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The Contribution of Critical Text Publications and Translations to the Study of Central Asian History

Abstract

Following the independence of the Central Asian states from the Soviet Union in 1991 there was an increase in cooperation between local and international scholars who worked on aspects of pre-modern Central Asian history, due to the lifting of restrictions on travel and engagement that typified the Soviet period. One product of this trend is the explosion in the preparation and publication of Persian and Chagatai Turkish source-language materials for the study of Central Asian history. These publications take the form of either (and in some cases, both) critical text editions and translations. However, the collapse in state funding immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union meant that many local scholars were unable to pursue to completion the edition of source-language materials. Fortunately, private foundations and research institutes in Western Europe and East Asia were able to step into the gap and provide much-needed funding and resources for the continuation of this scholarship. There has always been a strong tradition of philological training in Central Asian doctoral programs of history and literature, so that now these collaborations are a product of both scholarly rigor and adequate institutional support.

Key words: history, historiography, translation, edition, scholarship, manuscripts, philology, codicology, paleography, international cooperation.

Matniy-tanqidiy nashrlar va tarjimalarning Markaziy Osiyo tarixini o'rganishdagi o'рни

Abstrakt

Markaziy Osiyo davlatlari 1991-yilda Sovet Ittifoqi tarkibidan chiqib mustaqillikni qo'lga kiritgandan so'ng Markaziy Osiyoning qadimgi tarixining turli yo'nalishlari ustida ish olib boruvchi mahalliy va xalqaro olimlar o'rtasida hamkorlikning kuchayishi kuzatildi. Bu Sovet davridagi

tashrif va hamkorliklarga qo'yilgan cheklovlarning olib tashlanishi bilan bog'liq edi. Ushbu tendensiya natijalaridan biri Markaziy Osiyo tarixini o'rganish uchun fors va chig'atoy tillarida materiallarni aslyat tilida tayyorlash va nashr etishning tez sur'atlar bilan o'sishidir. Ushbu nashrlar tanqidiy matnni qayta ko'rib chiqish va tarjima shaklidagi (va ba'zi hollarda ikkalasi ham) matnlarni o'z ichiga oladi. Biroq, Sovet Ittifoqi tugatilishi bilanoq, hukumat tomonidan ajratiladigan mablag'larning qisqarishi, ko'plab mahalliy olimlarning asl nusxadagi matnni nashr etishni yakunlay olmasligiga olib keldi. G'arbiy Yevropa va Sharqiy Osiyodagi xususiy fondlar va tadqiqot institutlari ushbu bo'shliqni to'ldirish va hamkorlikni davom ettirish uchun zarur mablag' va resurslarni taqdim etishga yordamlashdi. Markaziy Osiyoda har doim tarix va adabiyotshunoslik fanlari bo'yicha filologik tayyorgarlikning tagzaminlari mavjud bo'lib kelgan. Shuning uchun bu hamkorlik ilmiy va yetarlicha mahsuldor bo'lgan faoliyat uchun samaralidir.

Kalit so'zlar: tarix, tarixshunoslik, tarjima, nashr, tahsil, qo'lyozmalar, filologiya, kodikologiya, paleografiya, xalqaro hamkorlik.

Part I

At the time of writing (June 2020), the COVID-19 global pandemic has run roughshod over summer research plans. Academics and other researchers have had to shelve long-hoped for site visits, with no idea of when they will be able to reactivate these plans. The best-case scenario assumes a resumption of global travel by summer 2021 at the earliest, depending largely upon the miraculous development and release of a vaccine within an historically unprecedented quick turnaround time. Consequently, scholars of Central Asian studies find themselves confined to their office-spaces at home (all campuses and research institutes being closed) and compelled to continuing their writing projects with materials gathered previously. It is at times like this that published source-language materials and translations should come to the fore, although the concurrent closure of libraries and their services means that researchers cannot even request materials deposited therein. As I sit at my desk, I look to the left and see a row of published materials that include a catalogue of documents from Samarqand, texts from a private archive in Marghilan, a Bukharan chronicle of the eighteenth-century, an early-twentieth century history from Xinjiang, and a Chaghatay dictionary from the Khanate of Khiva.

The one thing they all have in common is that have all been published within the past ten years and represent just a small

selection of the Persian and Chaghatai source-language materials for the study of Central Asian history that have proliferated since the opening up of archives and repositories to international researchers since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of the independent states of Central Asia. But they are also representative of a research ethos that runs strong in Central Asian academia, in contrast to the emphasis on single-author monographs in the North American and Western European academy as the benchmark by which academic historians are ranked, rated, and assessed. That phenomenon, in and of itself, is also essential: the welcome bloom in the publication of single-author monographs in the various fields of Central Asian studies, in conjunction with the expansion of the numbers of faculty specializing in Central Asia at North American and European universities and colleges, is a sign of the growing strength of the region as an area of study in its own right, rather than as an annex to Russia, the Middle East, East Asia, or South Asia. Consequently, it is now possible to teach undergraduate survey courses and run graduate seminars based upon monographs and articles published in the last twenty years by scholars who trained and conducted field research in the post-Soviet years, when, local conditions permitting, it was, and still is, a lot easier to gain access to research sites than during the Soviet period.

Equally, just as it is now possible to compile an entire syllabus based on readings from recent monographs on aspects of Central Asian history, so it is now possible to construct a syllabus based entirely on source-language readings. However, this kind of exercise does not meet with the approval of the mandarins who run universities, due to the limited numbers of students likely to enroll in such a class. Yet it is the most important and useful kind of class that an advanced graduate student needs to take. By and large, North American and Western European scholars are both researchers and full-time teachers, employed by research universities or undergraduate colleges. The bulk of their time is accounted for by teaching and service activities, which generally precludes research-based activities during the academic school-year, hence the importance attached to summer. By contrast, colleagues in Western Europe who are attached to research institutes, often in the framework of national academic of science, arts, or humanities, have few (if any) teaching responsibilities and are freer to devote more of their time to long-term projects, such as editing and translating sources.

Related to that, the institutional and structural politics of higher education in North America and Europe also affect the ability of students to acquire the language skills for research purposes, particularly regarding the older forms of the modern languages of their region of study. While courses in, say, modern Dari, Farsi, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Pashto, Tajik, Turkmen, Uyghur, and Uzbek can be accommodated by the kinds of curricula and coursework requirements demanded for particularly US-style doctoral programs, finding time, space, and resources for, say, Chaghatay, or classical Persian is more difficult.

Part II: Preparing to Study the Texts

Even when opportunities for studying reading languages for Central Asian history, there is a major problem in the utility and accessibility of pedagogical materials. When I was studying Chaghatay, there were two modern grammars of Chaghatay: Eckmann and Bodrogligeti. Both were published in English and both transcribed Chaghatay into a modified Latin script. Both were admirably thorough in their coverage of the grammatical and lexical aspects of Chaghatay, but thoroughly useless for teaching Chaghatay, being closer in style and presentation to the kinds of handbooks of grammar familiar to students of Ancient Greek or Latin, where there were plenty of charts and tables and detailed expositions of verb tenses, noun cases, adjectival constructions, pronouns, rules and exceptions, and so on, but no kind of step-by-step structure that guided the student from progression from beginner to intermediate to advanced. Each also had its quirks: for example, Eckmann drew his examples from what he defined as the “classical period of Chaghatay (1400-700) and mainly relied on poetic texts and a handful of canonical prose works (Navā’ī, Bābur, and Abū’l-Ghāzī), so that illustrative examples of grammatical were often drawn from lines of poetry, which is not very helpful to the student who wishes to parse sentences of prose, since the syntax of poetry is governed by meter, not by syntax. As an example, it took me a while to realize that *bilman* was not in fact “I know,” but the complete opposite, “I don’t know,” which I might’ve figured out sooner if it hadn’t’ve been artfully concealed in one of Eckmann’s dense paragraphs of grammatical exposition.

All the while grappling with grammar, the beginner student also has to grapple with lexicon. Here also a native English speaking student of Chaghatay was at a disadvantage, since there was not, and still, isn’t, an authoritative Chaghatay–English dictionary. The

closest approximation was Robert Shaw's *A Sketch of the Turki Languageas Spoken in Eastern Turkestan* (published in two parts) from the late-nineteenth century, which was in any case quite region specific. Otherwise, myself and four fellow students, who in the Spring semester of 2009 all found ourselves taking Introduction to Chaghatay at Indiana University with Devin DeWeese, resorted to a vast array of dictionaries, lexicons, and glossaries. Naturally, none of us had mastery of the complete set of modern and classical languages required for full 360-degree engagement with Central Asian historical materials, but between us we had combined capabilities, ranging from elementary to advanced, in Arabic (Modern and Classical), Chinese (Classical and Modern), French, German, Persian (Classical and Modern), Russian, Tajik, Turkish (Modern and Ottoman), Uyghur, and Uzbek. Consequently, afternoons were spent sitting around an oak table in the reading room of the Sinor Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies (then based in GoodbodyHall), surrounded by print-outs, laptops open, flicking pages back and forth, in an increasing state of agitation, confusion, and frustration as we endeavored to locate an acceptable translation for some obscure word from Abu'l-Ghazi or the *Tadhkira-i Muḥammad Sharif*.

I don't think any of us regrets those afternoons, since it fostered a powerful spirit of camaraderie that still exists to this day, nor indeed were we unthankful for the quite rare opportunity to study with one of the acknowledged masters of Chaghatay in North America, but it was illuminative of the challenges facing students of that language and has resulted, in a meandering way, of the publication a new introductory textbook by one of my colleagues in those marathon glossing sessions, Eric Schluessel. With this textbook and, ideally, someone to teach it, a student working in an English-medium environment is now better situated to engage with Chaghatay sources for the study of Central Asian Literature.

Part III

"Ah, so you are a philologist!" this was the response of an Uzbekistani scholar visiting the Department of Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University several years ago, when I was still a doctoral student. When he asked about my research project, I responded that I was writing about 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī and his impact upon Central Asian literary culture from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Undertaking my doctoral training in what was technically an area studies program (the only one of its kind, in fact)

I uneasily straddled the fields of history and comparative literature. I was aware of the dominant theoretical schools and conceptual approaches in both those disciplines, but I was not trained in them. I didn't think of myself then, in any case, as a philologist, but I do now, not least in the light of the revival of that term and its restoration to the heart of the humanities. But while the classical definition of philology is simple ("love of learning"), the habitus attached to philology is rooted in timeless scholarly practices that form the basis of critical text editions and source-language studies. The components of that habitus include, in no particular order, codicology, paleography, stemmatology, historical linguistics, and lexicography. An authoritative critical text edition or translation should represent all these facets of philology. But as already noted, the ability to so is dependent on training and resources.

Even a cursory survey of a selection of published source-language text editions (with critical apparatus) and translations reveals repeating patterns amongst international researchers working in the field of Central Asian history: the time and resources devoted by especially Japanese and European researchers and funding organizations to such endeavors; the commitment of Japanese and European publishers; the cooperation between international and local researchers; and the range of materials, e.g., chronicles, hagiographies, documents, genealogies, letters, shrine charters &c.

Each of these patterns can be detected in landmark publications. Yuri Bregel's edition and subsequent translation of the *Firdaws al-iqbāl* by Shīr Muḥammad Mū'nis and Muḥammad Rizā Āgahī was supported by funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (USA). Both volumes were published by Brill, whose history and expertise as a publisher of Middle Eastern and Asian-focused scholarship and source-language materials often makes them the first port of call for researchers seeking a publisher for textual scholarship. Bregel's achievement is the benchmark for modern critical text-editions and translation of source-language materials, based as it was upon a comparative study of a range of manuscripts from Russian and Central Asian collections. While the *Firdaws al-iqbāl* was principally a history of the Qonggrat dynasty up to Mūn'is and Āgahī's time, Bregel's formidably erudite and extensive notes on the translation on the translation constitute a history of Central Asia in their own right. His influence can be seen in the publication more recently of two regnal chronicles by Āgahī,

representing the continuation of the philological ethos by the new generation of Uzbekistani scholars.

From the same time as Firdaws al-iqbāl, Muḥamamad Ḥakīm Khān's Muntakhab al-tavārīkh is a combination of both chronicle and autobiography, whose author was both a member of the Ming dynasty of Khoqand and also a court intimate of the Emirs of Bukhara. The work was published in a facsimile edition in Dushanbe in the early to mid-1980s, but has now been superseded by a critical text edition published in the mid-2000s.

For an earlier period of Central Asian history, Eiji Mano's edition of the Bāburnāma, consisting of a text edition based on the four extant manuscripts of the Turkic text, with supporting critical apparatus, is no less impressive. This edition can be utilized in conjunction with Wheeler Thackston's more recent translation, which itself is a considerable improvement upon the previous complete English translation by Annette Beveridge. However, the reader should realize that while Thackston's is undoubtedly the superior translation, Beveridge's extensive notes are still immeasurably invaluable, e.g., on the flora and fauna of India.

The value of all these works is accentuated by the ripple effect: the extent to which they become foundational for research articles and monographs. It should be noted all three are chronicles and therefore are likely to be the first port of call for any historian seeking to sketch out a basic timeline of events and key personalities for whichever period they are writing about. As a basic resource on nineteenth-century Central Asia, Timur Beisenbiev's Annotated Indices to the Kokand Chronicles is majestic and magisterial, an unparalleled work of reference that allows researchers to quickly identify names and places drawn from the corpus of Khoqandian historiography, with the caveat that most of works have not yet been edited and published and still therefore have to be read physically or digitally in manuscript form. Which brings us back to the issue of training and preparation ...

Conclusion

Both Coco Chanel and Yves St. Laurent are credited with versions of the dictum fashion fades, style is eternal. While concepts and theories pass in and out of fashion, philology is eternally stylish, since it is a scholarly ethos enshrined in tried and tested tools and techniques of research. Reviewers of two works mentioned early on here have paid tribute to the unselfish modesty of scholars in bringing

previously unheralded works to public light and to the support of specialist publishers, research institutes, and private foundations. The ever-growing corpus of critical text editions and translations is a testament to the ever-strengthening ties between international and regional scholars, resulting in the establishment of a global community of researchers with a shared interest in the region of Central Asia. The impact of this corpus of texts is twofold: it makes available for researchers texts known and unknown that have been historically difficult to access to issues of institutional gatekeeping or geopolitics; and it makes available for teachers and students texts which can be used in a pedagogical setting for practicing reading and translation of the kinds of materials that students (particularly at the doctoral level) can reasonably expect to encounter during their own research. But, a North American or Western European early career scholar will have to publish in their native language a monograph based on original research, written in their own voice, and almost certainly a heavily revised version of their unpublished doctoral dissertation. Whether they are on the tenure-track (TT) at a US college or university or at a research-university in Western Europe, this monograph, along with a stipulated of articles in peer-reviewed journals, and additional chapters in edited volumes, will be the basis on how the research pillar of an early-career academic's professional progress is measured. (The other pillars being teaching and service.) But as a counter-example, it is worth highlighting the contributions of several North American-trained historians to the publication of materials related to the history of Eastern Turkistan, which is doubly important at a time when current events in Xinjiang have made international collaboration impossible.

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