

## OTTOMAN TEXTUAL STUDIES: CHALLENGING THE PAST, VISUALIZING THE FUTURE

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① When Selim asked me to give a talk for this conference, I had a thought...

“Walter...I said to myself...there is something you have wanted to talk about with your Turkish friends and colleagues since about 1969 and you have always shied away from openly speaking your mind, fearing—or more accurately, knowing—that many, most, or all of them would be upset and angry. In the meanwhile, you have gotten older and older and the situation that bothered you back then has not much improved. So...if not now, if not to this audience of scholars, who represent most open-minded of Ottomanist, then you are going to your grave never having said what you think needs saying.”

So...I am going to speak openly about some of my thoughts on the state of the art

② in Ottoman textual studies. I will, very bluntly, raise some issues that I hope will begin a discussion of what I see as fundamental problems with what we are doing in this field and how we are doing it. I will begin by reviewing a few points of well-known historical background that seem especially significant to me and then I will go on to discuss, with a few examples, how this history has influenced the theory and practice of dealing with Turkey’s historical texts. I will then end with some suggestions about how the application of rapidly developing digital

- Moreover, during the war years from the mid-thirties to the mid-forties, large numbers of precious manuscripts were dispersed to Anatolian libraries to preserve them from possible air attacks on major population centers.
- In short, too many manuscripts, too inaccessible, too little time...

In the field of Ottoman divan poetry, which I will take as my primary example, a small cadre of specialist scholars with impressive expertise undertook the task of converting the multiplicity of manuscripts to single so-called “critical” editions, converting the Arabic script to a Latin transcription alphabet, training the next generation of specialists, and often producing versions in a modern Turkish transcription accompanied by brief prose “translations” of each couplet or verse. Because access to manuscripts not in the major Istanbul libraries (University, Bayezit, Suleymaniye, National Library) was difficult, these conversions were often based on recourse to a limited number of manuscripts, which were often chosen with the primary goal of including as many poems as possible.

Today’s continued and even growing interest in Ottoman culture in Turkey owes a huge debt to these pioneering scholars and their students. However, the methodology they developed in an atmosphere of dire need and urgency was fundamentally flawed in several significant respects.

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- Foremost among these is the fact that the method depended far less on empirical data than on the unchallenged opinions of respected experts who served as editors and the trainers of future editors.

transliterate the Ottoman Arabic spelling of Turkish words faithfully—which means, at least, that there is little data for compiling a historical overview of the Ottoman script spelling of Turkish. Additionally, the fixing of vowels in the text, required by Latin script renderings, and the reading of ambiguous letters enshrined editorial decisions as the only options.

The second conversion was from the manuscript corpus to the book. To my mind, this—the “critical edition”—is, in fact, the more problematic conversion type because some significant theoretical textual studies issues and their consequences cannot be adequately taken into account in the case of Ottoman texts. The most obvious of these issues is how to account for the fundamental differences between a corpus of manuscripts and a book; the primary difference being the essential irreducibility of the former to the latter. Simply put, the conversion process rests on the metaphysical assumption that the manuscript tradition represents a collection of imperfect physical manifestations of an ideal (and perfect) single text that that existed [only] in the mind of the author or in a lost (and therefore equally non-existent) perfect “Ur-text or “source text”.

This assumption—and everything that follows from it—requires that we ignore the fact that a manuscript in a manuscript tradition is not a book as we know the book. It is a different kind of text, a text that will only replicate in more or less changed, edited, revised, expanded, truncated or otherwise altered versions. It is inseparable from its history, from the story of its evolution. In cases where multiple MS copies exist, each manuscript has potential parents, descendents, children, cousins, and more distant relatives. It is ultimately the

So let us look at the relation between the "critical edition methodological tradition" and the manuscripts in which the "text" of Baki's divan is manifested.

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The editor begins with a two and a half page "preface/önsöz" in which he discusses the print publication and manuscript tradition of Baki's divan. The discussion of the manuscripts takes up one long (1/2 page) paragraph. (The brevity of this is, in itself, telling.) He introduces the manuscripts by pointing out that there are "more than 100 manuscripts of Baki's Divan" existing worldwide. He does not say exactly how many there are and does not ever give a list of them. In fact, there is no evidence that he ever attempted to identify or count them all, but I assume that he did. He does point out that we "can imagine how difficult it is to produce a critical edition of a text for which so many manuscript versions exist".

This perceived difficulty is overcome by collecting copies of 10 Istanbul manuscripts (6 from the Istanbul University Library, three from the Suleymaniye, and one from the Köprülü library. To these he adds two from the Firat University Library. The only indication he gives about why he chose these particular manuscripts out of the hundred plus comes when he says they were chosen because they had the oldest dates of composition (although, only 6 of them have composition dates at all) and were the "richest" in regard to the number of poems they contained. There is no indication in this introduction that the manuscripts were compared in detail, there was no stemma created indicating the relation of these manuscripts to one another or to others in the corpus of manuscripts, there is also no mention of the composition dates of any of the

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1. Is there a core of gazels that occurs with extremely few or no exceptions in all manuscripts? That is to say, is there a core of gazels for which we have sound independent data confirming their authenticity as Baki's work?
2. If there are 548 gazels in the "critical edition" that means that there are 178 more gazels than appear in the 1582 MS, 35 more than in the largest MS compared by the editor, and 104 more than the average number of gazels in the compared MSS (excluding the largest and smallest). So, what methodology using what data was employed to determine which gazels are authentically Baki's? Are there levels of reliability in this determination? Where did the poems in the "critical edition" come from? Do we have any evidence about when <sup>each</sup> the non-core poems entered the manuscript tradition? To what degree can we be certain that any individual poem from this edition is really by Baki?
3. The editor says that he, "strove to select only those poems that belong to Baki from among the poems appearing in only one text and weeded out those poems not conforming to Baki's style...". If so, what method did he employ and what data determined his selection of conforming and non-conforming poems? Does it make sense to include a poem in an "edition" on the basis of an intuition, when it appears in only 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the manuscripts surveyed and possibly in only a fraction of 1% of the total number of existing manuscripts?

The answer we as a field (myself included) have given to all of these questions by our silence and our actions as scholars is the same: We don't care about answers to any of these questions because we are willing to study and talk about

Answering these questions might well have been impossible (practically) in 1990-94. They are not now and have not been for some time.

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interest in Latifi because his *tezkire* was the topic of my doctoral dissertation and I spent a considerable amount of time in my scholarly infancy working on its manuscript tradition. Prof. Canım's edition, unlike Prof. Küçük's, devotes many pages to the manuscripts including discussions of manuscript groupings and tables comparing the contents of the manuscripts he has selected as representative of the [ideal] text. He even cites my (1970) dissertation in a few places...

The problem with his citation of my dissertation is that it appears absolutely impossible that he ever read it or even talked about it with someone who had read it. If he had the slightest idea of what I said in the dissertation, he could not possibly have produced the edition he did without some response to the claims I made and the evidence I presented in my discussion of the manuscript tradition. It would have been obligatory, at least, for him to have argued that I am an idiot and what I said should not be taken seriously.

The short story is this: in the dissertation (and in an article entitled "Metin Nerede? Hangi Metin? Kimin Metni?," *Varlık*, no. 1062, March, 1996), I argue, with considerable evidence, that two manuscripts in the same format by the same copyist (Nur-u Osmaniye 3725 and Süleymaniye Halet Efendi 342 dated 1574 and 1575 respectively) are obviously a draft (Nur-u Osmaniye) and final copy (Halet Efendi) of a presentation text representing Latifi's major re-writing of the *tezkire*, including new entries, expanded entries, a substantially expanded *hatime*, and an overall, substantial, and unmistakable revision of the style of writing. My conclusion was (and still is) that there are two *Tezkire*'s of Latifi (or, if you wish,

⑫ — The missing second *tezkire* —  
 OCAHA see below p. 15

- It is rewritten with added anecdotal material and a substantially more high-flown prose style in a beautiful “presentation volume” created in draft and final versions in 1574 and 1575, at a time immediately following the accession of the bibliophile Sultan Murad III.

- [The history of print publication (Cevdet edition), early texts and translations.]

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— There is no edition of the 1543 text of *Rek tezkire*  
 — Latifi is the author of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tezkire.

Let me clarify now something I mentioned earlier: the problems with Dr.

Canım's edition of Latifi (and Dr. Küçük's edition of Baki) are not judgments on the competence of the editors—I am certain that both of them are many times more

15 competent readers of Ottoman texts than I. **My point here is that these problems are generated directly from major (and, in my opinion, fatal) flaws in the accepted methodology unquestioningly applied to the creation of critical editions in Ottoman studies.** It is not the people but the process that is at fault.

For example, when Dr. Canım says that he is trying to recreate the “original” text as it came from the pen of the author and at the same time uses as his “base text” a substantially changed version that only appears nearly 30 years after the author's first version, he is attempting to fulfill incompatible methodological requirements:

- first, that one must believe in the existence of a single a-historical ideal text (based on the oldest MSS) and
- second, that, at the same time, one must include as much information as possible (based on later texts).

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Cease thinking of the number of MSS versions of a text as a problem. Start thinking of it as a marvelous resource for developing a sound methodology for textual history that includes goals such as:

- constructing a comparative historical catalogue of writing styles and writing samples of known calligraphers and exploring the use of digital handwriting analysis to help us understand the relations among manuscripts and manuscript history. [cf. article by Bilkent team]
- creating databases and technologies to help us in developing taxonomies [cladistic analyses] of Ottoman manuscripts
- collecting digital images of all existing MSS of the work of major poets and authors and employ digital methods and tools for comparing and collating manuscripts
- working collaboratively on large projects focused on major texts (*the creation of transcribed text editions is too important to be based on prophetic intuitions or to be used as a rite of passage for individual graduate students or beginning professors*).
- making Turkey a leader in manuscript and textual studies

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• Rethink the theory behind text edition and transcription and alter our goals to reflect manuscript history and the relative reliability of material included. For example:

- changing the format or organization of an edited and transcribed text away from an idealized replica of a manuscript: for example, present the core poems as one section, the added poems by date and



[To sum up my thesis: the exigencies of a particular moment in history have frozen into a methodology that can produce nothing but insupportable and fatally flawed results in many cases.]

Nelly Hanna In Praise of Books

Atilla Şentürk

Karantanlar