



HISTORICAL MEMORY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN A. QODIRIY'S "BYGONE DAYS"

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ABSTRACT

This article examines A. Qodiriy's "Bygone Days" as a literary space in which historical memory and Uzbek cultural identity are mutually constructed. The novel is approached not only as a historical narrative about nineteenth-century Turkestan, but also as a symbolic archive of social etiquette, political experience, family ethics, religious practice, and everyday customs. Special attention is paid to culture-bound units such as forms of address, administrative terms, wedding vocabulary, bread-related rituals, and social titles. Drawing on linguoculturological and translation-oriented methods, the article argues that Qodiriy transforms collective memory into narrative form, while the English translations by Carol Ermakova and Mark Reese demonstrate different ways of transmitting cultural memory to non-Uzbek readers.

Abdullah Qodiriy's "Bygone Days" occupies a central place in the formation of modern Uzbek prose because it gives literary shape to a period that is remembered both as a historical past and as a moral experience. The novel reconstructs the social world of Tashkent and Margilan, but its significance is not limited to the depiction of events. It organizes memory through characters, customs, speech forms, and conflict. In this sense, historical memory in the novel is not a passive recollection of the past; it is an active cultural mechanism by which a community understands its losses, values, and aspirations.

The concept of historical memory is especially productive for reading Qodiriy

because the novel links individual destinies with broader social change. Otabek's personal choices, Kumush's moral purity, Yusufbek Hoji's authority, and the collective reactions of urban society all work as narrative signs of a culture negotiating between tradition and renewal. Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory helps explain how the past is remembered



within social frameworks rather than in isolation¹.

Likewise, Jan Assmann's distinction between everyday communicative memory and durable cultural memory is useful for understanding why Qodiriy's text continues to function as a memory-bearing monument of Uzbek identity².

The present article therefore studies "Bygone Days" as a cultural text in which memory is encoded in language. It pays attention to historical realities, but it also examines the smaller linguistic signs through which identity becomes visible. Words such as "taqsir," "o'rda," "nikoh," "mahr," and "yanga" are not merely lexical items. They transmit social hierarchy, religious worldview, gender relations, and customary order. When these units are translated into English, the translator faces not only a linguistic task but also the problem of carrying memory across cultural borders.

This approach makes it possible to connect literary interpretation with translation analysis. A historical novel may be full of dates, rulers, and conflicts, but its cultural energy often lies in less visible material: the etiquette of greeting, the symbolic value of bread, the silence of a bride, the social authority of elders, and the religious language of marriage. These elements allow the past to become emotionally recognizable. For Uzbek readers, many of them may work as shared cultural knowledge. For foreign readers, they require mediation. Thus, the study of "Bygone Days" also becomes

a study of how a national memory can be communicated beyond its original linguistic community.

The methodological basis of the article combines historical-literary interpretation with linguoculturological analysis. Linguoculturology treats language as a carrier of national experience and cultural information. In this approach, a word is important not only because of its dictionary meaning but also because of the cultural associations it activates in the consciousness of native speakers. V. A. Maslova's classification of linguoculturemes is relevant here because it includes non-equivalent words, speech etiquette, phraseological units, metaphors, stereotypes, and other language forms that preserve cultural value³.

A similar idea is emphasized in translation studies. When a literary text contains culture-specific vocabulary, translation requires more than lexical substitution. Eugene Nida's view that certain information may need to be made explicit for the receiving audience explains why explanatory strategies often become necessary in literary translation⁴.

Peter Newmark also argues that so-called untranslatable words can usually be explained through contextual or componential description rather than simply omitted. This idea is important for Qodiriy's novel because many Uzbek cultural signs would lose their historical

¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, - 1992, p.38–40.

² Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political*

Imagination. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, - 2011. p.36–38.

³ V. A. Maslova, *Linguoculturology: Manual for Students*. Moscow. – 2001. p.20.

⁴ Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*. Leiden: E. J. Brill. – 1964. – p.131.



depth if they were replaced by approximate English words without explanation⁵.

The present article shifts the discussion from translation technique alone to the broader question of how cultural identity and historical memory are preserved, transformed, or clarified when Qodiriy's text enters English. The analysis is organized in three stages. First, it interprets the novel as a representation of historical memory by observing how political conflict, family life, and social order are narrated. Second, it identifies culture-bound vocabulary and rituals that carry national identity. Third, it considers the English renderings of these units in order to understand how cultural meaning is transferred. Such a method is suitable for "Bygone Days" because Qodiriy's realism is never purely documentary: it is also symbolic. His descriptions of houses, gates, ceremonies, and modes of speech create a cultural semiotics of Uzbek life. Therefore, the object of analysis is not only the story but also the system of values embedded in the story.

The historical layer of "Bygone Days" is built around the social and political atmosphere of nineteenth-century Turkestan. Qodiriy does not present history as a list of dates or official episodes. Instead, he shows how historical pressure enters homes, markets, marriage negotiations, local authority, and speech. This narrative method makes the past emotionally

concrete. The reader encounters history through the anxiety of families, the pride of social groups, and the moral conflicts that arise when personal happiness becomes dependent on public customs.

Historical memory in the novel is also connected with the representation of power. The scenes associated with Azizbek, Qipchaqs, Qora Chopons, and the urban population show that political history becomes memorable when it is experienced as fear, punishment, revenge, and communal judgment. The Uzbek term "o'rda," for example, is linked with the residence or center of rule, and its presence evokes a historical environment of khanate authority. In one English translation, the term is domesticated through a more familiar equivalent, while in another it is preserved through transliteration, which keeps the historical sound of the Uzbek world⁶.

Such examples show that Qodiriy's historical imagination is linguistically grounded. The past survives not only in plot but also in culturally marked vocabulary. Therefore, historical memory in the novel can be understood as a system of signs. Places, titles, forms of address, ceremonial vocabulary, and social names create a memory map of Uzbek life. The translation of these signs becomes a second act of memory: the translator must decide whether the foreign reader should encounter the past as an adapted narrative or as a culturally distinct world⁷.

⁵ Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. – 1988. – p.79.

⁶ Abdullah Qodiriy. *Bygone Days*, trans. Mark Reese. Nashville, TN: Muloqot Cultural Engagement Program. – 2018. – p. 55.

⁷ J. C. Catford. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. - 1965.- p.49.



At the same time, the novel does not idealize the past. Its memory is selective but not decorative. Family tragedy, social injustice, political cruelty, and the vulnerability of women are shown as parts of historical experience. This is why the text remains relevant: it invites readers to remember the past critically. Cultural identity is not constructed only from pride; it is also formed through painful awareness. Qodiriy's historical memory therefore contains a double movement: it preserves the beauty of national life, and it exposes the social mechanisms that destroyed human happiness. This double structure gives the novel its ethical depth.

Cultural identity in "Bygone Days" is most clearly seen in the social behavior of the characters. Qodiriy's people speak, greet, obey, object, and remain silent according to a recognizable cultural code. Respect toward elders, the authority of parents, the social weight of reputation, and the moral significance of shame shape the inner logic of the narrative. These values are not presented through abstract explanation; they appear through scenes of conversation, marriage arrangement, hospitality, and public reaction.

Forms of address are particularly important. The term "taqsir" expresses a respectful attitude toward a person of status and belongs to an older layer of Uzbek speech etiquette. When translated as "milord," "master," or through transliteration, each solution highlights a different side of the same cultural sign. "Milord" and "master" make the social relationship easier for English readers to understand, but transliteration preserves the Uzbek historical sound.

This tension between accessibility and authenticity is central to the translation of cultural identity.

The word "otin" provides another example. In the Uzbek cultural context, it can indicate respect toward an educated or socially honored woman, especially when attached to a proper name. If it is replaced by a more general word such as "woman" or confused with another term, the cultural nuance may weaken. The issue is not simply whether the translation is correct at the lexical level; the deeper question is whether the reader can still recognize the social meaning carried by the original Uzbek form.

Social etiquette also shapes the construction of gender identity in the novel. Kumush's dignity, O'zbek oyim's authority, Oftob oyim's maternal presence, and Zaynab's tragic position are not isolated psychological portraits. They are culturally coded roles. Through them the novel shows how women carry family honor, how mothers influence marriage decisions, and how social expectations can both protect and harm individuals. The cultural identity of the novel is therefore dialogic: it contains admiration for national manners and criticism of those customs when they become oppressive.

Thus, Qodiriy's cultural identity is encoded in small linguistic details. Social etiquette is a memory practice because it preserves inherited patterns of conduct. Through these expressions the novel records how people understood honor, rank, age, gender, and moral obligation.

The family sphere in "Bygone Days" is one of the strongest carriers of cultural memory. Marriage is not represented



only as a private relationship between two individuals. It is connected with kinship, parental consent, religious legitimacy, witnesses, gifts, and the public recognition of a new family bond. The vocabulary of marriage therefore becomes a major field for the study of cultural identity.

The word “nikoh” is especially significant. It denotes the religious marriage ceremony and is linked with Islamic legal and moral understanding of family life. Translating it simply as “wedding” can reduce its ritual meaning, because “wedding” in English does not fully express the religious contract and ceremonial structure implied by the Uzbek term. The English versions show different solutions: transliteration preserves the cultural form, while additional notes or explanations help the reader understand the ceremony. This confirms that the most effective translation of ritual memory often combines preservation with explanation⁸.

Other marriage-related units such as “mahr,” “xutba,” “domla,” “omin,” “salovot,” and “yanga” also function as cultural markers. They reveal the religious setting, gendered roles, and customary order of Uzbek marriage. The “yanga,” for instance, is more than a literal sister-in-law in the wedding context: she participates in the protection of tradition and the social guidance of the bride. Such words show how social memory is performed through ritual roles rather than merely remembered as information.

Bread-related customs also play a symbolic role in the cultural memory of the Uzbek people. The custom of “non sindirish” and the broader respect for bread show how everyday objects become sacred social signs. Bread is not only food; it is a symbol of blessing, family agreement, and continuity. In this respect, material culture in the novel is inseparable from moral culture. A household, a meal, a loaf of bread, and a ceremony all participate in the same symbolic system. They remind the reader that cultural identity is not an abstract political slogan but a lived order of gestures, objects, and repeated social actions.

The ritual memory of the novel also explains why “Bygone Days” continues to be relevant to Uzbek readers. Many practices represented in the text have changed in form, but their symbolic meanings remain recognizable. The novel therefore creates a bridge between past and present: readers see old customs historically, but they also recognize emotional and ethical patterns that still influence social life.

The English translations of “Bygone Days” demonstrate that cultural identity can be transferred in several ways. Carol Ermakova and Mark Reese use different strategies when dealing with Uzbek realia. Sometimes they choose an English equivalent that helps the reader understand the situation quickly. At other times, especially when the term has strong historical or cultural weight, transliteration is used to retain the national form of the word. Both

⁸ Qodiriy, Abdullah. *Bygone Days*, trans. Reese. p. 78–80, 445–46.



procedures have value, but they produce different reading effects.

Domestication can make the narrative smoother for an English reader, but it may weaken the historical texture of the original. Foreignization, especially through transliteration and explanatory notes, preserves the Uzbek cultural environment, but it requires more interpretive effort. Lawrence Venuti's distinction between fluent domestication and resistant foreignization helps explain this problem, even though the most successful literary translation often balances both principles rather than choosing only one⁹.

Footnotes and endnotes are essential when an Uzbek word has no direct English equivalent. This is particularly important for words connected with Islamic ceremony, social hierarchy, and traditional customs. The translator becomes a mediator of cultural memory, because the translation either keeps the foreign term visible or replaces it with a more familiar concept. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere's approach to translation as a cultural and historical act supports this view: translation is not merely an exchange of words but a rewriting of texts within another cultural system¹⁰.

Therefore, "Bygone Days" in English is not only a translated novel; it is a cultural bridge. Through translation, Uzbek historical memory becomes available to a global readership, but this availability depends on careful handling of the signs that carry identity. A translation that erases national realia

may become fluent, but it risks making the Uzbek world less visible. A translation that preserves every cultural term without guidance may become difficult for readers. The best solution is a balanced strategy: to preserve culturally significant words and to provide enough context for interpretation.

This balance is also important for comparative literary studies. The English versions of the novel help foreign scholars discuss Uzbek literature within world literature, while the Uzbek original remains the source of cultural authority. The translation is therefore not a replacement for the original, but a secondary cultural space in which historical memory is reinterpreted.

A. Qodiriy's "Bygone Days" may be read as a literary archive of Uzbek historical memory and cultural identity. The novel transforms nineteenth-century social experience into a narrative of family, honor, conflict, love, and moral responsibility. Its cultural power lies in the fact that history is not separated from everyday life. Political authority, religious ceremony, family hierarchy, speech etiquette, hospitality, bread, marriage, and social titles all become signs through which the Uzbek past is remembered.

The analysis also shows that cultural identity in the novel is inseparable from language. Culture-bound words function as memory units because they preserve information about social relations and traditional practices. When these units are translated into English, the translator

⁹ Lawrence Venuti. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge. – 2008. – p. 1-34.

¹⁰ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, eds., *Translation, History and Culture*. London: Pinter. - 1990. – p.3.



faces the problem of balancing clarity and cultural authenticity. The most effective strategy is often a combination of transliteration, contextual explanation, and carefully chosen equivalents. Such an approach allows the English reader to understand the narrative while still encountering the cultural distinctiveness of Uzbek life¹¹.

In conclusion, "Bygone Days" remains significant not only because it represents a historical period, but because it teaches readers how that period is culturally remembered. Qodiriy's novel shows that national identity is constructed through memory, and memory is preserved through language, ritual, and narrative form¹².

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¹¹ Mildred L. Larson, *Meaning-Based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence*, 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. - 1998,

¹² Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London: Hutchinson. – 1973. – p.12.