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DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF ALISHER NAVOI'S WORKS IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP

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Abstract: This article analyzes the main directions in the study of Alisher Navoi's oeuvre in contemporary Western scholarship. While the initial study of Navoi's legacy within European and American Oriental studies was primarily associated with linguistics, Turkology, and textual criticism, subsequent scholarship has increasingly examined his works in close connection with the political and cultural environment of the Timurid period, Chagatai literature, Persian-Turkic literary interactions, Sufism, creative imitation, patronage, cultural exchange, and historical memory. The article traces the methodological development of Western Navoi studies through the works of scholars such as János Eckmann, András J. E. Bodrogligeti, Alexandre Papas, Mark Toutant, and Boram Shin. Particular attention is devoted to the interpretation of Navoi's Khamsa in the context of creative imitation, cultural acculturation, political authority, patronage, and Sufism, with special reference to Mark Toutant's monograph Un empire de mots. The study demonstrates that contemporary Western Navoi scholarship increasingly tends to interpret Navoi's oeuvre not merely as a phenomenon of national literature, but also as a transnational phenomenon that emerged within the multilingual and multicultural literary space of the Timurid period.

Keywords: Alisher Navoi, Western Navoi studies, Chagatai literature, Khamsa, Mark Toutant, János Eckmann, András J. E. Bodrogligeti, Alexandre Papas.

Alisher Navoi's oeuvre, as one of the most significant phenomena of the literary and cultural life of fifteenth-century Central Asia, has remained a constant focus of scholarly attention in both Eastern and Western intellectual traditions. His literary legacy constitutes an important object of research in international Navoi studies, primarily because it demonstrates the exceptionally high expressive potential of the Chagatai literary language, integrates Persian and Arabic literary-aesthetic traditions with Turkic poetic thought, and embodies the political, ethical, and spiritual views of the Timurid period. In the Western scholarly tradition, interest in Navoi has not developed as a unidirectional phenomenon. His oeuvre has been studied and reinterpreted through diverse methodological approaches associated with Turkology, Oriental studies, Islamic studies, Sufi studies, comparative literary studies, historiography, and cultural studies. Therefore, in examining contemporary Western Navoi studies, it is not sufficient merely to enumerate individual works or scholars; it is essential to identify the methodological transformations that have taken place within this body of scholarship.

In the early scholarly layer of Western Navoi studies, Navoi's oeuvre was primarily investigated within the framework of the Chagatai language and literature. In this process, the scholarly work of János Eckmann occupies a particularly significant place. His Chagatay Manual, published in Bloomington by Indiana University in 1966, is one of the fundamental studies devoted to a systematic examination of the phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and lexical features of the Chagatai language. Comprising XII + 340 pages, the work has been recognized as one of the important sources for the scholarly description of the Chagatai language in Western Turkology [1].

Eckmann's approach is of considerable importance for the study of the textual and linguistic foundations of Navoi's oeuvre. The complexity of Navoi's poetics is manifested not only at the semantic level but also in his use of the grammatical, lexical, and stylistic resources of the Chagatai language. From this perspective, it can be observed that the initial stage of the Western Turkological study of Navoi's oeuvre was oriented less toward the question "What did Navoi depict?" than toward the question "Within which literary-language system, and through what linguistic means, did Navoi construct artistic meaning?" This stage provided a solid philological foundation for subsequent poetic, comparative, and cultural studies.

Another important characteristic of Western research on Chagatai literature is the study of Navoi's oeuvre not in isolation from Persian literature, but within the broader system of Persian–Turkic literary interactions. The Herat milieu in which Navoi lived was a complex cultural environment in which Persian and Turkic functioned alongside one another and in which writers drew upon several literary traditions. Consequently, explaining the relationship between Navoi's Khamsa and the tradition of Nizami Ganjavi solely through the concept of "imitation" is insufficient for contemporary scholarship. Western researchers have increasingly focused on interpreting this relationship as a process of appropriating, transforming, and adapting literary heritage to a new cultural context.

This methodological shift is particularly evident in Mark Toutant's study devoted to Navoi's oeuvre. His monograph Un empire de mots: pouvoir, culture et soufisme à l'époque des derniers Timourides au miroir de la Khamsa de Mīr ʻAlī Shīr Nawāʼī, published by Peeters in 2016, comprises 701 pages and was issued as volume 22 of the Collection Turcica series. The work is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation defended at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in 2013; the original title of the dissertation was La culture des derniers Timourides: études des pratiques d'imitation à travers l'exemple de la Khamsa de Mīr ʻAlī Shīr Nawāʼī, 1441–1501 [2].

A fundamentally important aspect of Toutant's study is that Navoi's Khamsa is examined not merely as a poetic monument, but as a complex historical and cultural source reflecting the political, cultural, and religious-intellectual processes of the late Timurid period. The juxtaposition of the concepts of "power," "culture," and "Sufism" in the title of the monograph indicates the researcher's methodological position: Navoi's poetics cannot be separated from the power relations, cultural patronage, and Islamic–mystical thought of his time [2].

In Toutant's study, the relationship between Navoi's Khamsa and the five-poem model established by Nizami Ganjavi is of particular significance. The bibliographic description itself notes that the Khamsa was composed on the basis of the model of Nizami's Pentad. However, this relationship is understood not as mechanical copying, but as a process of recreating an existing literary model on the basis of a new language, a new historical context, and new cultural needs. In this respect, the concept of "imitation" employed in Western scholarship acquires particular scholarly significance. Unlike the potentially passive connotations of the traditional concept of taqlid (imitation), Toutant's study approaches imitation as a mechanism of creative and cultural production. Such an approach makes it possible to interpret Navoi's dependence on Nizami not as a factor that undermines the independent artistic value of the Khamsa, but rather as a means of creating a new literary model.

From this perspective, understanding Navoi's Khamsa as merely a "translation of Persian literature into Turkic" would constitute a scientifically reductive approach. While appropriating the poetic models created by Nizami, Amir Khusrau, and other predecessors,

Navoi invests their narrative, characterological, and ideological layers with new meanings. As a result, the earlier literary tradition is preserved, but its function is transformed. This process can be explained through the model of appropriating tradition – reinterpretation – creation of a new cultural code. Precisely this aspect provides an important theoretical basis for understanding the innovative nature of Navoi's oeuvre in contemporary Western scholarship.

Such an interpretation of Navoi's Khamsa also offers a new perspective on its relationship with the political and cultural environment of the Timurid period. In Toutant's study, the Khamsa is selected as one of the principal sources for the study of the culture of the late Timurid period [2]. Within this approach, the literary text is viewed not merely as a "reflection" of historical reality, but as an active intellectual medium that contributed to the formation of the social and political perceptions of its time. From this perspective, the ideas concerning rulers, justice, subjects (ra'iyat), knowledge, generosity, moral responsibility, and the relationship between the state and the individual in Navoi's epic poems can be studied as integral components of Timurid political thought.

This aspect contributed to the formation of a line of inquiry in Western Navoi studies concerned with the relationship between literature and power. As a statesman and poet closely associated with the courtly environment, Navoi did not stand outside the political life of his time. Therefore, interpretations of the ruler figures and reflections on justice in the Khamsa should not be confined to reading them merely as general moral admonitions; their historical and political context must also be taken into account. Toutant's study reinforces precisely this methodological possibility [2].

Another important dimension of Navoi's oeuvre in contemporary Western scholarship is its relationship with Sufism. This line of inquiry makes it possible to study such concepts as love, spiritual perfection, the nafs (lower self), gnosis, and spiritual development in Navoi's poetics not merely as thematic elements, but as categories constituting the internal semantic system of the literary text.

The fact that Toutant's monograph explicitly incorporates "Sufism" (soufisme) into its subject of investigation likewise demonstrates the significance of this issue within Western Navoi studies [2].

The view that Sufi content cannot be separated from Navoi's poetics is further complemented, from another perspective, by the studies of the French Orientalist Alexandre Papas. His article, "La Makhfî 'ilm ou science secrète de 'Alî Shîr Nawâ'î. Le projet d'une langue secrète naqshbandî," was published in volume 3 of the Journal of the History of Sufism in 2001, on pages 229–255 [3]. This study demonstrates the possibility of examining Navoi's legacy in connection with the history of the Naqshbandiyya order and Sufi knowledge. Such an approach opens the way to investigating the relationship between Navoi's oeuvre and specific historical and Sufi networks, rather than reducing its religious and mystical content to the general notion of "religious influence." This methodology is particularly important for reinterpreting the characters and plots of the Khamsa epics. For instance, examining the artistic functions of such figures as Farhad, Shirin, Majnun, Alexander, and Bahram solely within the framework of their respective plots does not fully reveal their spiritual and philosophical dimensions. An approach informed by Western Sufi studies, by contrast, makes it possible to analyze the relationship between the apparent romantic narrative and the underlying idea of spiritual perfection. From this perspective, Navoi's Khamsa is being studied not only as a historical and cultural text, but also as a poetic form of Islamic–mystical thought.

Another important direction in Western research on Navoi's oeuvre is the determination of his place in Chagatai literature and in the history of the Turkic literary language. Eckmann's Chagatay Manual represents an important example of precisely this scholarly tradition [1]. The study of the grammatical system, lexical richness, and literary usage of the Chagatai language makes it possible to establish the linguistic foundations of Navoi's poetics. In this regard, the significance of Navoi's oeuvre cannot be confined merely to its place in the history of the "Old Uzbek literary language." Rather, it represents one of the most important stages in the formation and consolidation of a highly developed Turkic written literary language in Central Asia. At the same time, contemporary Western scholarly discourse is increasingly shifting away from interpreting this issue within national boundaries toward reconstructing the broader regional map of Chagatai literature.

Alongside Central Asia, the Chagatai language and literature also existed in certain cultural environments of Iran, Afghanistan, and India during subsequent periods. Therefore, attempting to fully align Navoi's oeuvre with the boundaries of present-day national literatures may oversimplify the complexity of the historical process. Navoi's legacy should, above all, be studied as a phenomenon that emerged within the transregional Persian–Turkic literary space of the fifteenth century.
Another significant methodological development in contemporary Western Navoi studies is the transformation of historical perceptions of Navoi himself into an object of scholarly inquiry. Boram Shin's article "Inventing a National Writer: The Soviet Celebration of the 1948 Alisher Navoi Jubilee and the Writing of Uzbek History," published in the International Journal of Asian Studies in 2017, represents an important scholarly source in this regard [4]. The study examines the process through which Alisher Navoi, the Chagatai-Turkic poet active in fifteenth-century Herat, was reconstructed in the twentieth century as an "Uzbek national writer." The author analyzes the processes of nationalization and Sovietization of Navoi's image during the 1920s–1940s and demonstrates the role of the 1948 jubilee celebrations in this historical construction.

Shin's study leads to a methodologically important conclusion for Navoi studies: the image of Navoi is not an immutable scholarly category existing outside historical processes, but rather a cultural construct that has been interpreted differently in different periods. This approach introduces, alongside the question "Who was Navoi?", another equally important question: "How was Navoi imagined and represented in different historical periods?" [4]

From this perspective, contemporary Western Navoi studies are moving beyond the study of Navoi's oeuvre itself toward an examination of the history of scholarly discourse on Navoi. This development brings Navoi studies into closer dialogue with historiography and memory studies. The nationalization of Navoi's image in the twentieth century does not negate his actual historical and cultural position in the fifteenth century; rather, it helps explain how the scholarly and political needs of subsequent periods shaped the interpretation of his legacy. As a result, Navoi's legacy is studied on two levels: first, the historical Navoi reflected in fifteenth-century sources; and second, the image of Navoi reconstructed in subsequent centuries within various scholarly and national discourses.

Another important tendency in contemporary Western scholarship is the study of Navoi's oeuvre within the framework of transnational literary processes. The relationship between Navoi's Khamsa and the literary tradition of Nizami Ganjavi provides the clearest example of this approach. In this process, cultural influence is not unidirectional. The poetic model transmitted from Nizami to Navoi acquires a new form in Navoi's oeuvre and subsequently contributes to the development of Chagatai literature. Thus, literary tradition is not a ready-made product transmitted from a cultural center to a periphery, but rather a

dynamic system that is continually reworked in different cultural spaces. Toutant's study, grounded in the concept of "imitation," provides an important theoretical basis for understanding precisely this process [2].

From this perspective, the creation of Navoi's Khamsa can also be understood as a process of cultural recoding. When the poetic code formed within Persian literature is transferred into the Chagatai language, its meaning does not remain unchanged. Alongside the linguistic transformation, the semantic potential of the characters, national and cultural references, political and ethical emphases, and the author's historical position are also reconfigured. As a result, the model created by Nizami begins to perform a different historical function in Navoi's hands. This aspect reveals more strongly the character of Navoi's oeuvre as a process of "creative recreation" rather than mere "imitation."

Another important feature of the Western study of Navoi's legacy is its relationship with cultural patronage and the literary field. The integration of power, culture, and Sufism within the central conceptual framework of Toutant's monograph is by no means accidental. Navoi's oeuvre cannot be separated from the literary and cultural environment of the Timurid court. At the same time, reducing the relationship between the author and the ruler within this environment to a simple "patron-and-poet" relationship is insufficient. While a literary work may constitute part of court culture, it may also function as an intellectual medium through which moral and political ideals are articulated to the ruler. This, in turn, creates an opportunity to study Navoi's Khamsa as a text that combines political-didactic and aesthetic functions.

One of the most important characteristics of contemporary methodology in the Western study of Navoi is the refusal to treat language, literature, and history as separate domains. Whereas early Turkological studies focused primarily on the language, grammar, and lexicon of the texts, subsequent research has increasingly integrated this philological foundation with historical and cultural analysis. Considering Eckmann's linguistic studies [1], Papas's works on Sufism [3], Toutant's historical-cultural monograph [2], and Shin's historiographical study [4] as parts of a single scholarly system demonstrates the multilayered nature of contemporary Western Navoi studies.

At the same time, the position of Navoi's legacy within the context of world literature has emerged as another important and promising direction in Western scholarship. On the one hand, Navoi's oeuvre is connected with representatives of Persian literature such as Nizami and Amir Khusrau; on the other, it is linked to Chagatai and subsequent Turkic literary traditions. Therefore, rather than examining Navoi solely within the internal evolution of a single national literary history, analyzing his oeuvre within the broader interaction of the literary traditions of the Near and Middle East offers greater scholarly possibilities. Within this line of inquiry, studying Navoi's oeuvre through the "center–periphery" model of world literature theory may also generate new scholarly questions. For instance, the transfer of the Persian poetic model created by Nizami into the Turkic language by Navoi can be interpreted not merely as the cultural periphery's adoption of a central literary code, but also as a process through which a new literary center was established. Toutant's study based on Navoi's Khamsa provides an important scholarly foundation for investigating this issue [2].

From this perspective, when the major scholarly directions of contemporary Western Navoi studies are considered as a whole, they can be divided into several interconnected layers. The first is the philological and Turkological approach, which focuses on Navoi's language, the Chagatai language, and the linguistic features of his texts. The second is the comparative-literary approach, which examines the literary relationships between Navoi and such figures as Nizami, Amir Khusrau, and Jami. The third is the historical-cultural approach,

which situates Navoi's oeuvre within the political and cultural life of the Timurid period. The fourth is the study of Sufism, which investigates the mystical and spiritual foundations of Navoi's poetics. The fifth encompasses historiography and memory studies, focusing on the transformations of Navoi's image in subsequent historical periods. The sixth is the transnational and world-literature approach, within which Navoi's legacy is examined in the context of cultural exchange among Turkic, Persian, and Islamic literary spheres.

Thus, the most important scholarly characteristic of contemporary Western Navoi studies is its refusal to confine Navoi's oeuvre to a single method or a single literary tradition. Navoi's Khamsa is being studied simultaneously as a poetic work, a historical-cultural source, a political and ethical text, an expression of Sufi thought, and a major philological monument demonstrating the expressive potential of the Turkic literary language. In this respect, the evolution of Western scholarship on Navoi's oeuvre can be characterized as a transition "from describing the text to contextualizing the text, from identifying imitation to analyzing creative recreation, and from the framework of national literature to a transnational literary space."

The findings of the study allow us to emphasize that the principal transformation in the scholarly approach to Navoi in contemporary Western Navoi studies is characterized by an effort to reconstruct his oeuvre within the actual historical and cultural conditions of the fifteenth century, rather than treating it as a ready-made "national" category. In particular, Toutant's studies demonstrate that Navoi's Khamsa constitutes an important source for understanding the relationships among literary imitation, cultural acculturation, political power, and Sufism [2]. Shin's study, in turn, reveals how the image of Navoi was subsequently reshaped within national and Soviet historical discourses [4]. Eckmann's philological studies provide the necessary foundation for relating Navoi's oeuvre to the historical development of the Chagatai language [1], while Papas's research expands the possibilities for examining his oeuvre in connection with the Naqshbandi-Sufi milieu [3].

On this basis, the following scholarly conclusion may be drawn concerning the study of Navoi's oeuvre in contemporary Western scholarship: in order to fully understand the Navoi phenomenon, it is necessary to study him simultaneously as a major representative of Chagatai literature, a participant in the Persian–Turkic literary dialogue, an intellectual figure of the Timurid period, a poet associated with Sufi thought, and a cultural figure whose image was subsequently reinterpreted within various national historical discourses. It is precisely this multilayered approach that more fully reveals the scholarly potential of Navoi's legacy within the global humanities.

In this sense, contemporary Western Navoi studies are developing beyond the mere "study" of Navoi's oeuvre toward a comprehensive reconstruction of the cultural systems that gave rise to it, the literary field in which he operated, and the ways in which his legacy was subsequently reinterpreted.

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