centuries” – a figure who has “returned to his Motherland thanks to the obtaining of independence and sovereignty”.

Furthering this new front of legitimising CD through Temur and its move away from Soviet rule and historiography, Soviet rule is presented as “colonial clutches” which “deprived us of the possibility to revere our great compatriot and give dues to his historical merits”. The goal of this deprivation was to “erode a sense of national self-consciousness” in order to make people “lose a feeling of national pride and reconcile with their subjugation”. Yet this was a failure, and now, in order to “build up the great state that everybody dreams of”, “national dignity and the mastering of spiritual richness inherited from our great ancestors” is needed – and this image will foster “pride”, adding “strength and energy to the cause of the consolidation process of our people”. March (2002) esteems that Karimovian historiography’s focus on a strong state and strong leader, duty, obligation and pride, and a unifying telos to politics, and more fundamentally, the creation of an appearance of historical inevitability and legitimisation through the historical process as the cultural, intellectual and spiritual product of the nation rather than a particular group’s self-interest, has a distinctly authoritarian edge to it,[[25]](#footnote-25) and the content of this speech makes such a conclusion indeed convincing.

A similar emphasis on post-independence Temurid CD for legitimisation can be seen in the construction of a “State Museum of the History of the Temurids” in Toshkent on Amir Temur Square, mandated in 1996 to “propagandise the scientific and cultural progress and enlightenment of the Temurid era and Empire on a mass scale” and to “bring up the young generation in a spirit of patriotism on the base of historical achievements and traditions” (ibid: 15). A 2016 document, “Uzbek people’s pride”, touts the museum as an “inexhaustible fount of spirituality, keeper of ancient relics and real masterpieces of art with great historical value” with unique items and exhibitions on Temurid history that highlight its artistic legacy; these are supposed to serve as a “vivid illustration for the young generation’s moral education in the spirit of independence and awaken national consciousness by exploring the rich traditions of the people, ancient values, with a respectful and careful attitude to our ancestors’ invaluable heritage”[[26]](#footnote-26). At the Museum opening on 18th October 1996, Karimov stated that Temur is the “greatest person in our history, occupying the highest place in the past, present and future of our Motherland” and that “after our country gained independence, Amir Temur became a symbol of our Motherland and nation”. Like Karimov, Temur was “able to bring his people to consensus in historically difficult conditions” and “raise the flag of freedom”, thus creating a “powerful centralised sultanate”. The opening of the museum represents “historical justice” – it and Temur answer the question of “who the Uzbek is, where the power and strength of the Uzbek nation lies, where its justice and endless opportunities are, what it is contributed to global development, and through all of this, to understand its faith in the future” and of course, legitimising the figure leading them on this path.

A further legitimisation of Temurid CD in post-independence Uzbekistan can be seen in UNESCO’s celebration of Temur’s anniversary, seen as a vindication of the “undoubtable merits of Temur before mankind”, who aimed for “the Motherland’s freedom and independence” and “love for the Fatherland” gives a feeling of “authentic pride”. The “pain and suffering of Temur’s people and country” was transformed into the world’s most powerful sultanate – Uzbekistan is now in a similar position, and the link is clear “let us, loving our Motherland, transform Uzbekistan into a great state which will be envied worldwide!” (Amir Temur in World History, 1996: p.13-15). Writing on the Temurid Museum, Paskaleva (2016: 40-41) describes Temur as a figure whose “architectural ambitions fostering state legitimation” are echoed in Karimov’s building of the Museum on the Amir Temur Square, which has been the “ideological centre of Tashkent since 1882” and widely regarded as the “primary locus of ‘civilised’ Russian rule”. Indeed, in presenting Temurid achievements side by side with contemporary Uzbek history and leadership, a sense of continuity between Temur and post-independence leadership is created, as well as emphasising the humanistic achievements of Temur rather than his military prowess.

Paskaleva concludes the “formation of the architectural landscape of modern Tashkent” aspires to a material recognition of and testament to the state’s policies in the elevation of cultural and religious heritage as a tool for binding shared goals and ideas in the Uzbek collective memory, and that it is a tool to express “ideological power, and prompts respect and recognition at a local and international level” (ibid: 41). Examining this data, we thus see a clear link similar to that made by Paskaleva between Temurid state-building and post-independence state building, which Karimov being reiterated as the appropriate figure for this project of Renaissance in the same sense that Temur was, and with feelings of national pride, justice, and patriotism creating the state-society link that will lead Uzbekistan to greatness, showing its function of supporting the independence ideology and legitimising Karimov’s rule.

A picture containing sky, outdoor

Description automatically generated

Figure 8: The restoration or renovation of Temurid architecture as evidenced at Gur-i-Amir, Temur’s resting place in Samarqand (Author, 2019).

**The “Order of Amir Temur”**

Another dimension of Temur’s post-independence use can be seen in the 1996 creation of the “Order of Amir Temur” (№ 225-I), awarded to RoU citizens and others for outstanding services in strengthening statehood, or significant contributions to the development of architecture, science, literature and art, including military art. The “Order of Amir Temur" is also awarded for “special contributions to the strengthening of interstate cooperation, peace and friendship between peoples”.

Figure 9: The Order of Amir Temur with the writing *“Kuch Adolatda”* – “Justice is power” (World Military Encyclopedia, 2021).

Examples of the award’s deployment begin on 28th August 1996, when the city of Shahrisabz (Temur’s birthplace) is awarded the Order on the occasion of the 660th anniversary of Temur’s birth for its “special contribution to the preservation of the great cultural and spiritual heritage of the Timurid period, unique historical monuments, the upbringing of the younger generation as worthy heirs of our great ancestors and their ability to create a great future for our free country” (PF-1554-son). On the same date, Samarqand is also awarded the Order (№ UP-1553) for its “enormous contribution to the development of world science, culture and architectural art as the capital of the Timurid state and an outstanding contribution to the strengthening of interstate cooperation, peace, friendship between peoples” and for the “careful storage for many centuries and in glorification throughout the world historical and spiritual heritage of the Uzbek people, for active participation in the implementation of fundamental transformations in our independent country, in accelerating its economic progress and in connection with the 660th anniversary”. After an 18-year gap, Termiz is awarded the Order in 2014 for “services in the spirit of education” in the context of independence and “the preservation of the historical and spiritual heritage of our people and the noble values of our ancestors” (PF-4645-son).

One English-language document is revealing of the motives of these awards and explains the rationale behind the Order (Permanent Mission RoU UN); it writes that “after gaining independence and carrying out a huge work to restore historical justice and national pride of our people, the rich historical heritage and the names of many great ancestors have been revived.” and “a special place among them is occupied by Amir Temur, who has become a symbol of courage, courage and wisdom, and the national pride of our people.” Another document from the same organisation reiterates this, arguing the order’s name symbolises “independence and justice, national pride, and selfless devotion to the Motherland” for his descendants (Permanent Mission RoU UN, 2016). Indeed, “titles, orders and medals” serve as “symbols of the independence and glory of the state”, enshrining its “historical traditions, its national values, spiritual and cultural heritage.”.

In the latter source, Temur is described as “a great personality who occupies a worthy place in the history of not only our Motherland, but the whole world” whose “life and work, great merits, priceless legacy are constantly in the spotlight”. The source highlights that 1996 was declared the Year of Amir Temur, the wide celebration of Temur’s 660th anniversary, and the founding of the Order of Amir Temur, thus showing how these initiatives popularise Temur in the public consciousness, the “Uzbekification” drive. The contributions of Samarqand and Shahrisabz in the former’s “huge contribution to the development of world science, culture, architecture, strengthening cooperation and friendship between peoples” and the latter being where he “prepared for his campaigns for the liberation of the Motherland from invaders” is linked to the architectural legacy; “historical monuments erected in the era of Amir Temur and the Temurid Empire are today a source of endless pride among our compatriots, and of great interest and admiration among foreign guests.” This link between Temur and Temurid architecture is a divergence from the Soviet period, where Temur was denigrated but his architecture prized – now, both are prized.

Indeed, these cities and their Temurid heritage received close attention post-independence; “during the years of independence, these two cities have become even more beautiful” with “monuments of antiquity and places of worship reconstructed and improved” and “new buildings, educational and cultural institutions erected, wide roads parks, gardens and alleys laid out.” The order is supposed to serve as “an example for young citizens of our country who strive to become worthy heirs of great ancestors” and be “a source of strength in achieving noble goals - a symbol of freedom, expression of respect and reverence for great ancestors”. Moreover, the second source highlights that it is awarded for merits in “the strengthening of statehood and development of military affairs” as well as to foreigners who have “made a great contribution to the strengthening of international cooperation” – as we have seen, the Order represents the domestic and international importance of Temurid renovations. The potential for an award to foreigners based on the strengthening of mutual understanding demonstrates the presence of an international aspect to the Order, which, though present but less exploited in this particular case, will be seen in the next case study to be very much the angle.

In his work on the 1948 celebration of Navoiy, Shin highlights that it was “was promoted as the returning of the poet – who had previously been monopolised by the ruling elites and bourgeois nationalists – to his rightful descendants, the Uzbek working people” (Shin, 2017: 130) and that “the process of nationalising Alisher Navoi also ascribed ownership to the Uzbek nation over Chagatai and Timurid cultural legacy” (ibid: 138). Examining the content of Karimov’s speeches, the same may be said of Temur for the early post-independent Uzbekistani state. The contents of the Order’s decree and purpose demonstrate that the function of Temur and his architectural legacy was the promotion of these phenomena as a source of national identity; this is shown through the association of Temur and Temurid architecture with national pride, devotion to the newly independent Motherland, and an affiliation with the legacy of the country’s “ancestors”. Furthermore, the Order reflects the government’s incentivisation of Uzbek identity in cultural production as part of this post-colonial project, and a reconstitution of the international diplomatic landscape through the use of Temur as a way to develop international cooperation – this can be linked to part of the self-described Second Renaissance of post-Soviet Uzbekistan, a clear echo of the Temurid Renaissance, which demonstrates the domestic and international applications of Temur and the Temurid legacy in post-Soviet nation-building. If this case study of the Order has highlighted a principally domestic element, the next case study will particularly illuminate the international potential of CD found in Temur and his empire.

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Figure 10: Cover of the 1996 edition of the book with the colours of the Uzbekistani flag and the Amir Temur statue that replaced a Karl Marx statue in 1994 on Amir Temur Square in Toshkent. (Amir Temur in World History, 1996)

**3.5 - *Amir Temur in World History*: Conferences and literature**

**Context**

*Amir Temur in World History* was first published in English in Toshkent in October 1996 with a circulation of 3000 copies by Uzbek publishing house Sharq (p.263) and reprinted for a second edition in 2001 (Biblio, 2021). It was published in connection with two multilingual international conferences related to the role of Temur in world history; one was by UNESCO in Paris in April 1996, “The Heyday of Science, Culture and Education in the Temurid era” (№ 19) and the other in Toshkent in October 1996, called “Amir Temur in World History”. The link of this work to Karimov’s decree (630-son) is clear; the fourth article of the decree tasks the MFA, AoS and relevant ministries and governing bodies with the Amir Temur in World History conference, whilst the seventh article of the decree relates to the publication of new works on science, culture and art related to Temur and the Temurid period.

In relation to the Soviet legacy, Karimov’s comments on Soviet historiography in his Russian-language report in the book, “Amir Temur is our pride” demonstrate the move towards a new post-independence historiography and rehabilitation of Temur. Karimov states that “in Soviet society, dominated by communist ideology, historical science was a victim of great-power, chauvinistic ideas. For this reason, the historical works created at that time were “dominated by an unfair and one-sided approach”. Moreover, he repeatedly labels Soviet power as a “colonial regime” that “tried to rob us of our great history”, arguing the need to critically re-evaluate the “biased anti-scientific views and to restore the historical truth about Amir Temur” and his “great contribution to development of world civilisation”. Karimov writes that Temur has been “wrapped up in the mist of different legends and misjudgements” but that “the truth appeared to be stronger” in spite of “different ideological influences and unjust estimations”, by the “malicious alien will” and “inadmissible ideology”, concluding that his image as a “great statesman, reformer, adherent of justice and patron of science and culture” (p.5) has lasted, as have his Universalised “historical monuments, which have made a valuable contribution to global civilisation”.

Having delegitimised Soviet historiography and legitimised Temur, he links a second Temurid Renaissance to the restoration of “national traditions” by the Uzbek people who have “gained their freedom and independence”, the careful preservation of these creations of history and the restitution of spirituality, “the most important matter in the path of creating the open, secular and democratic society of Uzbekistan” (ibid). Lastly, in his speech at the opening of the exhibition at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, Karimov describes the pride of the Uzbekistani people in their “vast spiritual legacy” and “unique historical monuments” and the works of great thinkers such as Navoiy as the “invaluable property of all of humanity” (p.6). He says that the initial independence years were “years of return to the sources of spirituality, national roots and of regaining historical memory, reviving culture and morality” (p.7), linking back to the Temurid Renaissance and its Universalised influence “upon the process of the European Renaissance” and “general global progress” (ibid), and the potential of this to solve “debatable problems through political dialogue and preventive diplomacy” in contemporary post-independence politics.

Continuing this rehabilitation, Temur is described as a “highly gifted strategist, a skilful political, a firm reformer of outdated social relations, a patron of trade, crafts, science and culture” and a “creator of the state” (p.8). UNESCO’s contribution to the “elaboration and realisation of the special programme for study and restoration of both the cultural and spiritual heritage of Central Asia” is noted, as is their and other scientists’ “significant assistance” in order to “carry out restoration work to preserve the complexes of historical heritage and to create an international tourist industry” (p.9). The exhibition is said to be a “kind of invitation” to visit and appreciate Uzbekistan, concluding that “spiritual and cultural values are things that bring us together, that help us to come to mutual understanding, and discover new horizons of cooperation”, adding the Silk Road helps to serve said “mutual understanding and peaceful and creative dialogue of the East and the West”. The emphasis on mutual understanding directly corresponds to the idea of CD and highlights the international function of the use of the figure of Temur for cultural and political legitimisation, whilst the inclusion and participation of UNESCO as an authoritative international and indeed global body and keeper of culture further legitimises and Universalises the general project of the post-independence historical rehabilitation of Temur.

**A new historiography: Temur’s life and legacy**

The English-language *Amir Temur in World History* is an insightful document, revelatory of the changing content from Soviet times in the post-independence historiographical reassessment of Temur and the function of this, with themes of cultural and military prowess, state-building and justice emerging.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The narrative of Temur’s life (p.9-26) presents Temur as a righteous independence fighter against the Golden Horde that with “cruelty, despotism and violence” conquered Turkestan under Chinggis Khan after 1220 in spite of heroic resistance. Temur is presented in this context of cruelty as righteously attacking the Horde in 1387 amongst a rising desire for “peace, stability and an improved life” which “became the dream of millions of multinational but destitute people”, similar in its presentation to that of the post-independence situation, which makes its legitimising link and function clear. Indeed, in Karimov’s speech at the opening of the Amir Temur monument, (p.11-13) Temur’s aim is to “liberate his Motherland from the Mongolian conquerors” – in Karimov’s presentation of the clutches of Soviet colonial rule, then, and newfound independence, a clear parallel is drawn in the narrative of the two, and the cruelty attributed to Temur in Soviet historiography is instead attributed to the Mongol conquerors.

A further section reiterates these rehabilitation themes of military and cultural achievements (p.32-57); the noble and courageous Temur prevails against a greedy rival and is unanimously elected as ruler, establishing the aforementioned “long waited peace, stability and order in the country” (p.36), building and beautifying Samarqand and other towns, effectively fighting his enemies, expanding his state into an Empire and protecting his citizens. Furthermore, it discusses his capacity for foreign relations and his kindness, and emphasises his cultural prestige, discussing with famous scholars and clergymen. On his death, he reportedly said that “everything I did – I did for the benefit of my country” (p.50). Here and later in the book, there is also an emphasis his religious tolerance and piety, military prowess, shrewd economic policy, majestic court life and cultural production. Overall, what is highlighted is his centralisation of different regions into a single, unified state and Empire which flourished artistically – his role as a state-builder and with nearby states and Western diplomats highlights the stability and prosperity of an independent, centralised state controlled by a wise ruler, a historical rehabilitation echoed in the immediate circumstances of post-Soviet Uzbekistan.

**From rejection to rehabilitation**

The book’s post-independence historiographical rehabilitation of Temur is contextualised in relation to Soviet historiography, and the outlook outlined gives additional insight into the picture of post-independence changing conceptions of the Temurid figure. This includes a section on Soviet scholar Bartold, who claims that the “Codes of Temur”, a compilation of his biography and legal codes, was counterfeit – the book counterargues that “some of his views were presented by him to please the needs of political standards of the period he lived in” (p.83) and claims that the Codes show centuries-old cooperation and shared values between Turkic peoples, and that “therefore some attempts to oppose these fraternal people to each other contradicts reality” (p.83). Abdumajidovich (2018), comparing pre-revolution and Soviet era works by Bartold, similarly argues that his attitudes towards Temur and the Temurid legacy reflected and were pressurised by political and national circumstances, proposing, for example, that his published lectures on the History of Turkestan and Temur were edited to better suit Bolshevik themes (ibid: 71) – this view is further reflected in the book’s statement that “throughout the past decades of the 20th century for understandable “class” reasons, the impartial study of the life, activity and heritage of such historic personalities such as Amir Temur” was impossible (ATIW, 1996: 86), Temur being used only in “negative political situations to please the dominating regime” (ibid) and the difficulty of showing the “historic truth” (ibid).

The example of Muminov’s Russian-language 1968 brochure on the “Role and Place of Amir Temur in World History” examined earlier is given, with the communist imperative being against Temur’s idealisation, and the corresponding negative responses from historians, with Vakhabov calling the brochure “anti-Marxist and harmful” against “the struggle for the purity of Marxist-Leninist theory” and said that it “poisons the consciousness of the youth” (p.86). The book furthers earlier analysis of Temur’s denunciation in its context and comments around it, highlighting the resolution of the All-Union Meeting of Historians in March 1973 in Moscow to condemn the “new way of reading of the Leninist concept of the historical process” and “the idealisation of the past and deviation from class positions in assessing separate events and personalities such as Temur” (p.86-7).

Moving towards post-independence, the book promotes the rehabilitation of Temur, proclaiming an “evolution from originally narrow, one-sided, similar, and long prevalent interpretations of Amir Temur to a gradually deeper, wider and more versatile comprehension of him” (p.88).[[28]](#footnote-28) This section provides interesting insight into the post-independence Uzbekistani conception of Soviet historiography, with the idea of independence and historical justice associated with the evaluation of Temur closely linked, and with a positive assessment of Temur’s state-building capacity given which links to the creation of a new post-independence historiography of Temur and Uzbekistan. It is interesting to compare this to the “Media Overview” section of a Human Rights Watch report (HRW, 1996) wherein journalists reported that “historical material dealing with the medieval ruler Timur - a crucial figure in the new ideology of Uzbekistan nation-building, has to undergo additional high-level scrutiny before being deemed fit for public consumption” and that therefore the “wealth of articles” published on him for his anniversary painted a “rosy, one-sided picture that deprives residents of access to a variety of perspectives and sources of information.”, showing the revision of Soviet-era historiography in the context of a new post-independence nation-building project which, like the Soviet historiography and following its precepts, presents itself as historically just, yet in opposition to the Soviet era and its representations of Temur.

**Conclusion**

Overall, this case study has demonstrated that the application of Temur as a figure in the early post-independence era had both a domestic and international element. For the domestic element, the Uzbekified content of a strong, Uzbek state-building figure of military and cultural might underlines the function of this image; the inculcation of feelings of national pride, national identification, and the support of Karimov as the harbinger of post-independence Renaissance – what Adams calls “a cult of personality by proxy” (2010: 5). This is why the focus is on Temur rather than Navoiy as the central figure of this idea; in spite of there being 2001 celebrations of Navoiy’s 560th anniversary (№ 67), the focus is on Temur, historical rehabilitation, the new Renaissance, and the state-building required for it. In the Soviet era, Temurid figures were associated with Uzbek linguistic, cultural and territorial heritage and thus “Uzbekified”, this process also served to legitimise the Soviet project and its linguistic and territorial notions, and, as seen earlier, their histories and perspectives were moulded to Marxist-Leninist doctrine to this end; they were thus “Sovietised”. Yet in the Karimovian era’s changing historiography, Temur was “Uzbekified” as the founder of the Uzbek motherland, a great state-builder and progenitor of Uzbek culture, and symbol of post-independent Uzbekistan, legitimising the post-Soviet Uzbekistani project rather than the Soviet project, and “Universalised” as a figure of historically universal importance, which fed back into the value of his “Uzbekification”.

For the international element, the content regarding the Universalised application of Temur in world history belies its function of increased mutual understanding with the potential and hope for greater post-independence international relations, combined with increased domestic and international prestige for the regime, which also links to the idea of the post-independence Renaissance. It is interesting to note the differentiation of forms associated with these two applications; domestically, one Karimovian focus is very much public space – statues, museums, the Uzbekification of toponomy, the beautification of Temurid monuments and so on. In parallel, there is a focus on knowledge production in both visual and written form – television programmes and the production of domestically aimed books on Temurid history and culture destined for general consumption. The bridge between the domestic and the international can be seen in the beautification of Temurid architecture, which serves to increase national pride and identity, but which is also linked to the creation of tourist infrastructure.

Knowledge production in the international context, as exemplified in our case study of *Amir Temur in World History*, is disseminated through an academic and cultural network, as illustrated in the close collaboration with UNESCO, and this production reflects the new historiography of Temur and by proxy, of the Uzbekistani state. We may conclude that in the context of the celebrations, an increase in mutual understanding, legitimacy and diplomacy was achieved; Karimov made few state visits, but his 1996 visit to Paris for the exhibition was one, to which we can add his visit to NATO in the same year (NATO, 1996) and the reception of foreign academics and officials for the 660th anniversary celebrations, for which, as shown in one decree, special preparations were made (№ 300). I would however posit that the notion of and content in the Universalisation of Temur operates chiefly within a context of domestic historical revisionism, with his diplomacy and personality linked to his Uzbekification and the image of the post-colonial regime. On the face of things, the rejection of the Soviet historiography of Temur and the emphasis on post-colonial identity shows a rejection of and move away from Soviet historiographical conceptions. Yet on a more fundamental level, the use of public space and of historiography to create and project particular narratives related to ethnic and territorial identity is very much rooted in the Soviet tradition. We therefore see the use of a model of Golden Heritage within a Soviet heritage, but one which in any case clearly moves away from Leninist-Marxist ideology, replacing it with an ethno-nationalist ideology that reinforces both the state and the nation’s legitimacy.

However, in the wider context of Karimov’s rule, as Fazandeiro (2017: 420) highlights, foreign relations in a post-Cold War world with an emphasis on human rights and democratisation were strained due to the repressive Karimov regime, culminating in pressure that meant insularity was the regime’s priority. This is why although the application of the Temurid figure had both a domestic and international aspect during the 1996 celebrations, the isolation of the Karimovian regime meant that the domestic element was more pronounced overall.

Turning towards the background for the post-Karimov era, Fumagalli (2017: 6) highlights the Karimovian emphasis on state sovereignty, strength and stability in both domestic and foreign policy. In parallel, writing shortly after Karimov’s death, Fazandeiro (2017: 426) posited that if the political transition mirrored other post-Soviet transitions, then abrupt change to what he defines as the Karimovian pursuit of international status equality, bilateral relations, self-reliance and an aggressive stance when defending its international image would be unlikely. With Karimov’s death, we see the emergence of a pivotal moment of change in Uzbekistan’s potential political trajectory, and by extension, of the form, content and function of the use of Temurid figures. It is to the context and use of these figures in post-Karimovian Uzbekistan that the work will now turn.

**Chapter III - Mirziyoyev: Rebrand and reform.**

“With our country entering a new stage of its development based on the principle “From National Revival to National Progress”, and with a foundation for a new Renaissance era – a Third Renaissance, being built, the priceless literary heritage of Alisher Navoiy is more important than ever.”

Shavkat Mirziyoyev, from a 2020 decree on Navoiy’s 580th anniversary celebrations*.*

**3.1 – From Renaissance to Rebranding**

Karimov’s death in September 2016 after 25 years of presidential rule of independent Uzbekistan meant the country’s first post-Soviet political transition of power, as prime minister (2003-2016) Shavkat Mirziyoyev was appointed interim president on 8th September 2016. This represented a pivotal crossroads moment in Uzbekistan’s domestic and international political trajectory, and thus in the use of Temurid figures to these ends. Before analysing our data in relation to this period’s use of and function for Temurid figures, let us explain the context of Mirziyoyev’s ascension to power and tenure so far in order to properly contextualise the analysis of Mirziyoyevian use of Temurid figures that follows. After his interim role, Mirziyoyev won 88.6% of the vote in a December 2016 election, inheriting a different set of challenges to those of Karimov. A key change in his leadership narrative as opposed to Karimov’s is his reformism; if we refer to Starr and Cornell (2018: 28-36), in this assessment, as prime minister, Mirziyoyev was a prudent administrator and ensured the efficient application of government policy, working on issues such as child cotton labour, the Aral Sea, the modernisation of rural life, tax reform, and, most importantly to sceptical Western observers, reform in rule of law, criminal justice and human rights.

In other positive assessments, Starr argues his campaign represented and enabled a transition from a strong state to a robust civil society, embodying the evolution of Uzbek society from the threats and constraints on the Karimovian regime to a “fundamentally new phase of the nation’s development” (Starr, 2018: 39). Elsewhere, this new period is characterised by “reforms that are ambitious in aim and extensive in scope”, characterised by a “solid commitment to the rule of law, the rights of citizens, elective governance, cordial relations with the great powers without sacrificing sovereignty” (Cornell and Starr, 2018: 1) and improved regional relations. Marszewski (2018: 2-9) echoes this positive assessment, highlighting the curbing of the powerful National Security Service (SNB), corresponding liberalisation and opening up, and political and economic, domestic and international reform. Ibbotson (2020) highlights the undoing of political and economic isolationism and the building of international relationships under Mirziyoyev.

Others take a more sceptical view; Lasslet (2020) argues a complex legacy of political-economic structures and related institutional and social cultures make reform, especially top-down reform, difficult to implement. Swerdlow (2019, 2021) acknowledges reform, but also highlights backtracking on human rights commitments during the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing restrictions on media freedom, and the refusal of registration to NGOs. Lemon (2019: 1) strikes a balance between these two extremes with the label of “authoritarian upgrading” for the Mirziyoyevian regime; meaning the adoption of “economic and political reforms to placate the population’s demands for democratisation, while existing elites capture most of the benefits of the country’s embrace of globalisation and marketisation” resulting in “a softer authoritarian regime which relies more on persuasion than coercion”.

As we have thus far seen, Mirziyoyevian rebranding and reform has elicited debate and a wide range of reactions from the international community. Turning towards the topic of Temurid figures, CD and legitimisation, is within this thematic frame of the international community and Uzbekistani rebranding efforts that Noubel and Usmonov (2021) emphasise in an article that a key priority of Mirziyoyevian authorities has been rebranding and emphasising Uzbekistan’s potential for tourism, arguing Mirziyoyev “is very keen on relying on cultural symbols to present his country as an attractive destination for both tourism and investment”, an idea linking to Lemon’s (2019: 1) idea of “persuasion”. Thus, with Temur’s 680th anniversary having taken place in 2016 just months before Karimov’s death, Navoiy’s 580th anniversary provides Mirziyoyev’s first opportunity to use Temurid figures for CD and legitimisation in this context of domestic and international rebranding and reform. As the content of our 580th anniversary analysis will demonstrate, this is precisely the essence of Mirziyoyev-era CD.

Providing an overview of what will be discussed, as for the Karimov era, the evidence that we will examine will enable us to apply the label of domestic and international cultural canonisation, or Uzbekification and Universalisation, to Mirziyoyev as to Karimov, rather than the Uzbekification and Sovietisation that we have seen occurred during the Soviet era. In the Soviet era, Temurid figures were associated with Uzbek linguistic, cultural and territorial heritage and thus “Uzbekified” and “Sovietised” to legitimise the Soviet project, whilst in the Karimovian era, Temur was “Uzbekified” as the founder of the Uzbek motherland, a great state-builder and progenitor of Uzbek culture, and symbol of post-independent Uzbekistan, legitimising the post-Soviet Uzbekistani project rather than the Soviet project, and “Universalised” as a figure of historically universal importance, which fed back into the value of his “Uzbekification”.

Under Mirziyoyev too, the processes of Uzbekification and Universalisation enjoy a symbiotic relationship – in the same sense that the Sovietisation and Uzbekification of Temur and Navoiy reinforced each other within the national-federal Soviet project, the continued CD in presenting and promoting Navoiy as an acclaimed Uzbek national poet and father of Uzbek literature universalises his value domestically and internationally, whilst constantly reiterating his role as an Uzbek figure, as was the case for Temur under Karimov, thus promoting him as a Universal and Uzbek figure who legitimises Uzbekistan’s culture, history, and state. Having introduced the context and discourse of the Mirziyoyevian political transition, its potential implications for the representation of Temurid figures and the basic notion found in Navoiy’s representation under Mirziyoyev, let us now turn to an overview and analysis of Navoiy’s 580th anniversary, employing a top-down approach that will begin at analysis of state level discourse and actions, and track the diffusion of this prerogative domestically and internationally in order to gain a holistic understanding of the representation and function of Temurid figures in this period and its links to past layers of meaning.

**3.2 – 2021: The 580th anniversary of Alisher Navoiy**

**The decree**

If we begin with an analysis of the Mirziyoyevian state’s ideas of Navoiy’s content and his function in order to understand the anniversary events and the function behind them, an order made by Mirziyoyev on the 19th October 2020 (№ PP-4865) regarding preparations for Navoiy’s 580th anniversary celebrations demonstrates the domestic (Uzbekistani) and international (Universal) importance of the event. The order refers to the “priceless creative legacy of the great poet and thinker, accomplished statesman and public figure”, who “occupies an especially significant place in the history of the development of not only Uzbek, but of world literature, of our national culture, and the literary-aesthetic worldviews of our people.” In his work, he is said to have embodied “high humanist ideals and universal values, using the vast potential, richness and beauty of his native language”, and the initial quote is echoed in another stating his “deep reflection of national and universal values”. The order refers to the state’s attempt to popularise his works, stating that “in recent years a widespread effort to deeply study the unique and multifaceted creative legacy of Alisher Navoiy has taken place, as well as a wide popularisation of the poet’s corpus in our country as well as abroad, and the consecration of his memory”, namely through monuments and publications of his works. In fact, in the context of a “new stage in the country’s development based on the principle ‘from national rebirth – to national progress’”, Navoiy’s “priceless literary heritage is more important than ever”.

Beginning with the content of this decree is important, because in this language we see a direct admission by the state of the importance of the function of the Temurid figure in the post-Karimovian state rebranding of national rebirth to national progress that explains the content associated with the decree that we will examine – in this context of “national progress”, we can see a close mix of both domestic and international elements, with legitimisation coming from both sources. The popularisation of his work is both a domestic and foreign project, and these two aspects are brought together by his “priceless creative legacy”, which domestically has a national-cultural connotation for the Uzbek people, and internationally has universal humanist values inherent in them which give them a global potential for CD, with Navoiy emerging here as more important than Temur. Shin (2017: 129) maintains that “the Soviet canonisation of Alisher Navoi erased not only the poet's religiosity, which had been a target of the earlier Bolshevik criticism, but also his class origin” and also demonstrates the Sovietisation of Navoiy in a quote from Hamid Olimjon, the head of the Uzbek Writers’ Union (UWU) at that time, who said that “Navoi recognised that the country and the people could not remain in slavery and oppression for long” (ibid). Here, we see a continuation of the Soviet representation in the removal of the poet’s Sufism from the context of both his national and international significance and the focus on national values and universal humanist values. And more broadly, whilst we can affirm that this is a continuation of the process of the canonisation of Navoiy as a national writer in line with Shin’s analysis of the Soviet process, which demonstrates the continuation across time, we can add that this a process of domestic and international cultural canonisation, or Uzbekification and Universalisation, with a distinctly post-Karimovian bent of a “new stage in the country’s development” to it.

Further elements of the decree (№ PP-4865) develop our insight into the domestic and international importance of the Navoiy celebrations to state legitimisation and are worth examining. Many domestic and international measures are mentioned; the first is revelatory of the network of institutional actors involved in these efforts; the “wide celebration of the 580th birthdate anniversary of the great poet and thinker Alisher Navoi in 2021” is stated to be the proposition of the “MoC, the AoS, the UWU, the Republican Centre of Spirituality and Enlightenment and representatives of society”. The Cabinet of Ministries and associated ministries are tasked to bring a presidential order on the organisation of an “International Social Fund named after Alisher Navoi” to fruition in order to popularise his legacy “in our country and abroad” and to create an “Order of Alisher Navoi” that recognises those national and international individuals and institutions who study and popularise Navoiy, a form closely echoing the “Order of Amir Timur” from 1996 discussed in the earlier section on Karimov (PF-1333-son). We thus see a similar structure of network and form to Karimov’s decree, and indeed the Soviet decree, as analysed in Shin (2017: 126) in terms of the network of institutions involved: the UWU, the AoS, the MoC.

**Enactment**

If we now turn towards the enactment of these measures, we see the manifestation of the decree, whose content related to representing Navoiy and function of his popularisation belie the CD value he has for the Mirziyoyevian regime. The measure quoted above relating to the establishment of an “Alisher Navoi International Public Foundation” (UzDaily, 2021) was implemented, the Foundation being founded in February 2021. Its tasks include “the wide study and popularisation of the life, lofty humanistic ideas, as well as the scientific and literary heritage of Alisher Navoi in our country and on an international scale”, the “translation of Alisher Navoi’s works into foreign languages, as well as the creation of perfect scientific publications and their publication in the republic and abroad” and “promoting the activities of writers and scientists exploring the scientific and literary heritage of Alisher Navoi” and “cooperation with scientific and creative centres studying the poet’s work” and the “organisation and holding of a yearly international conference”, which echoes the international conference on *Amir Temur in World History* from the 1996 celebrations. Having examined this content, we see that ultimate function of these measures related to Navoiy’s domestic and international study and popularisation is the increase of the power of Uzbekistani CD through the figure of Navoiy. Furthermore, we can also see the distinctly linguistic element of the Uzbek language and literature promotion, in difference to Temur, that is emphasised in this decree and its orders, showing a nuance of difference in content.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Moving on from the International Fund to our next point, we can convincingly argue that the prerogative of translation and digitisation of Navoiy’s work as part of the domestic and international popularisation drive around the anniversary forms an original part of the (domestic) Uzbekification and (international) Universalisation project that differentiates it from Soviet and Karimovian methods. Focusing first on the functional reasoning behind the drive, in an Uzbek state television channel MTRK TV report on the 580th anniversary decree (MTRK, 2020), we see quotes that demonstrate the idea of the domestic and international application of Navoiy to history as a figure of Uzbek history and identity and spiritualist world history; Nikolai Il’in, a member of the UWU, states that “he is the fundament of our national self-awareness” (c. 2:23) and that he “opened the soul of the spiritual worldview of our people and opened it for the whole world”. Aftondil Erkinov, PhD and teacher, argues these celebrations serve a positive purpose, as “Navoiy is great icon for meaning, knowledge and for the Uzbek people to know who their ancestors were, and this serves for the people to know who their great travellers were” – adding that it is the first time he has seen such a decree, and such a big celebration and events, which will “immortalise Alisher Navoiy in world culture” (c. 4:00). It is within these notions of Navoiy as Uzbek (our national self-awareness, our ancestors) and Universal (a spiritual worldview and immortalisation) importance that translation and digitisation arise as a means to manifest and promote this idea.

A group of people posing for a photo in front of a statue

Description automatically generated

Figure 11: A delegation of politicians, artists, civil servants gathered at the Navoiy statue in Navoiy park (built in 1991 by Karimov to honour Navoiy’s 550th anniversary) on the occasion of his 580th anniversary to lay flowers and pay homage to the “founder of the Uzbek literary language” who left “an indelible mark on the history of the Uzbek people” (TCTI, 2021).

In relation to translation and digitisation, Erkinov states that that the drive to translate Navoiy into foreign languages systematically[[30]](#footnote-30) “will make Navoiy known on a global level” (c. 9:40), which mirrors the task of the institutions mentioned in the decree to attract Uzbek linguistic and literary experts to systematic work on “translations, publications and presentations of Alisher Navoiy’s work abroad”. This highlights the state’s efforts of Uzbekification and Universalisation of Navoiy, as seen with Temur in the Karimovian era, with the translation and digitisation forming a new conduit for this drive, an international prerogative of Temurid-based CD that will be further reflected later in the content of the BUS’ forum. In relation to digitisation, the decree mandates the Agency for Information and Mass Communication to create an electronic platform in the National Library of Uzbekistan for the study of academic materials related to Navoiy, as well as the creation by and popularisation among young people of mobile phone applications with Navoiy’s works, demonstrating the academic and mass-market demographics being addressed in the domestic popularisation drive, and the international popularisation possible through translation with digitisation being a more domestic drive.

Indeed, translation and digitisation form just one part of the international Navoiy popularisation or “Universalisation” drive; more generally, we see the role of CD further in the document, the MFA is given the task to regularly organise “events dedicated to the life and art of Alisher Navoiy in diplomatic institutions of our country abroad” in collaboration with the “AoS, UWU and other interested ministries and actors” throughout 2021, closely echoing the institutions used in the Karimovian decrees and the academic conferences and publications planned for the Karimovian 1996 celebrations. Here, in addition to the plethora of domestic programmes and events, with some aimed at the general public and others at students, we witness the importance of diplomatic institutions abroad in the Uzbekification and Universalisation of Navoiy’s canonisation, emphasising the clear link to CD in the state’s thinking; this thus creates a direct link to the events that this work will shortly proceed to examine in regard to the 580th anniversary, as well as highlighting the present and future relevance of this analysis to the continued Uzbekistani nation-building project.

Further exploring the domestic front of Uzbekification, the decree mentions a program called “Navoiy and the Youth”, a multifaceted domestic program. It includes poetry recital and composition competitions, the opening of an artistic school in Toshkent named after Alisher Navoiy, exhibitions of Navoiy and his achievements, films about Navoiy by state-owned *Uzbekkino*, which we will examine in further detail below, and more. Erkinov states that “adding Navoiy study to all domestic educational institutions will help because “if people know about their ancestors, they’ll know about the history of their nation and identify with it more” (c. 6:00). Many other domestic tasks related to educational institutions, public events, media-based advertising and publications are assigned to the AoS, often in connection with the Ministry of Youth Affairs; this includes the publication of his works with his handwriting and the acquisition of facsimiles of Western-held Navoiy manuscripts, and the publications of new commentaries on his works. This closely echoes the publication of new works on science, culture and the art of the Temurid period that was part Karimov’s 1994 decree. Overall, we thus witness how digitisation and translation form part of a greater program of the domestic and international popularisation, seen in artistic and diplomatic events within Uzbekistan and abroad, of Navoiy as the father of Uzbek literature, thus demonstrating the Uzbekification and Universalisation of Navoiy, the same process that we have seen applied to Temur under Karimov.



Figure 12 (left): A still of Navoiy from a 2021 documentary miniseries. (Ibatullina, 2021).

Figure 13 (right): A still from *Alisher Navoi*, 1947. (Kinoteatr, 2021).

Homing in on another element of the domestic front mentioned in the decree, namely, to produce media related to Navoiy in this anniversary year for *Uzbekkino*, a documentary film on Navoiy’s life has been filmed as part of a series called “The Heart of the People” *(serdce naroda)*, though at time of writing it has not yet been released. This echoes Karimov’s 1994 decree on the Temur celebrations which included the production of television and cinema material, and we thus witness not only the continuation of the ideas related to nation-building, but also the continuation of a top-down state-mandated image of Navoiy and the role of cultural elites in propagating this image.

In an interview for a news article, Furkat Usmanov, the scriptwriter, says that “we wanted to depict the life and image of Navoiy, showing that this great man did for his country and his people”, and Shohrukh Rasulov, the production designer, adds that “our task was to show Alisher Navoiy in all his aspects – after all, he wasn’t just a great poet, but a great philosopher, a great minister, a great patriot of his motherland, who loved his people and did everything possible for them” (Ibatullina, 2021). This clearly echoes the production of a 1947 Soviet film, *Alisher Navoi*, at the time of Navoiy’s 500th anniversary, which, according to Noubel and Usmonov’s article (2021), embodies Navoiy’s image as a key figure in the nation-building process of a Soviet-Uzbek identity. Said authors highlight a scene (c. 21:00) where in the background of a dangerous battle, Navoiy defends the importance of a “Turkic language that can unite the people”. Specifically, he says that the “Turkic people will have peace and happiness and be united as a people and as a land through its language, and that the people will understand its fate when its language has matured. Language unites people, and unity is strength.” (Yarmatov, 1947: c. 21:00-21:40).

In the original film we see a close association of the ideas of language, territory and ethnic identity connected to the ideas of the Soviet nation-building project, ideas which are echoed in the comments of those involved in the series’ production, showing a continuation of these ideas from the Soviet period. Moreover, in the Noubel and Usmonov article (2021) A’zam Obidov, an Uzbek poet, translator and cultural activist, highlights the lack of private-public partnership in the areas of the arts, culture and literature, arguing that those fields need independence rather than being in the “sphere of the state”, emphasising the state centralised and official nature of these celebrations. We thus witness not only the continuation of the ideas related to nation-building, but also the continuation of a top-down state-mandated image of Navoiy in this nation-building project.

I would argue that this is also reflected in the comments of production designer Rasulov on Navoiy being a “great patriot of his motherland and of his people”, a message in line with that of the state narrative which this production also forms part of, and which echoes the association of territory, ethnic identity and language in the 1947 film, showing the close continuation of these ideas in contemporary Uzbek nation-building. Having analysed the content, form, network and function of Mirziyoyev’s October 2020 decree related to Navoiy’s February 2021 anniversary, and having assessed the continuity of Soviet ideas of nation-building whilst highlighting the post-Karimovian turn from Temur to Navoiy, we will now turn to an analysis of the BUS’ “580th Anniversary of Alisher Navoi” celebration. Doing so will permit us to further our understanding of the enactment of the decree related to Navoiy’s anniversary and of the use of this Temurid figure from a different angle, thus further developing and strengthening the argument related to Navoiy’s representation and function under Mirziyoyevian Uzbekistan as a figure for legitimisation and CD.

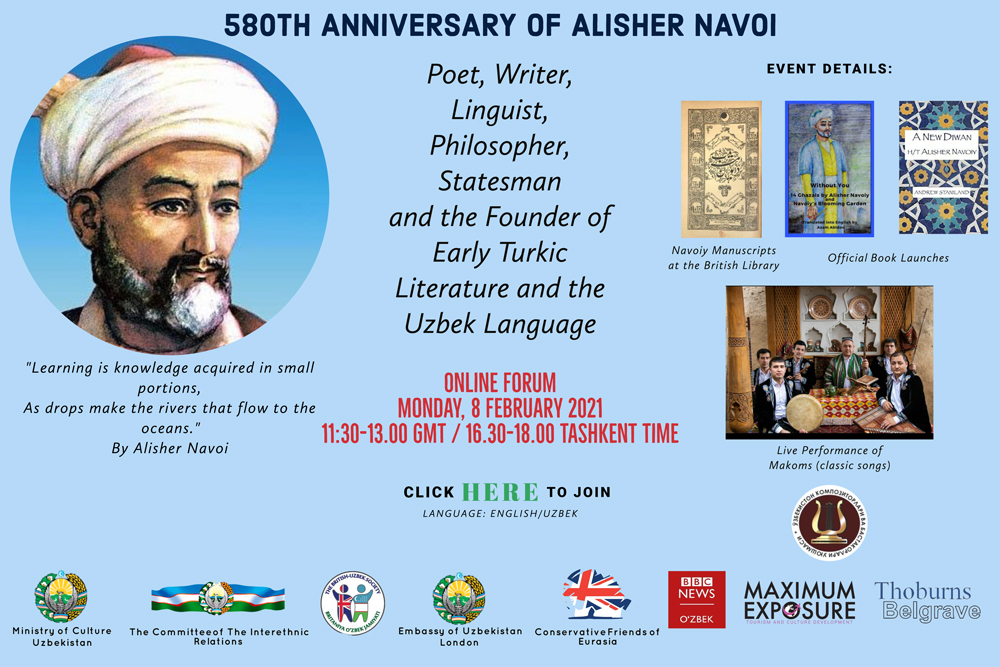


Figure 14: A poster advertising the British-Uzbek Society’s celebration of Navoiy’s 580th anniversary on February 8th, 2021 (BUS, 2021).

**3.3 - 580th anniversary: the British-Uzbek Society**

**A cultural diplomacy network**

The British-Uzbek Society’s (BUS) 580th anniversary celebration provides another piece of evidence relating to our examination of the decree, demonstrating a manifestation of the imperative of CD and the holding of events in order to popularise or “Universalise” Navoiy and legitimise the state. Before analysing, let us contextualise the network of CD that Navoiy is used in. According to its website, the BUS is an independent non-political organisation, established in 2002 with the aim of supporting and facilitating cultural, educational and people-to-people links (BUS, 2019; Companies House, 2021). Founder members included former Conservative politician Dr V.E Hartley Booth, controversial academic Dr Shirin Akiner (Vice Chairman 2002-2018, Chairman 2017-2018) who was discussed in the literature review, and H.E Alisher Faizullaev, Ambassador of the RoU to the UK. It is closely linked to the Embassy of Uzbekistan as a space forming an exclusive area for exposure to the Embassy, which is the exclusive “liaison for companies wishing to expand in Uzbekistan” (BuS Newsletter, 2017: 5). It is also linked to bilateral trade networks such as the Uzbek-British Trade and Industry Council (UBTIC) and the Uzbek Business Club (BuS Newsletter, 2017: 5), which is jointly overseen by the Uzbek Ambassador and the BUS and which are strongly linked to the oil and gas sector.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Let us further map out the network before proceeding to an analysis of the forum’s content. On Monday 8th February 2021, the BUS-organised “580th anniversary of Alisher Navoi”(BUS, 2021), took place. The advertising poster for the forum (Figure 14), which posits Navoiy as the “founder of the Uzbek language”, shows the event’s sponsoring by the Uzbek Ministry of Culture (MoC), Committee of Interethnic Relations (KMODS), the BUS, the Embassy of the RoU in the UK, Conservative Friends of Eurasia (CFE), Maximum Exposure and Thoburns Belgrave. The moderator of the event was Sophie Ibbotson, who is the Tourism Ambassador to the UK for the Tourism Promotion Board of the RoU, a tourism development consultant for the World Bank in CA and the Balkans, and the founder of Maximum Exposure, a tourism development and PR consultancy with offices in the UK, China, Russia and Turkey. Maximum Exposure offers services such as reputation management and brand recovery, branding and marketing, strategic planning and media relations. It has worked in Uzbekistan for “over a decade”, extending its relationship with PR and branding from a Karimovian 2011 to the present day (Maximum Exposure, 2021).

Having briefly introduced the BUS and Maximum Exposure, and ascertaining the close links of the event to the MoC and the Uzbek Embassy in the UK, the direct representatives of the state to the United Kingdom, we also see the role of organisations such as the CFE, largely responsible for the organisation of this event, a “member-led organisation that is helping to develop a meaningful relationship between the Conservative Party and the British Eurasian community” (CFE, 2021) and the Uzbek state’s KMODS, which signed a memorandum of understanding regarding the development of cultural and humanitarian bilateral relations between the RoU and the UK in 2020 (BUS, 2020). As earlier, these links demonstrate the network of the cultural elite and their role in propagating the state-mandated image. Having explained the context of the network allowing this process of Temurid-based CD to occur, let us now turn to analysing the themes that arise from an examination of the forum’s content.

**Analysis**

Looking at the event’s proceedings, multiple themes become clear. Firstly, the notion of Navoiy’s status as a national hero and national poet, a great humanist writer of universal values and “founder of the Uzbek language” is repeated by many of the actors involved, serving as a constant consolidation of his canonisation as a both an Uzbek and Universal figure. Ibbotson introduces Navoiy as “the father of Uzbek literature, and the national poet of Uzbekistan” (0:24), and Sherzod Asadov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, begins, highlighting the status of “the great poet and statesman, who we know as the founder of the Uzbek language and classic literature, Alisher Navoi” (1.37). Kamola Akilova, RoU Deputy Minister of Culture, adds that as one of the unique poets of world literature (c.12-13:00), Navoiy made an “invaluable contribution to human thought with his humanistic ideas, artistic and ethic views, unique poetic works” and “marked the development of Uzbek literature and had a great influence on the development of the spiritual culture”, and remarks that this event is “aimed at glorifying universal values put forward by our great thinker” (c. ibid).

This Universalisation notion continues in comments such as those of Uzbek poet and literary critic Abduvohid Hayit, whoobserves that “his works are not meant only for those who study Sufism” and have “universal values” (19:13). The Chairman of the Committee of Youth Culture and Sport, and Minister of Culture of the RoU, Bakhtiyor Sayfullaev, notes that Navoiy is “a poet who played an invaluable role in the self-awareness of our people and the formation of our nation” and the continued appreciation and study of his work shows “a love and respect for our native language and understanding of its inexhaustible richness” (c.38.00). Sayfullaev continues that 1991, the year of Uzbek independence, was declared the Year of Navoiy, (c. 38:00), and highlights his park, the region and city Navoi, national library, university, historical places and streets all named after him as “examples of the great respect of the nation to this great poet”. Finally, the Head of CFE argues Navoiy “is the most representative figure of Uzbek literature and a national hero whose importance is equal to the great rulers Amir Temur, Babur and Mirzo Ulughbek.” (c.50.30).

Secondly, CD as exhibited in Navoiy celebrations is posited as a key vector of bilateral relations between the UK and Uzbekistan through the idea posited in the definition earlier of CD as “mutual understanding”, with the event serving as a means of solidifying networks and political, cultural and economic cooperation. This is evidenced by the participation of multiple MPs and members of the House of Lords on the UK side, representatives of the Uzbek government on the other side, as well as figures with economic links to Uzbekistan such as the tourism representative, and literary-cultural figures from both the British and Uzbek sides such as the poets and the British Library representative. Returning first to the earlier discussed popularisation drive through translation, digitisation and publication, Asadov mentions the storage of Navoiy’s manuscripts in the British Library, which are gradually being digitised, and the new publication of “A New Diwan h/t Alisher Navoi” by English poet Andrew Staniland as evidence of Navoiy’s growing popularity abroad (2.14). In addition to Staniland, A’zam Obidov’s new translation of Navoiy into English presented in the forum shows the manifestation of the drive for new publications and translations of Navoiy; Obidov even comments that “Navoiy is not translated enough” (21:10), and reads a poem he wrote called “Navoiy’s lamentation”, lamenting the lack of the network of literary agents, publishers, poets and translators needed to glorify Navoiy, again connecting to the ongoing drive and move towards his Universalisation. Reiterating this Universalisation are readings of Navoiy’s work by British MPs and members of the House of Lords, patrons and members of the BUS and CFE.

Further emphasising the primacy of Navoiy as a figure of and conduit for CD, Asadov continues that “in recent years, bilateral relations, including cooperation in field of culture, arts, and education has been further strengthened” (2.46), then highlighting further educational exchange and plans. He says that “cultural ties between our two countries are being developed further” and that the BUS is evidence of this, a society aimed at introducing the history and culture of Uzbekistan to Britain (4.54). He concludes that the event “gives the opportunity to further fruitful cooperation in the future” (7.02). On the British side, Caroline Dinenage MP, UK Minister of State for Digital and Culture, mentions that this is a good time for Uzbek-British bilateral relations in the context of post-Brexit Global Britain and the fact that “Uzbekistan is now set on its own path to reform”, making it a “particularly propitious time to strengthen those cultural and educational ties to continue our friendship” (9.30).

Similarly, on the Uzbek side, Akilova proposes the event as a means to “strengthening the centuries old friendly relations between our peoples” (14:19), and the CFE head comments that “it is great that we can be here today to celebrate Alisher Navoiy and strengthen CD ties between our two countries” (50:30). In a telling nod to the functionof the event, Ibbotson remarks that “the exchange of ideas, information, art language and other aspects of culture has the power to foster mutual understanding” (28:50). All the evidence of the speakers thus points to the clear function of this event, with Ibbotson’s wording verbatim matching our definition of CD. This event, whose content celebrates the image of a domestically and internationally respected father of Uzbek literature, functions as a means to engage in and further bilateral diplomacy, which also ties into the idea of the legitimisation of Uzbekistan through diplomacy and openness and the idea of a rebranded, reformed Uzbekistan in comparison to the insular Karimov regime.

Indeed, CD is so overtly understood as the function of the celebration of this Temurid figure that three speakers are explicitly introduced as directly addressing CD between the RoU and the UK; the first, Lord Lilley, highlights commercial links between Uzbekistan and the UK, highlighting the UBTIC in this capacity, and echoes earlier speakers in saying that “Uzbekistan is opening up to the world and post-Brexit Britain is looking to wider horizons, so it is the best time to deepen our knowledge of each other, the best time to strengthen our ties culturally and in other ways, and this is a great occasion to do so” (32:40). This is followed by Sayfullaev, who echoes the British Library’s cooperation in preserving Navoiy’s manuscripts, and notes that “cooperation in past few years has been developing steadily” and that “today’s forum undoubtedly opens up new aspects of our collaboration” (c. 35:00-36:00). He concludes that “we need to share rich heritage between our peoples, so I think today’s forum meets these spiritual and cultural needs and strengthens the ties of friendship of our peoples” (39:41). Back on the UK side, Paul Scully MP reiterates this, stating that “cultural initiatives bring us together” (43:00). The Head of CFE highlights the role of the event in “strengthening our culture ties” and that “the importance of CD rests on culture”, and that “culture is a collaboration”, highlighting the networking aspect of it. Lastly, Said Rustamov, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to the UK, concludes the event saying that these poets “can rely on the embassy’s help for assistance publishing” (1:56:00) and that the event demonstrates “great prospects for cooperation in the field of culture” and that “we’ll try to organise more as part of our CD and efforts to bridge out to different nations and peoples” (1:57:00-1:58:00).

Overall, this diplomatic, cultural-political engagement through the lens of the Temurid figure Navoiy legitimises Uzbekistan’s relationship with the UK and thus legitimises the Uzbekistani state. We can see the presentation of the new translations of Navoiy’s poetry and of poetry inspired by him, as well as the holding of the event itself and its CD, as a direct result of the state-mandated 580th anniversary celebrations, and an embodiment of the continuing Uzbekification and Universalisation drive. Three decades on from independence, though the Soviet-inspired use of these figures and the ideas that they represent continues, perhaps the face of the literary, refined culture which is presented in the figure of Navoiy suits the branding of a reforming, civilised Mirziyoyevian state removed from the Karimovian imperative of post-independence consolidation that made Temur a more suitable representational figure. In spite of this difference, both eras have in common that they have sought to promote a strong and cultured domestic and international image in order to legitimise themselves domestically and internationally – and judging by the content of the speakers relating to the event successfully performing its function, this may be said to have been successful in this context.

I would further argue that in the context of Timurid figures, part of the power of these narratives on an international level and of the success mentioned in this given case is that, when disseminated, they can be divorced from the political and historical context of their creation that has been analysed in this work, meaning that efforts of CD emerge as a more risk-averse way to improve foreign relations; after all, no context of Navoiy’s canonisation in Soviet or post-Soviet Uzbekistan is provided as part of these celebrations. Overall, then, what we have seen from the Mirziyoyevian era is that the broad function of political legitimisation that we have seen Temurid figures employed for in the Soviet and Karimovian eras has continued in the 2021 celebrations, though with a shift in focus on content related to Navoiy rather than Temur.

Whilst the initial post-independence Karimov era maintained the fundamental function of legitimisation while significantly changing the content of Temur’s representation from a strong, cruel feudal leader to a strong, just and cultured state-building unifier in reflection of early post-independence prerogatives, the Mirziyoyev era has instead so far emphasised Navoiy’s domestic and international, or Uzbek and Universal credentials as a cultured figure. It has employed Foundations, Orders, media and domestic/international study/popularisation drives similar to those of Karimov to this end, but if we ask the question of why these differences exist whilst the broad function remains the same, then the focus so far on Navoiy rather than Temur seems a reflection of the emphasis on a legitimising rebranded political image of a civilised, cultural, diplomatically open country rather than the legitimising strong and somewhat insular Temur-like state-building of the Karimov era. These nuances of change in content and form work in accordance with the political and social landscapes of the respective eras, yet in spite of the changing branding, the broad continuity of the use of Temurid figures for CD may be seen as a perpetuation of their Soviet and Karimovian use and the ideas of ethnogenetic identity that they posited, demonstrating that underneath the rebranding, some of the previous structural layers that we have examined remain.

**Conclusion**

**Conclusion**

This work has charted the nation-state building process in Uzbekistan since the creation of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924; it has tracked the evolution of history, policy and historiography, beginning with a background of the Soviet consolidation of the Uzbekistani nation-state background, and then focusing on a foreground of post-communist Uzbekistan, evidencing the link of the Temurid figures Amir Temur and Navoiy to the Soviet and post-Soviet prerogatives of legitimisation in an attempt to answer the question set out in the introduction of the *form*, *content, networks* and *function* of the use of these figures. In order to do this, it explained Soviet historiography’s canonisation, or “Sovietisation and Uzbekification” of these figures, with a prioritisation of Navoiy over Temur, and with content promoting them as Uzbek by ethnogenesis to support the Soviet idea of ethnogenesis and linguistic identity, which took the form of celebrations, publications and academic debate, and the failed attempt at a positive reassessment of Temur attempted by Muminov in 1968 and the negative responses to it. It then analysed the conditions and events of late Soviet rule that laid the foundation for a somewhat undesired transition towards the new nationalist, independent legitimising ideology that emerged in post-Soviet Uzbekistan under Karimov.

In relation to the initial post-independence Karimovian regime, the work explained how the historical rehabilitation of Temur in the 1990s in particular followed this ideology of independence as an “Uzbekified” and “Universalised” figure, as exemplified in the forms of Karimov’s post-independence decrees and speeches, the Uzbekification of public space, of the *Order of Amir Temur* and *Foundation of Amir Temur*,and the 1996 publication *Amir Temur in World History* which this work analysed in detail. It found that content of these forms of representation of these figures in the Karimov era reflected ideas of newfound strength, the importance of a unified state and strong leader (associated with Karimov) national pride/patriotism, and a historical revisionism of Temur from a cruel feudal warlord to a strong, just state-builder that broke from the clutches of the Soviet colonial historiographical tradition, reflecting its overall function as a legitimisation of the new sovereign state domestically and internationally through CD – a second Temurid Renaissance of which Karimov was the Amir, and which organically prioritised the usage of Temur rather than Navoiy.

The work found that in this approach, however, in presenting Temur as the founder of the Uzbek motherland, a source of Uzbek national pride, identity and strength, and rebuilding Temurid architecture, thus focusing on the territorial element of ethnogenesis, reaffirmed the fundamentally ethnogenetic conception of history and associated canonisation of historical figures introduced by Soviet historiography whilst proclaiming to have broken free of its chains. Regardless of their differing positive and negative historiographical takes, Temur is the face in both Soviet and post-Soviet historiography as a strong leader of a centralised state, an imperative which well-suited the function and imperative of the Karimovian post-independence era and its state-building. This means that while the content of the representation of Temur as part of the nation may have changed significantly from negative to positive, the ethnogenetic premises behind the deployment did not – nor did the fundamental function of legitimisation that lay behind the original Soviet idea that catalysed the use of these Temurid figures.

Finally, moving onto the Mirziyoyev era from 2016 to present and its rebranding and reform rhetoric, the work has analysed how the celebration of Navoiy seems to have become more of a focus than Temur, with the form of his 580th anniversary celebrations in 2021 the key example of this. The symbiotic idea of Uzbekification and Universalisation found in the Karimov era continues in the Mirziyoyev era, with the domestic and international application of cultural diplomacy both playing a role in state legitimisation, though the prerogative of increased international cooperation and partial disassociation with the Karimovian era, changes the function of Navoiy slightly, and may answer the question of why the focus is now more on Navoiy rather than Temur.

In terms of form, beyond the celebrations which are echoed across the Soviet and Karimovian era, we see an increased concentration on the translation and digitisation of Navoiy to the Universalist end, and the developing idea of cultural cooperation as a conduit for improved and deepened networks of bilateral and regional ties, facilitated through lobbyist and tourist networks. Though in the emphasis on Universalised humanist values, the Soviet mitigation of his Sufi religious context is alive and well, and in the creations ordered in Mirziyoyev’s decrees of the *Order of Alisher Navoiy* and the *Foundation of Alisher Navoiy*, close echoes of the Karimov era decrees are found, and the Uzbekification of Navoiy in the Soviet era, as it did for Temur in the Karimovian era, continues in the ethnogenetic ideas presented of Navoiy as connected to the linguistic component of ethnogenesis - an Uzbek poet writing in Old Uzbek, the father of Uzbek literature, a symbol of national pride, identity and culture.

Three decades on from independence, perhaps now the face of literary, refined culture which is presented in Navoiy suits the image of a reforming, civilised Mirziyoyevian state seeking to promote and legitimise a corollary domestic and international image in order to legitimise itself rather than a strong state-building Temur and Karimov related one, reiterating the continuity of function that may be found in the shifting content and forms across the eras. In spite of the changing branding, the broad continuity of the use of Temurid figures for cultural diplomacy is a perpetuation of the Soviet and Karimovian use, and the ideas of ethnogenetic identity that they posited, demonstrating that underneath the rebranding, some of the previous structural layers that we have examined remain.

In relation to the work’s individual sections and overall findings detailed above, before turning to its place in the scholarship, it is worth reflecting on the fact that the ability to confidently conduct research in the Russian language into Russian and Uzbekistani scholarship and Uzbekstani state media, legislation and cultural production has been an essential pillar of forming the work’s dataset and the analytical strength and insight of the above conclusions, as has the author’s previous experience researching Islam in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and Central Asian water politics and experiences travelling in Uzbekistan.

Having reflected on the conclusions of the work, let us turn to its place in academic debate. In explaining the ideological deployment of ethnogenetic discourse and Temurid figures as a legitimising force for the nation-state from its Soviet origins through to the Mirziyoyev era, the work complements and reinforces the views of scholars such as Adams and Rustemova (2009) and Laruelle (2010), who analyse the use of ethnogenetic discourse as a legitimising idea for Uzbekistan, and scholars such as Cummings (2010), Paskaleva (2015, 2016), Shin (2017) and Zarkar (2015), who focus on the use of Temurid figures to the same end, with an emphasis on domestic public space, and brings these two streams together in its analysis. The section on the Karimovian era which focuses on Temur is perhaps especially relevant alongside the scholars mentioned above who have focused on Temurid figures in public space, complementing and adding to these works by also analysing literature and institutions, whereas the section on the Mirziyoyevian era that focuses on Navoiy is particularly complementary to Shin’s (2017) analysis of Navoiy’s representation in the Soviet era, as it not only presents the Mirziyoyevian equivalent and the latter’s continuity from Soviet times, but directly places this against the content of Shin’s argument in order to answer the question of the degree of change and continuity in content, form and function of Temurid figures in Uzbekistan.

There are two ways in which this work hopes to have made an original contribution. The first is in the positing of the concept of “Universalisation” to complement the ideas of “Uzbekification” and “Sovietisation” applied to Temurid figures in the scholarship, meaning the application of worldwide, or universal values and universal significance of Temurid figures as a means to increasing their potential for cultural diplomacy and the legitimisation of the state. This is an idea explored in depth throughout the post-independence Karimov and Mirziyoyevian periods, and it is hoped that in having been developed and applied the notion in depth within this work, that this concept may be further used in future analysis of the Uzbekistani use of Temurid figures, a potential this conclusion will momentarily turn to. Secondly, in adding to the well-researched Soviet and Karimovian eras by an up-to-date analysis of the newer Mirziyoyevian regime, the work hopes to have shown the continuity of the relevance of this topic and to have applied the ideas of scholars of the Soviet and Karimovian periods to the Mirziyoyevian era, increasing understandings of the present utilisation and function of Temurid figures and their relation to the past and to past scholarship. Within this framework, the work has also tried to employ data that has not been analysed in detail before such as the 1996 publication *Amir Temur in World History*, and recent 2021 events related to Navoiy, and hopes to have also made an original contribution in this respect.

Looking back at this work and towards the future, the 690th anniversary of Temur in 2026 will form an interesting litmus test in parallel to this work’s conclusions, as Mirziyoyev navigates the existing contents and forms of state-building, power, and negative and positive historical revisionism employed by the Soviets and post-independence Karimov respectively in relation to Temur. Temur was disdained by the Soviets in favour of Navoiy, favoured by Karimov over Navoiy, and 2026 will be an opportunity to see Mirziyoyev’s vision with its own organic changes from the preceding two eras. Perhaps a continued Mirziyoyevian focus on Navoiy as explored in this work instead of Temur will help to navigate and compensate for the layers of meaning related to Temur of state-building, justice, power and a break from colonial clutches that were created by and were a proxy for Karimov, with this continued preference thus supporting the rebranding of post-Karimov Uzbekistan. Or perhaps Mirziyoyev will focus equally on both figures, finding an equilibrium which finds equal functional importance in both Temur and Navoiy for domestic and international legitimisation and cultural diplomacy rather than favouring one Temurid figure over another; an equilibrium present in neither the Soviet nor Karimovian eras. This remains a task for future scholarly exploration, but this work hopes to have contributed a foundation to this endeavour through its exploration of the forms, content and functions relating to the Mirziyoyevian era’s use of Temurid figures and its relation to the Soviet and Karimovian eras.

Over these three chronological periods in Uzbekistan’s history overall, the forms of representation of these Temurid figures have ranged from academic historiographical publications to public celebrations and public space, and the content and function of the representations have varied from affirming a Sovietised and Soviet-legitimising national identity to a post-Soviet independent legitimising ideological and political imperative, showing a continuity of a legitimising function in the use of these Temurid figures in spite of their changing representations over time, from disdain for Temur and preference for Navoiy in the Soviet era to the canonisation of Temur as a national symbol in the post-independence Karimov era, and the recent use of Navoiy as a conduit for international cultural diplomacy in a rebranded Mirziyoyevian Uzbekistan. For this reason, these figures have retained relevance and saliency both domestically and internationally over this time, as this work has hoped to show. Having demonstrated the sustained relevance of Navoiy and Temur to Uzbekistani nation-building, it remains to say that as the domestic and international landscape of Uzbekistani political relations and identity changes over time, the forms, content and function of the representations of these Temurid figures will continue to evolve in response, ensuring their continued significance and interest to future scholars. Indeed, with this image of a rebranded, reformed, diplomatically and culturally open Uzbekistan now a solidified narrative under Mirziyoyev, it seems that the prerogative for international co-operation and dialogue as we have seen in the 2021 Navoiy celebrations, and the use of Temurid figures to this end, will not only continue to form an important part of the legitimisation of the Uzbekistani nation-state in coming years, but will indeed grow in importance.

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N.B: Harvard in-text referencing has been employed throughout this work and in the Harvard referencing is used in the bibliography. Russian and Uzbek titles have been translated and transliterated, with a slash “/” dividing them from the English, and English speech marks (“ ”) for English language, and Russian speech marks (« ») for those languages.

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1. The term *mahalla* refers to “a residential quarter of the city, which typically formed a community and self-governing administrative unit of residents that exercised significant influence in Uzbekistan during the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods.” (Dadabaev, 2013: 183). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The novel term of “Universalisation” is capitalised to reflect its status as a process akin to “Sovietisation” and “Uzbekification” and is explained in detail below. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In relation to defining the Soviet period, within Uzbekistan, post-Soviet academic and political historiography differs greatly in its assessment of the Soviet period to Soviet historiography; this will be explored in detail in later sections, but the essence of the matter is that delegitimising Soviet rule as a negative colonial project and delegitimising its condemning perspective on Temur helped to legitimise post-Soviet Karimovian rule and the new nationalist project and ideology, demonstrating that this is a relevant dynamic in both local and Western scholarship and politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Another mitigating factor is the efforts made to avoid hegemony by Western scholars in conducting research in Russian and local Turkic languages, exemplified by scholars such as Peter Finke and Morgan Liu. Russian-language sources constitute the majority of primary sources in this work’s dataset. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Journalistic, political and academic accounts have differed in their views regarding the state’s claims about the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and the existence or lack thereof of the organisation that the state used to justify its repressive crackdown (Rashid, 2002; Khalid, 2007; Louw, 2007; Karagiannis, 2010; Heathershaw and Montgomery; 2014; RFE, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The relevance is even more apparent when it is noted that Akiner was a Founder and Chairman of the BUS, whose recent Navoiy celebration will be analysed in this work. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It is also worth mentioning other topics commonly addressed regarding post-Soviet identity and nation-building which complement and inform this work. They include the centrality of morality and religion to the state’s projection of Uzbek identity (Khalid, 2003 & 2007; Zanca, 2004; Adams & Rustemova, 2009; Rasanayagam, 2011; Ro’i and Wainer, 2019), alongside other factors such as post-independence economic transformation (Blackmon, 2005; Liu, 2005; Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2013), migration for work and its effect on migrants’ worldviews (Finke et al. 2013; Mohapatra, 2013) and informal kinship and social networks such as those found in local *mahallas* (Collins, 2006; Rasanayagam, 2011; Liu, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Other post-Soviet nations have undergone this top-down narrative construction within their own historical frameworks; to provide Central Asian examples, whilst in Uzbekistan we see an emphasis on Temurid figures and Temurid history, in Krygyzstan under Akayev there was an ethno-nationalist focus on the Manas traditional epic (Marat, 2008: 34), whilst in Tajikistan there has been a focus on Samanid and Zoroastrian historical legacies (ibid: 54). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This idea of cultured socialism through Temurid legacy is echoed in Zarkar (2015) who explores the use of public space and Temurid heritage, and Cucciolla (2020: 194), who explores the international dimensions of Soviet Uzbekistan. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See also Shin, 2015 on propaganda for Uzbekistani soldiers in the Red Army. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As we will see, this Soviet shift in preference of Temurid figures will be echoed in the post-Soviet era under Karimov and Mirziyoyev. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Zarkar (2015) similarly places this post-independence project within the Soviet policies of monumental propaganda and historiography, and also emphasises the importance of public space to this end, focusing on statues of Temur and the Amir Temur Museum, opened in 1996 for the 660th anniversary of Temur’s birth. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. An emphasis is generally placed on this initial period of the consolidation of communism from 1920-1935 and its decline and fall in the 1980s-1991 (Massell, 1974; Critchlow: 1991; Khalid, 1999; Northrop, 2000; Martin, 2001; Smith, 2013; Khalid, 2014, Paskaleva 2015; Kudaibergenova and Shin; 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This was thus not always an easy process, as Dadabaev (2013: 1030) notes when touching on the complication of Uzbek identity based on the degree of assimilation or lack thereof of the “nativists” to these shifting realities. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Another key element of Soviet nationalities policy that contributed to national identity formation in Uzbekistan is census-taking and passports. The first Soviet census took place in 1926, with a second and third following in 1937 and 1939. They emphasised the link between language and ethnicity in order to encourage assimilation (Arel, 2002). Furthermore, from 1934, Soviet citizens had to have their ethnicity in their internal passports, promoting the primordialist view of identity as inherited, natural and unchangeable (Slezkine, 1994; Suny & Martin, 2001; Akturk, 2010; Sokolovskiy, 2013), a static imaginary of an ethnically diverse region with a history of transboundary movement and assimilation, and complex understandings of identity that are not necessary solely linked to categories such as language or territory (Finke, 2014: 29). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The project of nation-building and the associated historiography and canonisation of these figures that went on through the 1930s and 1940s was accelerated by the need to inculcate patriotism during WWII, as noted in the literature review, the forms of which took celebrations and literary/academic publications. Shin remarks that WWII catalysed the Uzbekification of regional history due to the cultural elite’s task of promoting Soviet patriotism in Uzbekistan, thus furthering Uzbekistan’s claim to an exclusively national ownership of the poet Navoiy (ibid: 121). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Temurid architecture, however, as Shaw (2011: 44) notes, remained prized and a key part of Soviet identity construction despite the disfavouring of Temur in eyes of Soviet historiography. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Jamalov’s work, a master’s dissertation and the product of a post-independence Uzbekistani university, also represents the post-independence rehabilitation of Temur in its negative assessment of “mistaken” and “unfounded” Soviet historiography (ibid: 18-20). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See also Manz, 2002: pp. 18-20 for an analysis which includes Muminov’s reassessment and Novoseltsev and Abduraimov’s rebuttals. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Born in 1938 in Samarqand into a family of civil servants, Karimov studied engineering and economics and worked as a foreman and engineer before working as a specialist at the State Planning Office for around 17 years (1966-1983). Climbing the rungs of bureaucracy, in 1983 he was appointed Minister of Finance, and in 1986 became deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, rising concurrently through the ranks of the Communist Party from a regional First Secretary to First Secretary of the Central Committee in June 1989, and President on 24th March 1990 (Pottenger, 2004: 60-61). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This decree was since repealed in September 2020 – perhaps an effort by the Mirziyoyevian state trying to wipe clean the Navoiyan slate in preparation for the 2021 celebrations. (No. UP-6075) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Whilst some scholars point to the arbitrariness of the choice of Temur as the national symbol of Karimovian Uzbek independence because of its anachronism (Finke, 2014: 1; Ro’i and Wainer, 2019: 144), reasons such as his global cultural capital, the legacy of the Temurid golden age as a time of supremacy, and the post-Soviet ideological vacuum are evoked as motivating his restoration (Weisbrode, 1997; Manz, 2002; Kumar, 2013; Paskaleva, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Interestingly, like the earlier decree on the Year of Navoiy, this decree also became invalid in accordance with the decree dated February 22, 2021 (№ 87) "On recognizing as invalid some decisions of the Government of the RoU that have lost their value” in relation to a September 2020 decree (No. UP-6075), again, demonstrative perhaps of the Mirziyoyev-era attempt to rebrand from the Karimovian image. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. There is also a desovietisation of symbols and names in the metro (Kurzman, 1999: 77) and an Uzbekification of urban toponymy and public space more generally; statues of Temur are also mandated to be constructed in other cities such as Samarqand and Shakhrisabz. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This distinctly authoritarian edge is what makes the process emanate in a strongly top-down fashion, as this is where the power to disseminate narratives such as that of historical legitimisation is chiefly focused in the Karimovian era, as this work argues. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. A tour of the museum from a visitor can be found [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEaQbvTrD4k), starting from 7:40 and with particularly interesting moments c. 8:17, 23:41, 26:46, 7:40. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The book is, however, a very curious document; its English is often extremely awkward and sometimes difficult to understand, riddled with typos, and, judging by its grammatical constructions, seems to the author to have been translated from Russian. This, along with the small print run, does inspire the question of who this was targeted at; the assumption here is that of an academic audience. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. As noted earlier, in a 1941 work tracing “the Uzbek ethnogenesis not to the sixteenth century and the Shaybanids but to the tenth century, with the arrival of Turkic peoples and their settlement under the Kara-Khanid dynasty, which concluded the brilliant early ethnogenesis of the Uzbek”, Iakubovskii reified Soviet ideas of ethnogenetic identity in academia (Laruelle, 2010: 105). In a fascinating continuation of Soviet ethnogenesis, this is the same narrative presented in the book, with the arrival and uniting of Turkic peoples under the Kara-Khanid dynasty in the tenth century: “In the last decade of the tenth century, a state of Turks-Karakhanids was formed on the territory between Kashgar and Isfidjab (Sairam). This state united the Turkic nationalities of Karluks, Chigelis, Yargus and Yagmas” (ATIWH: p.28). Whist we see the content of representations changing, the Soviet legacy remains in the idea of ethnogenesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. However, the form of this foundation for popularisation and study of a Temurid figure closely echoes Karimov’s founding of an “International Foundation of Amir Temur”, shown in a 1996 decree (№ 100) aimed at the “deep study of the social and political heritage of the great statesman Amir Temur and his enormous contribution to the development of culture and morality and the formation of a sense of pride in the nation and an independent Motherland”, the “study and publication of historical materials on the activities of Amir Temur”, assistance on the restoration of Temurid architecture, and “the implementation of measures aimed at the spiritual and cultural development of the young generation, instilling a sense of pride and patriotism for the future of independent Uzbekistan”, as well as the “development of international cooperation of our country’s scientific, literary and cultural figures”. This demonstrates a degree of continuity in forms of representation for the function of CD through Uzbekification and Universalisation. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. At time of writing, Navoiy is available mostly in Russian and Turkic languages, with no comprehensive and systematic translation of his works in English. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Some are perturbed by these strong political/economic links; a 2015 Corporate Europe Observatory report (CEO: 2015) highlighted the UBTIC’s controversial links to the Uzbek cotton industry despite the continued coercion by the state of slave child and adult labour in the Uzbekistani cotton harvest. Most of the current Executive Committee, which is composed of Dentons law firm lawyers with exclusive experience in Uzbekistan as the only foreign registered law firm, is linked to oil and gas, and headed by Chairman Louis Skyner, whose experience lies firmly within FSU energy practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)