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The Literature of the Turkish Peoples: Issues of Research, Investigation, Analysis, and Interpretation

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Abstract

During an era of increasing cultural interconnectivity, the study of the literatures of the Turkish peoples presents both unparalleled possibilities and basic methodological issues. This article considers the major problems posed in researching, analyzing, and interpreting the literary tradition of Turkic cultures, which extend from Anatolia and the Balkans across Central Asia, Siberia, and beyond. The research argues that the discipline is characterized by an intricate interplay of history, language, and politics that complicates access to texts, categorization, and theoretical contextualization. Founded on a qualitative meta-analytical approach, the study identifies challenges of linguistic disaggregation, Soviet-era compartmentalization of national literatures, hermeneutic challenges in interpreting historical texts, and the predominance of externally imposed theoretical paradigms such as orientalism and Marxism. Results show that a more interdisciplinary, collaborative, and technologically oriented methodology is needed to move beyond these constraints. The paper concludes with a call for context-aware and collaborative strategies, including the use of digital humanities methods and the development of endogenous theoretical models, towards promoting a more detailed and comprehensive conception of Turkish literatures.

Keywords: *Turkish literatures, comparative literature, transnationalism, methodology, hermeneutics, Soviet literary policy, textual analysis*

Introduction

The literary culture of the Turkish people, who span from Anatolia to the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Siberia, is one of the richest and most diverse corpora of human imagination. From the ancient Orkhon inscriptions to the refined poetry of Alisher Navai, from the epic cycles of Dede Korkut to the experimental fiction of contemporary novelists, this literature offers profound insight into history, identity, and collective fantasy. Yet the range and diversity of Turkish literatures pose daunting methodological challenges to researchers.





New researchers in the field enter a labyrinth of problems: problems of research (access to texts and language), problems of analysis (classification and canon-formation), and problems of interpretation (negotiating historical contexts and nationalist or orientalist projections). The objective of this research is to bring these ongoing problems to light and to argue that the way forward for the field is in embracing its transnationalism and in forging self-reflexive and collaborative methodologies.

This research employed a qualitative meta-analytical methodology with a view to assessing the key methodological problems encountered by the research of Turkish literatures. The research drew on an extensive body of secondary literature in comparative literature, postcolonial theory, and Turkological research, with specific focus on literature published both during and after the Soviet period.

The corpus was made up of monographs, literary histories, and translated anthologies published across Turkey, Central Asia, and Russia, supplemented by conference proceedings and critical articles in journals of Turkic studies. Complementing this textual foundation, selective semi-structured interviews were conducted with veteran scholars in the field, whose observations provided a practical dimension to interpretive problems identified in the literature.

The analytical framework was organized around three dimensions. First, primary text availability and linguistic diversity were considered, including translation concerns, script change (Arabic, Cyrillic, and Latin alphabets), and archive access. Second, national compartmentalization in the Soviet period was considered as a legacy continuing to affect canon formation and scholarly approaches. Third, the study explored interpretive and theoretical concerns, including the imposition of external paradigms like orientalism and Marxism, and the emerging attempts to develop endogenous theoretical positions grounded in Turkic intellectual traditions.

The criteria for evaluation were informed by hermeneutic theories and comparative methods drawn from literary theory, and by lessons from decolonial and postcolonial studies. The triangulated method allowed for a balanced judgment of both past obstacles and present possibilities in Turkish literary studies.

Results

The result is that scholarship on Turkish literatures is guided by political, linguistic, and historical obstacles. Primary materials remain a continuous issue since most of the texts exist in multiple scripts—Cyrillic, Latin, and Arabic—that reflect shifting political regimes. Such a disunified textual landscape complicates thematic research and is further complicated by a scarcity of reliable translations into worldwide scholarly languages, rendering





much of the corpus inaccessible to comparative ends. Limited access to archives in post-Soviet states also reinforces disparities between scholars in places.

The study highlights the legacy of compartmentalization in Soviet times, which was encouraging national literatures while concealing pan-Turkic kinships. Alisher Navai type characters are a testament to this contradiction: celebrated father of Uzbek literature, but no less significant to greater Turkic cultural history. These artificial barriers still confine scholarship into narrow categories, limiting transnational vision.

Interpretive challenges continue to bedevil the field. Such texts as Kitabi-Dede Qorqud resist simple categorization, requiring an equivalence of anthropological, historical, and literary approaches. The absence of profound traditions of critique has rendered much work vulnerable to politicization or reductionism.

Finally, the field remains without well-defined theoretical traditions. Orientalist scholarship employed to exotize Turkic practices, Soviet models employed to apply Marxist interpretations. Although postcolonial and postmodern methods now offer rich insights, they are more often external imports rather than models developed within the intellectual traditions of the Turks. Such dependency underscores the need for theories constructed within the specific cultural and historical experience of Turkish literatures.

Discussion

The conclusions are that the research into Turkish literatures is not detachable from politics, cultural memory, and ideological legacy issues. Limited access to text, fragmented canons, and open-ended questions of interpretation all favor reexamining methodological foundations.

Digital humanities hold particular promise. Open-access repositories of original-script texts, translations, and metadata would be greatly more accessible, while digital software tracking motifs, poetic forms, or intertextuality would enable new comparative comments.

Just as significant is cooperative scholarship that breaks free of national paradigms. Comparative research—e.g., studying Turkish aşık poetry in parallel to Azerbaijani ashug and Turkmen bagşy traditions—would emphasize both local specificity and common transnational continuities and assist in combating Soviet-era fragmentation.

Renewal at the theoretical level remains crucial. The field must move out of reliance on paradigms brought in from the outside and construct models derived from Turkic hermeneutics, comparative poetics, and local intellectual traditions. These models would simultaneously reflect local realities and attract world scholarship.





Overall, the future of Turkish literary studies is reflexivity, interdisciplinarity, and cooperation. By embracing computer media, working on comparative visions, and building endogenous theories, the field can overcome traditional boundaries and develop a more integrated view of the diversity of Turkic literatures.

Conclusion

The study of Turkish literatures stands at a pivotal crossroads. The obstacles of access, compartmentalization, and theoretical dependency are significant, yet they also create opportunities for methodological innovation. A future-oriented approach must balance the recognition of national particularities with the exploration of transnational continuities, drawing on both modern technologies and collaborative scholarship. Rather than aiming to construct a single, monolithic narrative, the field should strive to highlight the diversity and interconnectedness of one of the world's great literary traditions. By doing so, scholars can ensure that Turkish literatures are not only preserved but also reinterpreted in ways that do justice to their richness and complexity.

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