RESEARCH ARTICLE

Source And Textual Criteria For Editing Uzbek Classical Texts

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses criteria for selecting manuscript sources, establishing relationships among textual witnesses, and evaluating textual variants when preparing Uzbek classical literary works for publication. Drawing on scholarly studies published in Uzbekistan, it examines Porso Shamsiyev's work on the text of Alisher Navoiy's Khamsa and the treatment of manuscript evidence in the 2021 critical edition of Muhokamat ul-lug'atayn. It argues that the overall reliability of a base witness does not warrant accepting all its readings unchanged and that the grounds for editorial decisions must be recorded in the critical apparatus. It also considers the distinction between the earliest source of a literary-historical account and subsequent derivative interpretations. The article concludes that editions intended for a general readership should clearly identify their source texts, editorial interventions, and the status of prose adaptations.

Keywords: *textual scholarship, literary source studies, classical literary heritage, base witness, textual variant, critical apparatus, publication history.*

The interpretation of Uzbek classical literary heritage depends on the reliability of the text used. Although a manuscript, a critical edition, and a prose adaptation may represent the same work, they differ in their scholarly functions and status as sources. Literary analysis should therefore be preceded by an examination of the sources underlying an edition, the principles governing its preparation, and the grounds for its editorial decisions. This article addresses these issues at the intersection of textual scholarship and literary source studies.

Mahmud Hasaniy and Alimulla Habibullayev associate textual scholarship with the critical study and scholarly publication of the texts of literary, historical, and scientific works, as well as documents [Hasaniy, Habibullayev, 2012: 6]. A. Erkinov likewise emphasizes that the validity of literary analysis depends on textual reliability [Erkinov, 2019: 8]. Consequently, reading a manuscript must be accompanied by identifying the sources of its variant readings and explaining why a particular reading has been adopted in an edition.

A manuscript description should specify the repository, the date and context of copying, the contents, the state of preservation, and any later additions. This information helps establish the manuscript's relationship to other witnesses. M. Hakimov observes that the scribes who copied Navoiy's works differed in skill and style, and that each manuscript reflects the practices of book production within a particular period and milieu [Hakimov, 1991: 4]. Manuscript

description thus provides the initial basis for textual analysis.

The selection of a base witness takes account of its age, completeness, and the care with which it was copied. Its overall reliability, however, does not justify accepting every reading without scrutiny. Parts added or corrected at a later date require separate assessment. Sh. Sirojiddinov similarly notes that the study of literary sources should extend beyond manuscript description to consider textual content and interpretation [Sirojiddinov, 2019: 6].

Porso Shamsiyev's editorial practice demonstrates the practical importance of this approach. As Sh. Sirojiddinov and S. Umarova report, the manuscript copied by the scribe Abduljamil was adopted as the base witness for the Khamsa, and its couplets were collated against five other witnesses. Since the first nine folios of Hayrat ul-abror in that manuscript had been supplied subsequently by an unidentified scribe, this section was reconstructed from other witnesses [Sirojiddinov, Umarova, 2015: 69–70]. The overall value of the manuscript and the provenance of a particular section were therefore assessed separately.

The theoretical implication of this case is that selecting a base witness does not resolve every disputed passage in advance. A single base manuscript may contain textual layers from different periods. The legibility of a later addition is insufficient to establish that it has the same textual authority as the earlier text. If the source from which a supplementary passage was copied is unknown, the passage must be checked against other witnesses. Manuscript description and textual criticism thus complement one another.

The purpose of recording textual variants is to establish their place in the history of the text, rather than merely to list alternative readings. The omission of a verse line, a scribal addition, and an authorial revision should not be treated as equivalent phenomena. To determine the origin of a variant, the editor must examine which witnesses preserve it, its position in the manuscript, and the relationship of the passage to the work as a whole. Where the evidence is insufficient, a variant should not be definitively attributed to either the author or a scribe.

The study of publication history also helps clarify the grounds for editorial decisions. The preface to Yusuf Tursunov's 2021 edition of Muhokamat ul-lug'atayn states that the 1940 edition prepared by Porso Shamsiyev and Olim Usmonov relied on printed editions published in Paris, Istanbul, and Kokand [Tursunov, 2021: 3]. An earlier edition must therefore be assessed in light of the range of sources available to its editors. Comparison with a subsequent edition should establish what additional sources were used.

In the edition prepared by Yusuf Tursunov, the Fatih manuscript serves as the base witness, while the remaining three manuscripts are designated as supporting witnesses. Deficiencies in the base witness were corrected through collation with the other manuscripts, and the procedures for recording substitutions, omissions, and additions in the critical apparatus are explained [Tursunov, 2021: 22–23]. This practice demonstrates that consistent reliance on a base witness does not entail reproducing it unchanged. Every editorial departure from that witness should be justified by the results of collation.

The sigla used to identify witnesses and the conventions for recording textual

variants must be applied consistently in the critical apparatus. A reading preserved in a manuscript, a correction adopted from another witness, and an editorial proposal should be clearly distinguished. A textual note explains the grounds for the chosen reading, whereas interpretative commentary elucidates the literary meaning of the work. Conflating the two makes it difficult to establish how the edited text was constituted. The apparatus should enable readers to assess editorial decisions against the source evidence.

If the surviving witnesses do not resolve a disputed passage, its uncertainty should be acknowledged. A conjecturally reconstructed reading must not be presented as though it were attested in a manuscript. Otherwise, a subsequent researcher may mistake an editor's conjecture for the author's wording. The source of an emendation and the degree of confidence in it should therefore be explained. This requirement also applies to editions intended for a general readership: the scholarly edition underlying a simplified presentation of the text should be identified.

The earliest source must likewise be identified when evaluating literary-historical accounts. Sh. Sirojiddinov shows that later interpretations concerning Navoiy may combine early evidence with additional assumptions, producing contradictory accounts [Sirojiddinov, 2011: 23–24]. The repetition of a report in several books should therefore not be regarded as independent corroboration. Its source and the changes introduced by later authors must be examined. The provenance of the evidence remains central to the assessment of both textual variants and biographical accounts.

A prose adaptation helps readers understand a work's content, but it should not be equated with the original text. If a passage from an adaptation is quoted as the author's exact wording, the adapter's rendering becomes conflated with the original. A scholarly article should identify the edition from which a quotation is taken, the person responsible for preparing it, and the relevant page. The same precision is required when rendering a text in a modern alphabet: the source used and the editorial principles adopted must be stated.

Digitizing manuscripts can facilitate these tasks. Access to a digital image, however, does not replace scholarly description or collation. A passage in an edition must be linked to a specific manuscript folio, later corrections must be recorded, and the legibility of the image must be assessed. References become ambiguous if the page number in a digital file is not distinguished from the manuscript's foliation. Digital tools therefore become an effective means of accessing sources when their use is guided by the principles of textual scholarship.

The examples discussed demonstrate the interdependence of manuscript description, collation, and the critical apparatus in preparing classical texts for publication. Description establishes a source's status, collation identifies textual variants, and the apparatus makes editorial decisions open to scrutiny. Inadequate attention to any of these stages makes it difficult to understand the source basis of an edition. The quality of an edition therefore cannot be judged solely by its appearance or popularity.

An essential task of textual scholarship and literary source studies is to establish the source basis of existing editions and improve them in light of new

evidence. Shamsiyev's critical assessment of witnesses, the procedures for recording variants in Tursunov's edition, and Sirojiddinov's method of tracing accounts back to their earliest sources all contribute to this task. The value of a scholarly edition lies in the evidential grounds for its adopted text and conclusions, and in the possibility of independently reassessing them.

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