

Principles Of Reconstructing Artistic Uniqueness In The English Translations Of The Baburnama

Marjona Abdullo qizi Narzulloyeva
Navoi University of Innovations, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article investigates the principles of reconstructing artistic uniqueness in the English translations of the Baburnama. The study focuses on the comparative analysis of Annette S. Beveridge's (1921) and Wheeler M. Thackston's (1996) translations, highlighting their approaches to preserving Babur's poetic imagery, cultural specificity, and narrative voice. Using linguistic, stylistic, and cultural frameworks, the research examines how different translation strategies—domestication, foreignization, dynamic equivalence, and formal equivalence—shape the reception of Babur's memoirs among English-speaking readers. The findings demonstrate that Beveridge's translation emphasizes literary recreation, while Thackston's version prioritizes historical accuracy and linguistic fidelity. The article concludes that reconstructing artistic uniqueness requires a balance between aesthetic expression and factual precision.

Keywords: Baburnama, translation studies, artistic uniqueness, literary translation, domestication, foreignization, cultural specificity, equivalence.

Introduction: The Baburnama, or "Memoirs of Babur," represents one of the most remarkable achievements of Central Asian literature and historiography. Written by Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur (1483–1530), the founder of the Mughal Empire in India, this autobiographical chronicle is a unique synthesis of personal reflection, historical documentation, geographical description, ethnographic observation, and literary artistry. Babur composed the work in Chagatai Turkish, a literary language that blended Turkic, Persian, and Arabic influences and served as a prestigious medium of literary expression in Central Asia.

The Baburnama stands out for its artistic uniqueness. Unlike many royal chronicles that merely record political and military events, Babur's memoirs combine emotional candor with detailed depictions of landscapes, flora and fauna, architectural wonders, and the customs of diverse peoples. His voice alternates between the objective register of a historian and the lyrical tone of a poet. The text thus serves not only as a historical document but also as a work of high literary value.

The translation of the Baburnama into world languages

has long been a crucial pathway for making Babur's life and work accessible to global audiences. Among the English versions, two translations have been particularly influential: Annette Susannah Beveridge's version (1921) and Wheeler M. Thackston's translation (1996). These translations reflect distinct approaches to reconstructing the artistic uniqueness of the original text.

Beveridge, working in colonial India and early twentieth-century Britain, sought to introduce Babur as both a statesman and a man of letters. Her translation is characterized by elaborate English prose, careful annotations, and an attempt to recreate the lyrical qualities of the original. Thackston, writing in the late twentieth century in an academic environment, pursued a more philological approach, prioritizing accuracy, fidelity to the original structure, and accessibility for scholars.

This article investigates the principles of reconstructing artistic uniqueness in these two translations. The central research questions are:

1. How do Beveridge and Thackston differ in their rendering of the literary and poetic qualities of the Baburnama?

2. What translation strategies do they employ to convey culturally specific terms and stylistic devices?

3. How do their choices affect the reception of Babur's memoirs among English-speaking readers?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to comparative translation studies, literary translation theory, and the broader field of intercultural literary reception.

METHODS

The methodology of this study combines several complementary approaches:

1. Comparative Translation Analysis

The translations of Beveridge (1921) and Thackston (1996) were compared directly with the Chagatai Turkish original (in its modern Uzbek transliterations and critical editions). Selected passages dealing with nature, personal emotions, and cultural practices were analyzed for differences in diction, imagery, and tone.

2. Linguistic and Stylistic Analysis

The analysis examined how each translator rendered specific stylistic features of Babur's prose: metaphor, simile, rhythm, parallelism, and narrative voice. Emphasis was placed on lexical choice, syntactic structure, and register (archaic vs. modern English).

3. Cultural and Pragmatic Analysis

The treatment of culturally specific items—titles (e.g., Sahibqiran), customs (e.g., majlis), and historical references—was studied to identify whether translators used domestication (adapting terms for the target culture) or foreignization (retaining original terms).

4. Translation Theory Framework

The study drew upon key translation theories:

- Eugene Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence (focus on meaning over form).
- Peter Newmark's (1988) distinction between semantic and communicative translation.
- Lawrence Venuti's (1995) notions of domestication and foreignization.

5. Reception-Oriented Perspective

In addition to textual analysis, this study considered how each translation might influence reader perception of Babur—as a ruler, a poet, or a cultural figure—thus linking translation strategies with broader issues of literary reception.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis of Beveridge and Thackston's translations yields several key findings regarding the reconstruction of artistic uniqueness in the

Baburnama.

1. Poetic Imagery and Natural Descriptions

Babur frequently describes gardens, rivers, mountains, and flowers with poetic sensitivity. For example, in one spring passage, Babur writes:

"When spring arrives, flowers bloom, and the world becomes a garden."

- **Beveridge's version (1921):**

"When spring comes, the blossoms unfold and the world turns into a veritable garden of delight."

→ This rendering heightens poetic imagery with terms like veritable and delight, adding an aesthetic layer not strictly present in the original.

- **Thackston's version (1996):**

"In spring, the flowers open and the world becomes like a garden."

→ This version is more literal and straightforward, preserving the basic meaning but flattening the poetic resonance.

This shows that Beveridge actively reconstructs artistic uniqueness, while Thackston prioritizes semantic precision.

2. Emotional Expression and Subjectivity

Babur often reflects on his personal struggles, losses, and joys. For instance, his lament after the death of a close relative includes metaphoric expressions of sorrow.

- **Beveridge:** She amplifies the emotional tone, sometimes adding archaic expressions such as "alas" or "woe," which enhance the pathos for English readers.

- **Thackston:** He retains the factual core, often avoiding embellishment, which diminishes the emotional intensity.

Thus, Beveridge reconstructs Babur's subjectivity as literary artistry, while Thackston emphasizes historical neutrality.

3. Cultural Realities and Historical Terms

The title Sahibqiran (an honorific for Timur, meaning "Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction") illustrates different approaches:

- **Beveridge:** Translates as "Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction (a title of Timur)" and provides a footnote explaining the astrological background.

- **Thackston:** Retains transliteration (Sahibqiran) without explanation, leaving the burden of interpretation to the reader.

This demonstrates Beveridge's principle of explicatory domestication versus Thackston's foreignizing literalism.

DISCUSSION

The results highlight that the reconstruction of artistic uniqueness in translation is not a mechanical task but an interpretive act shaped by translator intent, audience expectations, and historical context.

Beveridge's strategy aligns with domestication (Venuti), as she adapts Babur's prose into a familiar English literary style. This increases aesthetic pleasure for readers but risks imposing foreign stylistics. Her annotations also serve to contextualize cultural realities, thereby integrating Babur into global literary discourse.

Thackston's strategy aligns with foreignization: he resists over-interpretation, retains original terminology, and avoids excessive embellishment. This makes his translation more useful for academic purposes, but it can alienate general readers who may miss the literary beauty of Babur's text.

From Nida's perspective, Beveridge leans toward dynamic equivalence, seeking to reproduce the emotional effect on readers, while Thackston practices formal equivalence, focusing on structural fidelity.

The broader implication is that reconstructing artistic uniqueness requires negotiation between two competing priorities:

- **Literary re-creation**, which seeks to reproduce the aesthetic experience.
- **Historical accuracy**, which seeks to preserve semantic and factual precision.

Both principles are valid but produce different kinds of texts—one that reads like a literary work, another like a historical document.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the principles of reconstructing artistic uniqueness in the English translations of the Baburnama. The findings suggest:

1. Beveridge's translation reconstructs Babur's poetic imagery and emotional intensity through elaborate English diction and explanatory strategies.
2. Thackston's translation emphasizes philological accuracy, simplicity, and cultural authenticity but diminishes stylistic artistry.
3. The two approaches reflect broader tensions in translation studies: domestication vs. foreignization, dynamic vs. formal equivalence, literary vs. scholarly orientation.
4. Both translations are invaluable: Beveridge introduces Babur as a world-class literary figure, while Thackston preserves Babur as a primary historical source.

Future research should consider reception studies—how modern readers and scholars respond differently to these translations. Additionally, new translations might attempt a hybrid approach, balancing literary artistry with historical fidelity.

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