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## **RESEARCH AND PROBLEMS OF MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS IN THE PERSIAN LANGUAGE IN KAZAKHSTAN DIGITALIZATION, CATALOGING WORK**

**Albina Maksutova<sup>1\*</sup>, Gulmira Sabdenova<sup>2</sup>, Dosbol Baigunakov<sup>2</sup>,  
Yrysbek Omarbayev<sup>3</sup> and Aina Nurzhanova<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, 2 Satpayev Street, Astana, 010008,  
Republic of Kazakhstan*

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 71 al-Farabi Ave., Almaty, 050040,  
Republic of Kazakhstan*

<sup>3</sup> *Scientific Center SS, 23/3 Taiburyl Street, Astana, Z10E2F4, Republic of Kazakhstan*

<sup>4</sup> *Satbayev University, 22a Satpayev Street, 050013, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan*

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### **Abstract**

The medieval history of Kazakhstan is closely connected with works in the Persian language. The vast majority of manuscripts are written with Arabic graphics in the meaning of the Persian language. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Kazakhstan's achievement of independence accelerated the process of theoretical rethinking of national history. As an integral part of the state ideology, historians faced the task of substantiating the depth of the Kazakh national history. In this regard, the demand for translation and theoretical comparative-analytical work of the medieval Persian manuscripts increased significantly. Special research grants were allocated to bring the medieval Persian works' copies stored in foreign museums and Manuscript Collections to Kazakhstan and translate them. Special attention was paid to the activities of the Institute of Oriental Studies. In addition, today there are a number of problems in the course of studying medieval manuscripts in Arabic and Persian. The article pays attention to their peculiarities and solutions. The purpose of this research work is to analyse the level and challenges of modern study of medieval Persian manuscripts in Kazakhstan. In addition, the authors of the article have developed recommendations on ways to deal with problems encountered in the process of studying and introducing manuscripts into scientific circulation.

**Keywords:** Persian manuscripts, Oriental Studies, digitalization, persianist, Tarikh-i Rashidi

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### **1. Introduction**

Oriental studies is of great importance in the academic system of Kazakhstan. The activities in this area are within the competence of the Oriental Studies Institute. Specialists of the Oriental Studies Institute have done a huge

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\*E-mail: maksutova-a.84@mail.ru

amount of work over the last three decades. As a result of this, work translation of medieval Arabic and Persian manuscripts have been performed and introduced into scientific circulation.

Persian manuscripts play a vital role in the description of the medieval history of Kazakhstan. In the XXI century, there are three trends in the introduction of Persian manuscripts into scientific circulation in Kazakhstan: 1) a search for Persian manuscripts in Kazakhstan or their transfer to Kazakhstan from abroad and further translation, 2) cataloguing of individual manuscripts, 3) digitalization of manuscripts.

In the early 2000s, within the framework of the State Program ‘Cultural Heritage’, work was in full swing on the import of Persian manuscripts from abroad and publication of their translations. Moreover, the work on the cataloguing of the Persian manuscripts was organized at a qualitative level in the central libraries and Manuscript centres.

In connection with the adoption of the ‘Digital Kazakhstan’ program by the Government of Kazakhstan in 2017, high attention was paid to the digitalization of archival documents and rare manuscripts. In this regard, 12 Persian manuscripts of high relevance in the description of the medieval history of Kazakhstan have been digitalized [A.S. Bekishev, *Research of rare books and manuscripts in Kazakhstan: main directions and trends*, 2020, <https://edu.e-history.kz/ru/contents/view/1586>, retrieved 8.06.2022]. Their preservation and accessibility to the reader has increased.

From our point of view, the work on the cataloguing and digitalization of medieval Persian manuscripts and collections is currently being implemented in an effective direction. There is reason to believe that the issues of their safety and electronic accessibility have been resolved. However, one problem that is getting more and more complicated to solve when it comes to working with existing Persian manuscripts is their translation at the academic level. Most of the researchers who are able to translate Persian manuscripts at an academic level are specialists of the Soviet schools. Many of them today have limited opportunities to engage in scientific work due to the fact that they have reached retirement age. Moreover, there is a lack of young specialists that can translate Persian manuscripts. In the university system, the number of students applying for the specialty of Persian language is decreasing year by year. Currently, only two universities in Kazakhstan are offering the training of the Persian language specialists. However, the number of students studying in this specialization is 4-5 times lower than in other language learners [1]. Our research includes this current situation among the most pressing problems.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the results of work on Persian manuscripts in the academic space of Kazakhstan so far and analyse the existing problems.

## **2. Literature review**

There were many personalities who wrote scientific literature on this topic. Among them was Kazakh academician B.E. Kumekov [2]. In his publication, the scientist presented many theoretical and practical conclusions on the study and introduction of medieval manuscripts into scientific circulation. The next outstanding Orientalist scientist T.I. Sultanov in his study revealed the results of manuscripts' translations that tell about the history and literature of the states of medieval Central Asia [3]. K.A. Pishchulina concentrated on the issues related to the training of specialists of medieval manuscripts study in the education system [4]. The modern translations of medieval Arab-Persian manuscripts describing the history of the Kazakh Khanate was considered in work of M.H. Abuseitova [5]. N.M. Askarbekova and T.A. Zamzaeva conducted a study on the importance of cataloguing manuscripts in Arabic [6]. Kazakh scientist I. Zhemeney who translated manuscript 'Tarikh - i Rashidi' from Persian into Kazakh in his edition gave a comprehensive assessment of the scientific features of the manuscripts translation [I. Zhemeney, *The work 'Rashidi' clearly reflects the whole being of the Kazakh people*, 2015, <https://e-history.kz/kz/news/show/3208/>, retrieved 19.05.2022]. K.K. Abugalieva in her publication analysed the conditions of storage and use of medieval manuscripts in scientific libraries of Kazakhstan [7].

Historiography on this topic is still being formed in the historical science of Kazakhstan. The problems of cataloguing and digitizing historical manuscripts require complex research projects. We would call the targeted focus of grant funding as a way to expand the range of this topic.

## **3. Method**

Since this research work is of interdisciplinary importance, the methods of the Humanities and Social sciences have been widely applied hereto. It should be recognized that the work on the study and introduction of Persian manuscripts into scientific circulation had been also effectively done in the period of Soviet Kazakhstan. Considering this, a comparative analytical method was applied to determine the quantity and quality level of translated manuscripts done in the Soviet and independent Kazakhstan periods. We relied on the induction method to evaluate the results of work with individual Persian manuscripts of particular importance for the history of Kazakhstan and to determine its contribution to the theoretical development of historical science as a whole. The historical-genetic method was used to analyse the origins of the manuscripts and the reasons for the changes in the data contained in them. (In the historical science of post-Soviet countries, this method is used quite often. It helps to determine the causes and origin of historical events.) In the process of the manuscripts taxonomization by type and character, we relied on the classification and structural methods.

#### 4. Results

In Kazakhstan, there are special organizations engaged in the study and storage of the medieval Persian manuscripts such as academic institutes, universities, and research centres. While storage, cataloguing and digitization of the manuscripts are being implemented by libraries, museums, foundations and special centres. The activities of the above organizations are systematized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Organizations engaged in the preservation and study of manuscripts in Kazakhstan.

No.	Organizations	Direction of activity
1	National Central Library of the Republic of Kazakhstan	Preservation, cataloguing and digitization of manuscripts
2	Museum of Rare Books	Storage of manuscripts
3	National Centre for Manuscripts and Rare Books	Preservation, cataloguing and digitization of manuscripts
4	Rare Books, Manuscripts and National Literature Fund	Storage of manuscripts
5	Institute of Oriental Studies	Find, translate and publish manuscripts
6	Institute of History and Ethnology named after S.S. Ualikhanov	Analysis and publication of manuscripts

Only two out of the above-mentioned organizations reveal active services of: 1) National Central Library of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2) Institute of Oriental Studies.

The National Central Library of the Republic of Kazakhstan has a number of accomplishments in the preservation, cataloguing and digitalization of the medieval Persian manuscripts. Pursuant to the order of this organization, cataloguing and translation of the medieval Persian manuscripts into the new Persian language have been carried out. In 2019, a new Persian catalogue of 112 Persian manuscripts that were stored in the collections of the National Central Library was developed [<https://edu.e-history.kz/ru/contents/view/1586>]. This is the first great result in the history of studying and storing old manuscripts in the period of independent Kazakhstan. The initiative work of the Institute of Oriental Studies of Kazakhstan on the search for the medieval Persian manuscripts, obtaining their copies from foreign funds and their translation and publication has achieved qualitative results. Historians and translators with a deep knowledge of the medieval Persian language in Kazakhstan work at this institute. Thanks to their work on translating, analysing and publishing manuscripts, several volumes related to the history of Kazakhstan have been published so far. The relevance of digitization of medieval Arabic and Persian manuscripts is widely reflected in these publications. In addition, an excellent example of the use of technology achievements in historical science is described.

In 2006, the Institute of Oriental Studies published a 5-volume collection 'The History of Kazakhstan in the Persian literature' [8]. This collection contains translations and reviews of original Persian sources that shed the light upon the political, cultural, ethnic, socio-geographical life of the Kazakh people in the XIII-XIX centuries. The research paper describes translations of a great deal of Persian data that have not previously been included into scientific circulation, and analyses them. Materials are arranged in the chronological order. In addition, the authors of the collection conducted a source-based analysis of the origin of the Persian manuscripts and the level of authenticity of the information contained in them. According to the authors of the collection, the degree of authenticity of data in a number of Persian-language works of the XVI-XVII centuries requires to be critically assessed [8, p. 41]. This is because the political-diplomatic and war factors that developed in Central Asia of that period forced the authors of the work to write them from a biased point of view. The rulers of the palace commissioned most of the works, thus, the influence of the authorities was strong. Since the works were mainly focused on the history and biography of a particular ruling dynasty or person, many facts were distorted.

According to researchers, we classify the medieval Persian manuscripts, which indirectly describe the history of the Kazakh people and the state, into three groups in terms of source-based point: 1) works written in a neutral position, 2) works written by authors from hostile states, 3) works written by the authors of friendly states.

A neutral position can be traced in the works written before the formation of the Kazakh statehood. They have undergone a huge theoretical and source-based analysis by orientalists worldwide. The list of works in Persian that are committed to the neutral position is reflected in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Manuscripts in Persian that are committed to the neutral position in relation to the history of Kazakhstan.

No.	Manuscript	Author of the manuscript	Written period
1	Tarikh-I-Jahan-Gusha	Ata-Malik Juvaini	XIII
2	Jami' al-tawarikh	Rashid al-Din	XIII-XIV
3	Jamal al-Qarshi	al-Mulhakat Bi-S-Surah	XIII-XIV

The above-mentioned manuscripts contain interesting facts about cities, ethnic composition and territories of the medieval states that existed on the lands of contemporary Kazakhstan. However, researchers of independent Kazakhstan did not directly participate in the translation and introduction of these manuscripts into scientific circulation. The work on their translation into Russian and English was carried out by Soviet and Western scientists.

Around 70% of Persian manuscripts related to the history of Kazakhstan were born in the XVI-XVII centuries [6, p. 9]. To evaluate the authenticity of data at this stage, researchers extensively rely on the methods of historical-genetics, critical analysis, comparative analysis, and induction. This is because

the information in the manuscript might be expressed differently in the second manuscript due to known circumstance. It will require a hard work to collect data from different sources and compare them with each other, determine the origin and draw common conclusions.

Persian works related to the history of Kazakhstan in the XVI-XVII centuries are divided into two groups in terms of political and ideological orientation: 1) works commissioned by political opponents against the Kazakh state, 2) works written by authors from countries allied to the Kazakh state. The works belonging to the second direction have a very small volume compared to the first. Those who are engaged in the study of the medieval manuscripts note that they constantly keep in mind the above facts.

The works written by the authors of the political opposition countries to the Kazakh state, revealed the life of the Kazakh people indirectly. Undoubtedly, the political-military processes described there require comparisons with data from other sources. In our opinion, there is a need for works to conduct analytical conclusions in this direction.

Persian manuscripts written by the authors of the friendly states to the Kazakh state reflect the true features of the description of historical processes. They give an equal assessment of the political and economic successes and failures of the Kazakh statehood.

The vast majority of Persian manuscripts of the XVI-XVII centuries has entered scientific circulation through the activities of the Russian Empire and Soviet scientists. Among them, the role of the famous orientalist V.V. Barthold is of particular importance [9]. Nevertheless, thanks to the works of historians and orientalists of contemporary Kazakhstan, a number of Persian manuscripts are being translated into Kazakh and Russian languages and published.

The Persian-language manuscript ‘The Tarikh-i Rashidi’ written by Muhammad Haidar Dulati, who ruled the Kashmir region of India in the 1530s and 1550s, has undergone three translations or additions to the Kazakh language over the past decades. The supplemented version of the last translation of the manuscript ‘Tarikh-i Rashidi’ in Kazakh was published in 2021 [<https://e-history.kz/kz/news/show/3208/>].

Thus, the processes of translation of Persian manuscripts into Kazakh and Russian languages related to the history of Kazakhstan are divided into 3 historical periods (Table 3). However, the work on their cataloguing and digitalization continues to this day.

The bulk of the above-mentioned manuscripts are written in the Central Asian Persian dialect, and translation process requires a hard work. According to the authors, it will take more than a year to translate a 30-40 page medieval Persian work [6, p. 44]. Among the manuscripts presented in the table, the work ‘Tarikh-i Rashidi’ is a special focus for historians and persianists of Kazakhstan. Three factors can be named to distinguish this work from other manuscripts: 1) proximity to the Kazakh origins of the work author Muhammad Haidar Dulati; 2) for the first time appearance of the ethnonym ‘Kazakh’ in the manuscript and descriptions about the political and economic life of the Kazakh

Khanate in a neutral position; 3) residence of the author of the work in the state of Mogulistan, which was considered a friend to the Kazakh state.

**Table 3.** Persian manuscripts of the XVI-XVII centuries related to the history of Kazakhstan and the stages of their translation into Russian-Kazakh.

No.	Manuscript	Manuscript author and writing date	Translators of the manuscript and date
1	Tarikhi Abulkhair-Hani	Masud ibn Uthman Kuhistani 1540-1551	[8]
2	Mihman-name-yi Bukhara	Fazlallah ibn Ruzbihan Isfahani 1509	[9]
3	Tarikh-i Rashidi	Muhammad Haidar Dulati, 1544-1551	V.V. Velyaminov-Zernov, XIX century; Oriental Studies Institute, 2003; [10]
4	Bahr al-asrar	Mahmud ibn Wali 1634-1640	[8]
5	Hafiz-I Tanysh Bukhari	Sharaf-nameh-yi Shahi 1584-1591	M.A. Salakhetdinova 1969 [5]; Oriental Studies Institute, 2005
6	Chronicle	Shah Mahmud ibn Churas, 1676-1677	[11]
7	Rauzat ar-rizvan	Badr ad-din Kashmiri, 1570-1580	[12]

Due to these factors, Kazakh historians and orientalists actively began to work on the translation and publication of the manuscript 'Tarikh-i Rashidi' into Kazakh. Moreover, the catalogues of this manuscript in libraries compared to other medieval manuscripts were widely established and were the first to be included in the digital system. It should be noted that today, predominantly representatives of the old generation are engaged in the translation and introduction of the medieval Persian manuscripts into scientific circulation. Most of them make up representatives of the Soviet school. Indeed, it is clear that their number is decreasing over time.

There are a number of problems in the academic system of modern Kazakhstan concerning the research and introduction of the medieval Persian manuscripts into scientific circulation. These issues are often discussed in the media. The main problem is that year by year the number of students specializing in the studies of the Persian language in the university system is decreasing. It should be noted, that the interest level of graduate and

postgraduate students pursuing their degrees in history to the medieval topics is in recession as well. The two aforementioned issues can impose a serious impediment to the current and future development of historical science in Kazakhstan.

The core for teaching and training specialists in the Persian language in Kazakhstan is concentrated at the Department of Iranistics of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. In addition, academic training and degrees in the Persian language are offered by University of International Relations and World Languages named after Abylai Khan and Eurasian National University named after L.N. Gumilyov. In this regard, due to the reduction of the staff, the departments of the Persian language and departments of Iranistics were closed and forced to merge with other departments [<https://edu.e-history.kz/ru/contents/view/1586>].

According to statistics, in 2021, only 18 students enrolled in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the Persian language specialty at universities across Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan allocated 35 full scholarships for this specialty. Thus, 17 scholarships remained unclaimed. In 2021, 31 students defended their diplomas in the university system, while in 2022 this figure is 24 students. There can be observed a tendency to decrease every year. All socio-economic factors of this reduction are inevitable. Experts suggest that the cultural and spiritual consequences will greatly affect the development of public consciousness [<https://edu.e-history.kz/ru/contents/view/1586>].

Currently, there is no special department in the university system of Kazakhstan, which is engaged in the preparation of the Persian language. Most of the specialists who teach Persian adapt to other types of activities. It is well known that the role of language professionals in business is measured by the opening of language courses and centres. Experts claim that no client will come to paid courses that teach the Persian language [<https://edu.e-history.kz/ru/contents/view/1586>]. Currently, language courses in English, Turkish, Chinese, and Korean are gaining popularity in society.

Despite the fact that universities are actively working to attract school graduates to the Persian language specialties, the number of interested school-leavers is not increasing. Experts attribute reasons for this to the current political and economic situation in Iran, where the Persian language comes from. Thus, there is an opinion in the society that it is financially and socially unprofitable to study Persian.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan is taking a number of measures to increase the role of the Persian language in the education system. One of them is teaching the Persian language to the students who study history. At the same time, in agreement with the Ministry and universities, special free Persian language courses are being organized at universities. Students of city schools and representatives of Science have an opportunity to attend the courses.

It is known that one of the professionals mostly interested in learning Persian is a historian. A number of leading universities in Kazakhstan conduct special lectures on the Persian language for those who study to become historians. The lectures give theoretical and practical explanations about the role of the Persian language in history. In addition, analysis are conducted on the calligraphic features of the medieval Persian manuscripts. The need for the Persian language in the history of Kazakhstan arose in the Middle Ages, while in the other historical periods the need for the Persian language is at a very small level.

In 2021, 72 students doing their degrees in history at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Kazakhstan were delivered a regular Persian language course over the academic year [<https://edu.e-history.kz/ru/contents/view/1586>]. It is expected that the students will have the opportunity to be acquainted with the peculiarities of the Persian grammar and writing within the framework of the Persian language course. In addition, they have got the opportunity to get acquainted with copies of the medieval Persian manuscripts [<https://edu.e-history.kz/ru/contents/view/1586>]. Moreover, 45 students out of 72 passed the exam in the Persian language with the highest performance. Currently we are considering implementation of the practical project of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University on teaching the Persian language course to the history specialty students in the rest universities of Kazakhstan (subject: ‘Research of rare books and manuscripts in Kazakhstan’). In this regard, there had been concluded an agreement between Kazakh National University named after Al-Farabi and the South Kazakhstan State University named after M. Auezov concerning theoretical and practical exchanges in teaching the Persian language.

## **5. Discussion**

The history of the Persian manuscripts study in Kazakhstan dates back to the beginning of the XX century. In general, the historiography of the study of Persian manuscripts is divided into three historical periods: 1) the period of Tsarist Russia, 2) the Soviet period, 3) the period of independent Kazakhstan. During the period of Tsarist Russia, the first work was done on collection, translation and cataloguing of Persian manuscripts in libraries. Russian scientists paid a great attention not to the analysis of the Persian manuscripts, but to the translation. The role of an outstanding Russian scientist V.V. Bartold is unique. In his work ‘History of cultural life of Turkestan’ [13], a typology of the medieval Persian manuscripts were developed and a general description of their contents was given.

Another Russian scientist, N.I. Veselovsky (1915), in his work gave an analysis of the lives of the Persian manuscripts authors and expressed his opinion regarding the motives for writing the manuscripts [14].

The work of a Kazakh historian Kurbangali Khalid 'Tauarih Hamsa' (1910) was written on the basis of the medieval Persian manuscripts and devoted to the history of the Kazakh state [15]. The author sought to create a genealogy of the descendants of Genghis Khan based on the data from Persian manuscripts.

During the Soviet period, the process of introducing the medieval Persian manuscripts related to the history of Kazakhstan into scientific circulation had been developed in a new way. Soviet orientalists and historians achieved a number of successes in translation, source analysis and classification of the Persian manuscripts. In addition, the first steps were taken towards the system of catalogues of the Persian manuscripts in libraries.

In the works of Soviet scientists S.K. Ibragimov [16], A.P. Chuloshnikov [17], B.S.M. Abramzon [18], K.A. Pishchulina [19], B.E. Kumelev [2] there are references to the data in the medieval Persian manuscripts and its critical analyses. Scientists of the Soviet period paid a great attention to the cultural and social aspects of the data recorded in the Persian manuscripts. This is because, according to the Marxist-Leninist principle of the Soviet period, a special attention was paid to the cultural and social history of peoples in historical science. The issue of political and religious history remained beyond the scientific form. In this regard, the context of the political and religious orientation of the medieval Persian manuscripts did not receive a high degree of source analysis. We are well aware that the main content of the medieval Persian manuscripts is dedicated to political power and religious situation.

The period of a systematic scientific analysis of the medieval Persian manuscripts in terms of historiographical and source points corresponds to the period of independent Kazakhstan. During this period, medieval works have undergone a theoretical and methodological systematization and digitalization. Historians and orientalists of Kazakhstan have demonstrated a number of achievements in getting copies of new Persian manuscripts from libraries and museums worldwide and their further translation.

The works of scientists such as S.G. Klyashtorny and T.I. Sultanov [20], M.K. Kozybayev [21], B.B. Karibayev [22] present a comprehensive assessment of the nature and content of the medieval Persian manuscripts. The named scientific works reflect the authors approach to discussions on the definition of political events and the date of the formation of the Kazakh Khanate by Persian manuscripts. The problems of translated works of medieval Arab-Persian manuscripts and their cataloguing, digitalization are reflected in the work of A.K. Bolshibaeva [1].

Unlike Soviet scientists in theoretical and methodological terms, researchers of independent Kazakhstan have been active in a critical approach, paying a deep attention to the political and religious content of the medieval Persian manuscripts. In this regard, the basics of the writing motive and the author's goals of Persian manuscripts have become known by the scientific community. Independent Kazakh scientists have made proposals for organization and digitalization of catalogues of the medieval Persian manuscripts in libraries and implemented scientific projects in this direction.

## **6. Conclusions**

The study of the medieval Persian manuscripts in Kazakhstan reached a new level in the 1990-2000s. The work on translation, source science classification and analysis of manuscripts was conducted in a truly scientific direction. In parallel, a substantial work was performed to catalogue and digitalize translated manuscripts in libraries. Digitalization has been actively implemented since 2017. The volume of the projects' grant funding from the Ministry of Education and Science for cataloguing and digitalization medieval historical monuments and manuscripts has increased. In 2022 their number increased by six projects.

There have been problems in this direction as well. It should be noted that translation of the Persian manuscripts at the scientific level, research work in the future might face some challenges. This is due to a reduction in the number of specialists who have fundamental academic knowledge of the Persian language in the scientific and research community of Kazakhstan.

Due to the retirement of the vast majority of representatives of the Soviet School of Oriental Studies, the younger generation of scientists lacks the Persian language proficiency. However, the solution of this problem in the education system is under consideration within the framework of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Moreover, full scholarships are intensively allocated annually to support the specialty and training courses in the Persian language.

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