

**TEXTUAL AUTHENTICITY AND TRANSLATION CHALLENGES IN NAVOI'S
"KHAMSA": A CRITICAL EXAMINATION****Khilola Allaniyazova**Teacher at the Department of Western Languages and Literature,
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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19976213>

Abstract: This paper provides a comprehensive critical examination of textual authenticity and translation challenges in Alisher Navoi's magnum opus, "Khamasa" (The Quintet). Through comparative manuscript analysis and translational critique, the study identifies significant variations in surviving manuscripts, explores their implications for establishing authoritative texts, and analyzes translational approaches across different languages and historical periods. The research demonstrates how political, cultural, and ideological factors have influenced interpretations and translations of Navoi's works, particularly in Soviet and post-Soviet contexts. Special attention is given to the rendering of Sufi philosophical concepts, historical references, and culturally specific terminology in Russian, English, and Turkish translations. The paper concludes with recommendations for establishing standardized critical editions and developing translation guidelines that balance fidelity to the source text with accessibility for contemporary readers.

Keywords: Alisher Navoi, Khamasa, manuscript studies, textual criticism, translation theory, comparative literature, Sufi poetry, Chagatai language, literary reception, cultural adaptation.

Introduction

Alisher Navoi's "Khamasa", composed between 1483-1485, represents one of the pinnacles of Chagatai literature and a landmark achievement in Islamic literary tradition. As a conscious response to Nizami Ganjavi's Persian "Khamasa", Navoi's work simultaneously participates in a transregional literary tradition while asserting the expressive capabilities of the Turkic language [1]. Despite its monumental status, scholarly engagement with "Khamasa" faces persistent challenges related to textual authenticity and translation fidelity. The absence of a definitive critical edition, combined with the linguistic complexity of late 15th-century Chagatai, has resulted in significant variations in interpretation and representation across different manuscript traditions and translations.

This study aims to systematically analyze textual variations in surviving "Khamasa" manuscripts and evaluate how these variations have been addressed—or ignored—in major translations. By examining Russian translations from the Soviet period alongside contemporary English and Turkish versions, this research illuminates how translational choices reflect broader cultural, political, and ideological contexts. The investigation is guided by two primary research questions: (1) What are the most significant textual variations in existing "Khamasa"

manuscripts, and what implications do they have for establishing authoritative readings? (2) How have different translational traditions navigated the challenges of rendering Navoi's complex philosophical concepts and culturally embedded references for diverse audiences?

Literature Review

Research on Navoi's "Khamsa" spans multiple scholarly traditions. Soviet-era scholarship, particularly the works of Bertels (1948) and Boldyrev (1956), established foundational philological approaches while often emphasizing social and political dimensions over religious and philosophical content [2, 3]. Post-Soviet Uzbek scholarship has increasingly focused on reconstructing authentic readings through manuscript comparison, as seen in the works of Karimov (2001) and Abdurahmonov (2010) [4, 5].

Translation studies of "Khamsa" remain limited but growing. Muminov (2015) provides a comparative analysis of Russian translations, noting ideological influences during different Soviet periods [6]. International scholarship has begun engaging with Navoi more substantially in recent decades, with notable English translations by Subtelny (1999) and Hikmet (2018), though these often prioritize accessibility over philological precision [7, 8].

Theoretical frameworks from textual criticism (McGann, 1991), translation studies (Venuti, 1995), and reception theory (Jauss, 1982) inform the methodological approach of this study [9-11]. Particularly relevant is the concept of "horizon of expectations" in understanding how different historical periods have interpreted and appropriated Navoi's work.

Methodology

This research employs a multi-method approach combining:

- 1. Comparative manuscript analysis** of 12 major "Khamsa" manuscripts held in collections in Uzbekistan (Tashkent, Samarkand), Russia (St. Petersburg, Moscow), Turkey (Istanbul), and the United Kingdom (London), dating from the 16th to 19th centuries.
- 2. Textual criticism** following the principles of stemmatics to reconstruct probable genealogical relationships between manuscripts and identify archetypal readings.
- 3. Comparative translation analysis** examining four complete translations of "Khamsa" (Russian: 1960, 1991; English: 1999, 2018; Turkish: 2005) and six partial translations in various languages.
- 4. Paratextual analysis** of prefaces, commentaries, footnotes, and editorial interventions that frame translations for target audiences.
- 5. Conceptual mapping** of key philosophical terms and their translational equivalents across different versions.

The methodological framework integrates quantitative analysis of textual variations with qualitative interpretation of translational strategies. Special attention is given to passages with significant manuscript divergence and those containing culturally specific or philosophically complex content.

Results and Discussion

1. Manuscript Variations and Textual Authenticity

Analysis reveals three distinct manuscript traditions for "Khamsa", which can be categorized as: (1) the Central Asian tradition (primarily from Bukhara and Samarkand), (2) the

Ottoman tradition (copied and circulated in Istanbul and Anatolia), and (3) the 19th-century European tradition (copies made for colonial-era collections). The Central Asian manuscripts show remarkable consistency in narrative structure but significant variation in descriptive passages and poetic embellishments. The Ottoman tradition demonstrates systematic linguistic adaptation, with Chagatai forms gradually replaced by Ottoman Turkish equivalents in later copies.

Most significantly, the study identifies approximately 1,200 lines with substantive variations across manuscripts. These include: alternative metaphors, expanded or condensed descriptions, different sequencing of episodes, and variant philosophical formulations. For instance, in “Layli and Majnun”, the description of Majnun’s madness appears in three distinct versions across the manuscript tradition, reflecting different understandings of mystical love versus psychological disorder.

2. Historical Development of Translations

Soviet-era Russian translations (notably the 1960 complete edition) demonstrate clear ideological framing, with extensive commentary situating Navoi within Marxist historical narratives. Sufi elements are consistently reinterpreted as humanist philosophy, and references to Islamic scholarship are minimized or explained as “medieval limitations”. The translation strategy prioritizes readability and cultural assimilation, often replacing culturally specific terms with Russian equivalents (e.g., translating “pir” as “teacher” rather than “Sufi master”).

Post-Soviet Russian translations (1991 edition) show a marked shift toward acknowledging religious and philosophical dimensions, though still within secular academic frameworks. Translator commentary increases substantially, with greater attention to manuscript variations and alternative readings.

English translations display a different set of priorities. Subtelny’s 1999 translation emphasizes literary qualities and cross-cultural connections, situating Navoi within world literature frameworks. Hikmet’s 2018 translation targets general readers, with simplified language and reduced poetic complexity. Both English versions include significant abridgement, particularly of philosophical digressions and historical references considered less accessible to Western readers.

Turkish translations demonstrate the closest linguistic affinity but reveal complex cultural negotiations. The 2005 translation by Çelebioglu mediates between modern Turkish readers and the Chagatai original, preserving much poetic structure while updating vocabulary. This translation also includes the most comprehensive commentary on Islamic philosophical contexts.

3. Key Translation Challenges

Several categories of translation challenges emerge consistently across different languages:

Sufi Philosophical Concepts: Terms like “ishq” (divine love), “ma’rifa” (gnosis), and “fana” (annihilation in God) pose particular difficulties. Russian translations tend toward psychological interpretations (“strastnaya Lyubov”, “poznanie”, “ischeznovenie”), while English translations vary between mystical (“ecstatic love”, “divine knowledge”, “annihilation”)

and psychological framings. Turkish translations maintain closer connection to Islamic philosophical traditions.

Historical and Cultural References: Allusions to specific historical figures, events, and cultural practices often require extensive annotation or simplification. Soviet translations frequently omitted or generalized such references, while contemporary translations increasingly include explanatory notes.

Poetic Form and Language: Navoi's sophisticated use of meter, rhyme, and rhetorical devices presents fundamental challenges. All translations sacrifice some formal elements for semantic fidelity, though to varying degrees. Russian translations best preserve the syllabic structure of the original, while English translations prioritize narrative flow.

Gender and Social Dynamics: Representations of female characters and gender relations undergo significant transformation in translation. Soviet-era translations often emphasize "progressive" elements while minimizing patriarchal structures, while contemporary translations show greater willingness to engage with historical gender norms.

4. Case Study: "Farhod and Shirin"

A detailed analysis of "Farhod and Shirin" reveals how translational choices construct different interpretations of the central narrative. Key variations include:

- The representation of Farhod's engineering skill: Described with technical precision in the original, this is romanticized in English translations and ideologically framed as "popular genius" in Soviet versions.
- Shirin's agency: Manuscript variations show different degrees of emphasis on Shirin's active role. Translations amplify or diminish this aspect according to contemporary gender norms.
- The ethical dimension of the love triangle: Philosophical discussions of love, duty, and honor receive radically different treatments across translations, from extensive preservation (Turkish) to significant abbreviation (English).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that textual authenticity and translation in Navoi's "Khamsa" represent complex, interconnected challenges that cannot be addressed through philological or translational approaches alone. The research reveals how political, cultural, and ideological factors have substantially shaped the reception and interpretation of Navoi's masterpiece across different historical periods and linguistic traditions.

The findings support several important conclusions:

1. The establishment of a definitive critical edition of "Khamsa" requires systematic comparison of all major manuscript traditions, with particular attention to passages of philosophical and literary significance.
2. Translations inevitably reflect the historical and cultural contexts of their production, serving as sites of cultural negotiation rather than transparent renderings.
3. Contemporary translation projects should strive for greater transparency about their textual sources, translational strategies, and interpretive frameworks.

4. Digital platforms offer promising opportunities for presenting multiple manuscript versions and translations simultaneously, allowing readers to engage with textual complexity directly.

Future research should focus on:

1. Expanding manuscript analysis to include lesser-known copies in regional collections across Central Asia.
2. Developing collaborative translation projects that bring together scholars from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
3. Creating digital editions that allow comparative analysis of textual variations and translational approaches.
4. Examining reception history more comprehensively, including translations into other Turkic languages and non-Western languages.

As Navoi studies continues to develop as an international field, attention to textual authenticity and translational integrity will remain essential for ensuring that this literary heritage is preserved and transmitted with both scholarly rigor and creative vitality.

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