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REWRITING THE SUFI SAINT IN UZBEK CLASSICAL LITERATURE: NARRATIVE EXPANSION, FAMILY ETHICS, AND LYRICIZATION IN HUVAYDO'S "HIKOYATI IBROHIM BIN ADHAM"

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Xo'janazar Huvaydo reworks the transregional hagiographic tradition of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham in the "Hikoyati Ibrohim bin Adham rahmatulloh alayhi" episode of Rohati dil. Rather than treating the episode as merely a repetition of an inherited Sufi plot, the article argues that Huvaydo creates a distinctive Uzbek literary configuration through three interrelated strategies: narrative expansion, family-centered ethical conflict, and lyricization of the hagiographic tale. Comparative close reading places Huvaydo in dialogue with ʿAttar's Tazkirat ul-avliyo, Alisher Navoiy's Nasoyim ul-muhabbat and Hayrat ul-abror, and classical Sufi biographical traditions represented by Al-Qushayri. The analysis shows that Huvaydo extends the saint's story backward through genealogy and his mother's apparent death and recovery, then forward through marriage, fatherhood, separation, bereavement, and posthumous confirmation. Embedded ghazals and marsiya forms shift focalization away from the saint alone toward Zulhayo and Muhammad, rendering renunciation emotionally costly rather than merely exemplary. The Kaʿba–Rābiʿa episode further reframes ritual achievement through compassion and divine favor. These structural innovations transform a mobile hagiographic tradition into a quasi-qissa whose didactic force arises from the tension between human attachment and mystical exclusivity. Huvaydo's originality thus lies in reorganizing inherited materials into an emotionally plural, genre-hybrid narrative form for Uzbek readers.

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Introduction

Ibrāhīm ibn Adham occupies a distinctive position in the literary memory of Islamic mysticism. The historical figure appears to have been an eighth-century ascetic associated with Balkh and Syria, but the early documentary record is comparatively sparse. In subsequent centuries, biographical and hagiographic writing transformed him into a paradigmatic ruler-turned-saint whose abandonment of status, wealth, and social privilege dramatized tawba (repentance), zuhd (ascetic renunciation), tawakkul (trust in God), and the authority of the walī, the "friend of God" (Alikberov, 2018; Sato, 2007). This distinction matters methodologically: literary analysis should not treat every marvelous episode as historical

biography. Instead, the Ibrāhīm tradition is best understood as a mobile repertoire of motifs that authors repeatedly select, intensify, omit, and recombine.

In Persian and Turkic literary cultures, this repertoire acquired exceptional durability. ʿAttar's *Tazkirat ul-avliyo* gives Ibrāhīm a highly developed saintly profile, while Alisher Navoiy records his conversion and ascetic life in *Nasoyim ul-muhabbat* and employs the well-known Ibrāhīm–Rābiʿa encounter in *Hayrat ul-abror* (ʿAttar, 2012; Navoiy, 2013a, 2013b). Such recirculation is typical of Islamic hagiography, in which the value of a story does not depend primarily on plot novelty: repetition can reinforce exemplary patterns, while variation adapts the saintly figure to new linguistic, social, and didactic environments (Renard, 2008). Huvaydo's *Rohati dil* belongs to this continuum but is not reducible to it.

The episode titled "Hikoyati Ibrohim bin Adham rahmatulloh alayhi" is unusually expansive within Huvaydo's didactic-mystical project. It begins before Ibrāhīm's birth with his mother's apparent death and recovery, moves through childhood and accession to kingship, narrates the conversion from sovereign hunter to itinerant ascetic, includes the Kaʿba–Rābiʿa complex, and then develops a family sequel centered on Zulhayo and Muhammad. The expanded plot and unusually dense system of principal and episodic characters are central features of Huvaydo's treatment. The episode also incorporates six ghazals, a marsiya-ghazal, and a marsiya; these insertions enlarge the work toward the scale and internal complexity of a qissa rather than a compact exemplary hikoyat (Huvaydo, 1994, pp. 88–110).

This article develops that structural observation into a broader argument. Huvaydo converts a saint's conversion legend into a multiperspectival family narrative in which spiritual perfection is tested against love, grief, bodily vulnerability, and social obligation. The resulting text does not weaken the Sufi ideal of renunciation; rather, it makes that ideal narratively legible by rendering its human costs visible. The study therefore asks three questions: (1) How does Huvaydo reorganize inherited Ibrāhīm motifs? (2) What functions do the added family characters and lyric insertions perform? (3) How does this reorganization reshape the didactic meaning of sainthood for an Uzbek-reading audience?

Literature Review and Research Gap

Modern scholarship provides two complementary contexts for these questions. Research on early Sufism warns against reading mature saint legends backward as transparent records of eighth-century figures. Knysh (2000, 2017), Karamustafa (2007), and Schimmel (1975) situate figures such as Ibrāhīm within the heterogeneous ascetic and devotional currents from which later Sufi institutions and literary self-understandings emerged. Sato (2007) traces the geographical diffusion of the Ibrāhīm legend across the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and Southeast Asia, demonstrating that the saint's literary afterlife became far wider than the recoverable historical record. Alikberov (2018) similarly emphasizes the transformation of Ibrāhīm into a "holy ruler," a narrative image structured by the dramatic opposition between sovereignty and sanctity. Al-Qushayri's *Risāla*, one of the major classical manuals of Sufi teaching, preserves anecdotes of Ibrāhīm that stress generosity, hardship, companionship, lawful livelihood, and spiritual discipline (Al-Qushayri, 2007). Together, these sources clarify the conventional symbolic repertoire available to later poets.

A second body of scholarship concerns Turkic and specifically Uzbek adaptations. Zaripova (2024) compares Ibrāhīm narratives in ʿAttar, Navoiy, and Huvaydo and emphasizes Huvaydo's distinctive treatment of the saint. Recent studies of *Rohati dil* likewise discuss the poem's religious-didactic orientation, Sufi ethics, and use of traditional narrative materials (Aliyeva, 2026; Sayidolimov & Ne'matova, 2026). These studies are valuable for locating Huvaydo within Uzbek didactic literature; however, there remains room for an integrated account of form in which genealogy, conversion, pilgrimage, family separation, embedded lyric genres, and the son's death are analyzed as components of a single compositional system. The present reading addresses that gap.

The term "lyricization" is used here in a limited narratological sense. It does not imply that the entire hikoyat becomes lyric poetry. Rather, at moments of emotional pressure, narrative movement yields

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to first-person or strongly focalized verse—especially ghazal and marsiya—so that an event is not only reported but also inwardly experienced. This distinction matters because hagiography often organizes lives typologically: the saint's acts exemplify conversion, asceticism, miracle, service, and death (Renard, 2008). Huvaydo retains that exemplary architecture, but lyric insertion complicates it by distributing affect among the wife, the son, and the saint-father. Ibrāhīm remains the axis of the plot, yet he is no longer its sole center of consciousness.

Method

The study uses comparative textual analysis, close reading, motif analysis, and narratological description. The primary text is Huvaydo's *Rohati dil* (1994 edition), with particular attention to the Ibrāhīm episode on pp. 88–110. The comparison corpus comprises ʿAttar's *Tazkirat ul-avliyo*, Navoiy's *Nasoyim ul-muhabbat* and *Hayrat ul-abror*, together with classical sources and modern scholarship on the Ibrāhīm tradition. The aim is not to establish a complete stemma of textual transmission, which would require manuscript collation, but to identify the literary operations by which Huvaydo modifies widely attested motifs.

Three analytical units are distinguished. First, a motif unit is a recurrent hagiographic action or situation, such as royal status, an awakening call, renunciation, pilgrimage, ascetic labor, an encounter with Rābiʿa, or posthumous vindication. Second, a narrative-expansion unit is material that enlarges causal or emotional context, especially Ibrāhīm's parents, Zulhayo, Muhammad, and the sequences of recognition, departure, reunion, and mourning. Third, a lyric-interruption unit is an embedded poem whose function is evaluated in relation to the surrounding narrative: whether it delays action, changes focalization, interprets an event, or intensifies grief. English analytical prose uses a light scholarly transliteration (e.g., Ibrāhīm, Rābiʿa, Kaʿba), whereas Uzbek titles and quoted passages retain source orthography. Brief English translations are provided for analytical clarity and are not presented as definitive philological translations.

The method also imposes an important limit. Claims about Huvaydo's "innovation" refer to the comparison set used here, not to absolute uniqueness across all Persianate or Turkic Ibrāhīm texts. Any claim to textual priority would require systematic comparison with manuscript and lithographic witnesses. The present study therefore speaks of distinctive reorganization and intensification rather than invention ex nihilo.

Results and Discussion

Narrative Aggregation: From Saintly Core to Family Prehistory

Table 1 compares the principal motifs across the selected traditions and highlights the compositional expansions that distinguish Huvaydo's treatment.

Table 1

Comparative Motif Matrix for the Ibrāhīm ibn Adham Tradition

Motif and Function	Classical Sufi and ʿAttar Tradition	Navoiy	Huvaydo, *Rohati dil*
Royal identity	Later hagiographic traditions strongly associate Ibrāhīm with royal or elite status followed by renunciation.	*Nasoyim ul-muhabbat* records royal origin; *Hayrat ul-abror* presupposes established saintly prestige.	Kingship is narratively established through recognition by the maternal royal household and is later renounced.
Awakening / tawba	Unseen admonitions and disruptive signs precipitate conversion.	*Nasoyim ul-muhabbat* summarizes his conversion.	The hunt, an admonitory voice, and the rooftop-camel episode accumulate as successive shocks to worldly certainty.
Pilgrimage / Kaʿba	Mecca and itinerant asceticism are central settings in the saintly tradition.	*Hayrat ul-abror* foregrounds the Ibrāhīm–Rābiʿa encounter at the Kaʿba.	The encounter is retained and expanded with the thirsty-dog episode, foregrounding compassion.

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Motif and Function	Classical Sufi and ʿAttar Tradition	Navoiy	Huvaydo, *Rohati dil*
Ascetic labor	Lawful subsistence, poverty, generosity, and travel recur in Sufi anecdotes.	*Nasoyim ul-muhabbat* notes lawful work in Syria.	Firewood labor is narrated in detail and linked to giving to dervishes, widows, and orphans.
Family narrative	Generally secondary to the saint's conversion and ascetic trajectory.	Not central to the Ibrāhīm–Rābiʿa exemplum.	Adham, Ibrāhīm's mother, Zulhayo, and Muhammad create a multigenerational counterplot.
Lyric / elegiac insertion	Anecdotal narration is primarily biographical and exemplary.	The didactic hikoyat remains comparatively compact.	Six ghazals, a marsiya-ghazal, and a marsiya distribute grief among wife, son, and father.

Note. The matrix synthesizes the comparison corpus and does not imply that any source preserves a single fixed version of the legend.

The comparison shows that Huvaydo works primarily by aggregation. The inherited saintly core remains recognizable: sovereignty, awakening, abandonment of wealth, movement toward Mecca, ascetic livelihood, and divine recognition. Yet Huvaydo surrounds this core with narrative material that changes its scale and ethical texture. The most striking addition is the backward extension to Ibrāhīm's parents. Adham is not a king but a gravedigger, while Ibrāhīm's mother is a king's daughter who is mistakenly buried and later recovers. Their marriage leads to Ibrāhīm's birth; he is subsequently recognized by the royal household and ultimately inherits kingship. The pattern produces a double movement between low and high social status: graveyard and palace, poverty and sovereignty, burial and recovery. Before Ibrāhīm renounces the world, his genealogy has already destabilized worldly hierarchy.

This opening is more than ornamental prehistory. Hagiographic narratives often use extraordinary beginnings to mark a saint as providentially significant (Renard, 2008). Huvaydo adapts that logic to familial causality: the mother's extraordinary recovery creates the conditions for Ibrāhīm's birth, while recognition by the maternal royal line makes his eventual kingship narratively plausible. Renunciation therefore becomes the reversal of a status that the plot has carefully constructed. The reader has watched Ibrāhīm acquire lineage, legitimacy, household, and rule; when he abandons them, the sacrifice carries measurable narrative weight.

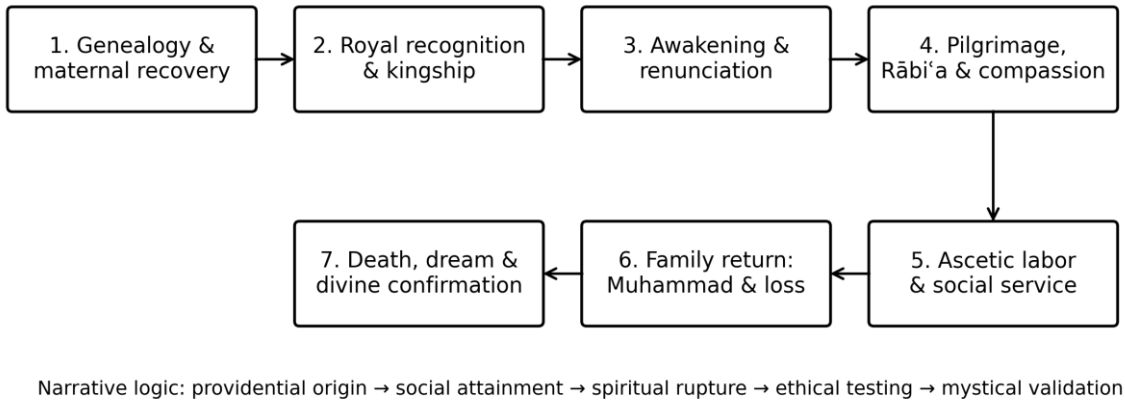
The conversion sequence retains the well-known ruler-to-ascetic pattern. In the broader Ibrāhīm tradition, calls from the unseen, destabilizing encounters, and speaking animals expose the futility of seeking permanence in royal life (ʿAttar, 2012; Sato, 2007). Huvaydo combines several awakening signals: the hunt, an admonitory voice, and the nocturnal encounter with a man searching for a camel on the roof. Their cumulative function is a shock to worldly certainty. Kingship is presented as a mistaken mode of orientation: the ruler can govern territory yet does not understand what he was created for. Once this disorientation is recognized, he exchanges the external signs of sovereignty for a shepherd's rough garment and begins his journey toward Mecca.

The pilgrimage section also illustrates selective inheritance. Navoiy's *Hayrat ul-abror* juxtaposes Ibrāhīm's laborious devotional progress with Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya's niyoz, or inward supplication: the Kaʿba itself goes to meet her. Huvaydo preserves the basic reversal but adds the episode of the thirsty dog, whose prayer is accepted after Rābiʿa gives it water. The text states, "Duo aylab dedi it, yo ilohe! / Hama darmondaning san-san panohe … Ijobat bo'ldi ul itning du'osi" (Huvaydo, 1994, p. 99). A functional English translation is, "The dog prayed: O God, You are the refuge of all the helpless … and its prayer was accepted." The episode redirects the logic of spiritual rank from countable ritual exertion toward compassionate responsiveness. Ibrāhīm's repeated two-rakʿa prayers remain admirable, but the narrative refuses to make measurable effort the sole index of proximity to God. Figure 1 summarizes the resulting expansion from inherited saintly motifs to family and posthumous closure.

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Figure 1

Narrative Expansion Arc in Huvaydo's Ibrāhīm ibn Adham Episode



Note. The figure models the compositional sequence emphasized in this analysis; it is not a chronological reconstruction of the historical Ibrāhīm ibn Adham.

Family Counterplot and the Ethics of Separation

Huvaydo's most consequential expansion occurs after renunciation, at a point where many saintly biographies might have moved directly toward further ascetic feats and death. Instead, *Rohati dil* reopens the abandoned household. Zulhayo, left pregnant in Balkh, gives birth to Muhammad and raises him until he becomes pious like his father. This apparently secondary line becomes the emotional counterplot to the saint's journey. Ibrāhīm travels away from family toward divine exclusivity; Muhammad travels toward the absent father; Zulhayo remains spatially fixed but passes through hope, fear, consent, separation, and bereavement. Three trajectories—away, toward, and waiting—organize the middle and final sections of the story.

This geometry of separation explains why the inserted lyric forms are structurally necessary. When Muhammad asks permission to seek his father, Zulhayo's speech cannot be reduced to a didactic statement. Huvaydo suspends the plot and gives her a ghazal: "Na hasratu yordin ayrilib xonumon boʻlmoq, / Xayolimda yoʻq erdi yordin mundogʻ judo boʻlmoq" (Huvaydo, 1994, p. 103). In approximate English, "What grief—to lose one's beloved and one's home; / I never imagined such a separation from the beloved." The ghazal relocates the language of classical separation from the conventional lover to a wife and mother whose household has been fractured by sacred renunciation. The lexical field of firoq (separation) thus becomes simultaneously mystical and domestic.

A second lyric sequence appears when the departing son disappears from view. The seven-bayt ghazal with the radif "firoq" represents separation as an active force that destroys the "throne of fortune" and reduces the speaker to poverty. This metaphor is especially resonant in a narrative in which literal kingship has already been abandoned. Worldly sovereignty is relinquished by Ibrāhīm voluntarily; emotional sovereignty is destroyed in Zulhayo involuntarily. The poem thereby creates a gendered counterpoint to ascetic agency. Zulhayo does not reject the divine order—indeed, she repeatedly submits to it—but submission is represented as the labor of grief rather than as effortless assent.

Muhammad's own ghazal in the firewood market extends this technique. He arrives in Mecca but cannot immediately find his father; his speech turns toward death, exile, and frustrated longing. The son's piety is represented not through abstract doctrinal vocabulary alone but through filial desire. When he finally recognizes Ibrāhīm by the physical and devotional signs described by his mother—tall stature, reddish face, black beard, rough shawl, constant dhikr, and prayer at each step—the narrative converts Zulhayo's remembered portrait into a set of recognition markers. Her perspective thus prepares the reunion even though she remains absent from it.

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The reunion is the story's climactic ethical crisis. A voice from the unseen confronts Ibrāhīm with an absolute choice: "Mani suygilu yo o'g'lingni suygil" (Huvaydo, 1994, p. 107)—"Love Me, or love your son." Read narrowly, the line might appear to oppose religion and family affection. Within the full composition, however, its function is more severe and paradoxical. The text has invested considerable narrative space in making the son lovable, pious, obedient, and sacrificial. The command therefore tests not whether Ibrāhīm possesses affection but whether any created attachment can claim ultimate allegiance. Mystical exclusivity gains force precisely because ordinary attachment has been made morally valuable.

Muhammad's death and Ibrāhīm's marsiya prevent the father's renunciation from being represented as affective indifference. He mourns, "Ayo o'g'lim jigarbandim qulunum, / G'ariblikda sanga kelgan bu o'lum" (Huvaydo, 1994, p. 108), approximately, "O my son, my own flesh and blood, my dear one; / death has come to you in exile." The marsiya acknowledges parental love, unrealized youth, and the mother's waiting even as Ibrāhīm submits to divine decree. Huvaydo thus stages a distinction central to the episode: renunciation is not the absence of love but the refusal to absolutize attachment to the created world. Table 2 summarizes the major lyric insertions and their narrative functions.

Table 2

Embedded Lyric Forms and Their Narrative Functions

Lyric Moment	Speaker or Focalizer	Formal Marker	Narrative Function
Separation from husband	Zulhayo	4-bayt ghazal; radif "bo'lmoq"	Recasts classical separation language as domestic and marital grief.
Son prepares to depart	Zulhayo	7-bayt ghazal; radif "firoq"	Slows the departure and frames consent as emotionally costly submission.
Search in Mecca	Muhammad	5-bayt ghazal; radif "o'lum"	Turns filial search into first-person exile, mortality, and longing.
Death of Muhammad	Ibrāhīm	Marsiya	Restores paternal affect after the mystical command to privilege divine love.
News of the son's death	Zulhayo	16-bayt marsiya-ghazal; radif "bolam"	Makes maternal bereavement an independent ethical center of the story.
Final mystical closure	Narrator / saintly frame	Concluding ghazal passages and dream report	Moves from human loss toward posthumous validation and divine vision.

Note. Bayt counts and radif labels follow Huvaydo (1994, pp. 103–110); "marsiya-ghazal" designates a ghazal-form lament functioning as elegy.

Lyricization, Focalization, and Genre Hybridity

The embedded poems also alter genre. The base form is a didactic hikoyat with masnavi-like narrative movement, but the repeated ghazals and elegiac passages create a hybrid architecture. The 1994 edition contains six ghazals, one marsiya-ghazal, and one marsiya within the episode. Their placement is patterned rather than random. Lyric intensity rises at narrative thresholds: recollection of the absent husband, permission for the son's departure, the son's unsuccessful search, the father–son reunion, death, and maternal mourning. In narratological terms, these poems slow story time while expanding discourse time. A few minutes of narrated action—saying farewell, waiting, or receiving news—can occupy many lines because the work privileges affective interpretation over event progression.

This is why "lyricization" is more precise than treating the poems as ornament. If the poems were merely decorative, removing them would not substantially alter the narrative's ethical architecture; here, it would. Without Zulhayo's ghazals, the story would still communicate that a wife and mother suffers, but

the reader would experience Ibrāhīm's renunciation chiefly from the saint's perspective. With the poems included, Huvaydo requires the reader to inhabit the costs borne by those who remain behind. The saint's path is therefore framed by emotional testimony from others.

The distribution in Table 2 is especially significant after Muhammad's death. The sixteen-bayt "bolam" ("my child") lament moves the emotional center away from the saint at precisely the point when hagiographic narrative might otherwise celebrate triumph over attachment. The mother's voice insists on the irreducible human reality of loss. Yet her grief does not cancel the religious conclusion; rather, the story holds grief and submission together. This coexistence gives Huvaydo's didacticism unusual psychological depth.

The same hybrid strategy appears in the posthumous close. After Ibrāhīm's death, a disciple sees him in a dream and asks about his state in the grave. Ibrāhīm reports divine favor and the promise of beholding God. The dream functions as hagiographic verification: the saint's ascetic choices are retrospectively authorized from the unseen world. Structurally, it closes the chain opened by earlier voices from the unseen. At conversion, the unseen disrupts kingship; at the father–son climax, it demands exclusive love; after death, it confirms the saint's reward. The narrative therefore forms an arc from interruption to trial to validation.

Sufi Ethics: Renunciation, Compassion, and Social Service

The episode's ethical system can be described through four linked values: renunciation, compassionate service, lawful subsistence, and submission to divine judgment. Asceticism alone is insufficient. In Mecca, Ibrāhīm gathers and sells firewood, gives portions of his earnings to dervishes, widows, and orphans, and lives in poverty. This motif corresponds to early Sufi ideals in which reliance on God did not necessarily exclude lawful work and generosity (Al-Qushayri, 2007; Karamustafa, 2007). Huvaydo's saint is therefore not merely a man who leaves society; he re-enters social relations through service rather than status.

The Rābiʿa episode complements this ethic by placing mercy toward a vulnerable animal beside formal worship. The contrast is not an argument against ritual prayer. Instead, Huvaydo's sequencing implies that divine proximity cannot be reduced to visible religious labor. Rābiʿa's response to the thirsty dog becomes a sign of inward orientation and compassionate responsiveness. In this sense, the dog is not simply a conventional emblem of loyalty; it becomes a narrative witness whose accepted prayer discloses the hidden value of mercy.

Family ethics operate within the same system. Adham rescues the buried princess and marries her lawfully; the royal family recognizes kinship; Zulhayo raises Muhammad; Muhammad seeks paternal recognition; and Ibrāhīm mourns the son he must surrender. Huvaydo does not represent worldly life as intrinsically worthless. It contains legitimate marriage, parental care, generosity, and social justice. The danger lies in treating these goods as ultimate possessions. Consequently, the story's Sufi didacticism operates through a hierarchy of values rather than simple negation: worldly ties are real and morally serious, but divine love remains ultimate.

This hierarchy helps explain the continuing pedagogical power of the episode. In a modern classroom, the text can support discussion of genre hybridity, adaptation, gendered focalization, emotional ethics, and the historical distinction between saintly legend and recoverable biography. Its didactic relevance is strongest when the text is not simplified into the injunction to "abandon the world." Huvaydo's composition asks a more demanding question: how does spiritual commitment interact with obligations that are themselves ethically meaningful?

Conclusion

Huvaydo's "Hikoyati Ibrohim bin Adham" is a revealing example of how Uzbek classical literature receives and transforms a transregional Sufi saint legend. The narrative preserves the recognizable Ibrāhīm paradigm—royal privilege, awakening, renunciation, pilgrimage, ascetic labor, Rābiʿa, and final divine

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favor—but reorganizes it within a much broader family and emotional frame. The prehistory of Adham and the king's daughter gives Ibrāhīm a providential genealogy; the later Zulhayo–Muhammad sequence invites renunciation to be viewed from the perspective of those who are left behind; and the dream epilogue completes the saint's trajectory through posthumous confirmation.

The paper's central finding is that Huvaydo's originality is compositional rather than doctrinal. He does not introduce a new theory of tasavvuf; instead, he alters how inherited doctrine is experienced by reshaping narrative form. Embedded ghazals and marsiya passages redistribute consciousness, slow the action at moments of separation, and allow domestic grief to stand beside mystical aspiration. In this configuration, saintly perfection is not represented as emotional emptiness. Ibrāhīm loves, loses, mourns, gives, works, and submits; Zulhayo and Muhammad make the human costs of his path visible.

The Kaʿba–RābiʿaRābiʿa episode reinforces the same principle at another level. Spiritual rank cannot be reduced to an arithmetic of outward effort. Compassion, niyoz, humility, and divine acceptance resist visible measurement. Huvaydo's text therefore binds mystical exclusivity to ethical service rather than to isolated withdrawal. The resulting work is best understood as a genre-hybrid, quasi-qissa narrative whose didactic authority derives from the tension it sustains: family bonds are honored, grief is given voice, and worldly goods retain relative value, yet none is permitted to become absolute.

Future research should test this argument through manuscript and lithographic comparison where relevant witnesses are available. Such work could examine whether lyric placement, omitted or added bayts, orthographic variants, and episode boundaries alter interpretation of the Ibrāhīm narrative. Bringing close literary reading into dialogue with textual scholarship would further clarify Huvaydo's position within the wider Persianate and Turkic transmission history of the Ibrāhīm ibn Adham tradition.

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