

Turkic Manuscripts in Berlin Libraries

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Abstract: This article explores Eastern manuscripts, particularly the Turfan fragments and Old Uzbek sources, that were brought to Germany as a result of diplomatic relations between Prussia and the Ottoman Empire in the 18th–19th centuries. It analyzes the origins, thematic composition, and the significance of these written relics preserved in Berlin libraries in the context of Central Asian cultural heritage. The study highlights the historical processes that introduced the works of scholars such as Babur and Alisher Navoi to European academia.

Keywords: Turfan fragments, Old Uzbek language, Prussian-Ottoman diplomacy, Berlin library, Turkic manuscripts, Babur, Alisher Navoi, Eastern sources, history of literary language.

Introduction: At the end of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century, representatives of the Kingdom of Prussia (Königreich Preußen) established active diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire (Büyük Porte). Within the framework of these relations, Eastern manuscripts, which are now preserved in the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin), were transferred to the Prussian side and considered one of the essential conditions of diplomatic agreements. Today, the Berlin State Library and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences house more than forty thousand valuable "Turfan fragments" and collections known as "Chagatai manuscripts," which are considered rare findings for the peoples of Central Asia.

The Chagatai language (Chagatai Turkic) is one of the two major literary languages of the Muslim Turkic world that formed during the medieval period, influenced by the literary traditions of the Kok Turk, ancient Uyghur, and Karakhanid periods, as well as the written heritage of the Golden Horde. "Chagatai Ulus" refers to the Turkic state in Central and Middle Asia, while "Chagatai Turkic" denotes the Turkic language that developed over centuries into a written literary language.

The term "Chagatai Turkic" was used during the 13th–16th centuries, but it would be inaccurate to consider it merely another name for the Old Uzbek literary language. Unfortunately, some Russian and Western

scholars have used "Chagatai" interchangeably with Old Uzbek. The Old Uzbek language developed as a literary language during the Timurid era in Central Asia. Great scholars such as Lutfiy, Alisher Navoi, and Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur elevated Old Uzbek to new heights through their works, defining its path of development.

Babur demonstrated the artistic power of the Turkic language in his poetry. His ghazals and rubaiyat vividly reflect the linguistic richness, phonetic simplicity, morphological convenience, and melodic lexical depth of the Turkic language. By incorporating numerous Persian words and expressions, he expanded the stylistic capabilities of Chagatai. Babur viewed the Turkic language not merely as a literary tool specific to a single people or region, but as a broad medium representing the shared cultural heritage of the Turkic world. Notably, during his years in India, he remained loyal to the Turkic language and continued to write in it, as exemplified by his work Baburnama. This demonstrates his deep attachment to his mother tongue and his desire to express his inner world through it.

METHODS

Although the Turkic-language manuscripts preserved in the Berlin State Library originate from the same geographic region, they belong to different historical periods. Currently, there are more than 190 Turkic-

language manuscripts in the Berlin library. In terms of volume, they are smaller in number compared to the Arabic-language manuscripts in the same library. In addition, such manuscripts are also preserved in the collections of major libraries around the world. Besides Germany, similar sources can be found in universities and museums in Saint Petersburg, London, Lund, Paris, Vienna, Istanbul, and other countries.

The study of Turkic manuscript sources stored in different parts of the world has led to the formation of several specific research directions. Research on Turkic texts reveals that in Europe, these studies are relatively limited due to the scarcity of available data. It is therefore important to discuss in detail how rare samples of classical Turkic literature reached the Oriental manuscript collections of German libraries.

German indologist, tibetologist, and ethnologist Albert Grünwedel (1856–1935), archaeologist Albert von Le Coq (1860–1930), and sailor, museum technician, and conservator Theodor Bartus (1858–1941) jointly undertook scientific expeditions to the Chinese city of Xinjiang, known as the "Turfan Expeditions." As a result of four expeditions, they discovered and studied thousands of materials, including fragments excavated from the soil and pieces related to Buddhist culture.

The collection of rare books by ambassadors, scholars, booksellers, and antiquarians began as early as 1817. In particular, Heinrich Friedrich von Diez, Julius Heinrich Petermann, Aloys Sprenger, and Martin Hartmann played leading roles in this endeavor. According to A. Mirsultan, head of the Oriental Manuscripts Department at the Berlin State Library, the "Hartmann Collection," acquired in 1905, consisted of 131 manuscripts. Hartmann compiled his collection during his time in Kashgar and Yarkand and also brought manuscripts from other regions, including Tashkent and Baku. The collection was fully formed by 1904 and is now preserved as part of the library's rare archives.

Johannes Avetaranian and Georg Huth also worked specifically on collecting Turkic-language sources. In this way, a large-scale library collection was formed at the beginning of the 19th century.

RESULTS

There are rare examples of Uzbek classical literature that, although written after the introduction of Islam, are in the Turkic language and use the old Uyghur script. Copies of such works are preserved in some of the world's most renowned libraries — for instance, *Bahtiyarname* (Oxford), *Mi'rojname* (Paris), and *Tazkirat al-Awliya* (Paris and Istanbul). Interestingly, these works reflect a synthesis of ancient script and new religious beliefs. It should be noted that the manuscripts preserved in library collections are not

always original versions but rather copies made by manuscript collectors or scribes. Therefore, it cannot be definitively stated that all of these works were created in Central Asia; they were not necessarily produced in local contexts. Based on the available data, it is more accurate to say that many sources emerged in cities like Constantinople and Herat.

Regarding the physical condition and form of the manuscripts, some are made from cloth, goatskin, or cardboard. Others feature leather bindings, simple seals, Persian-style decorative stamps, and are written on ordinary cloth or paper. In terms of content, the manuscripts in the collection can be categorized into the following genres: classical literature, hagiographic texts (describing the lives and virtues of saints and sheikhs), religious works, didactic writings, medical texts, and dictionaries.

The manuscripts preserved in the Berlin State Library include the following, with corresponding titles and catalog numbers (Note: Ms. = manuscript, or. = oriental (language), oct. = octavo, referring to size and format):

1. Classical literature samples — Works in Chagatai Turkic by poets such as Ferdowsi, Alisher Navoi, Babur, and Lutfiy are preserved in the collection.
2. Hagiographic texts — These include biographies and stories of saints, Sufi scholars, and Sufi schools, such as *Qisas al-Anbiya* (Stories of the Prophets) and *Tazkirat al-Awliya* (Biographies of Saints).
3. Religious sources — This group includes Chagatai translations of the Qur'an, tafsirs (commentaries), hadiths, and fiqh texts (Islamic jurisprudence).
4. Didactic texts — This category includes treatises in the *risala* genre on moral-spiritual education, political advice, etiquette, family matters, and social conduct.
5. Medical works — Treatises on Eastern medicine, pharmacology, nature, and anatomy written in Chagatai Turkic fall into this category.
6. Dictionaries and grammars — These works reflect the lexicon, grammatical structure, and comparative features of Chagatai Turkic with other languages.

Some of the manuscripts are anthologies or excerpts from historical works that include references to Babur. Others contain poems by Babur's contemporaries or modern commentaries. These sources are important not only for the study of Chagatai literature and language but also for understanding how the history of the Mughal Empire was received in Europe. German scholars such as Annemarie Schimmel and Josef

Horovitz, through their analysis of these texts, played a crucial role in introducing Babur's literary and cultural significance to Western academic circles.

DISCUSSION

These written sources are not only of historical or literary value but also serve as unique tools for uncovering the linguistic, cultural, and religious history of Turkic peoples. In particular, the works related to Babur and his era — including ghazals, rubaiyat, and historical memoirs — demonstrate the artistic capabilities of the Turkic language. Babur's commitment to writing in the Turkic language reflects his deep loyalty to his mother tongue and his desire to express a shared pan-Turkic identity. Furthermore, the misinterpretation of Chagatai as merely an "Old Uzbek language" continues to spark scholarly debate among Western researchers. In this context, a clear classification and an approach based on historical linguistics are necessary to accurately understand the evolution and identity of the language.

CONCLUSION

The Turfan fragments and Turkic manuscripts preserved in Berlin libraries hold exceptional significance for studying the development of Turkic world culture and language. These sources, brought to Europe within the framework of diplomatic relations between the Prussian and Ottoman Empires, have retained their scholarly and cultural value to this day. Their preservation, digitization, and study not only represent historical justice but also serve as a scientific legacy for future generations.

Through these manuscripts, we can delve deeply into the works of authors like Alisher Navoi and Babur, while also gaining a broader understanding of ancient Turkic writing culture, religious thought, philosophical views, and social systems. This scholarly research contributes to the analysis of Turkic written heritage and provides a deeper understanding of the origins, content, and significance of Eastern manuscripts preserved specifically in Berlin — one of Europe's major library centers.

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