

Y.E. Bertels: Researcher of Alisher Navoi's Life and Works

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Abstract: This article examines the significant contribution of the Orientalist scholar Yevgeny Eduardovich Bertels to the analysis and study of the life and works of Alisher Navoi, the great thinker of our classical literature and bilingual poet, in the context of textual studies, source studies, and comparative aspects within a holistic historical and literary process. At the same time, it is objectively shown that adherence to the principle of class consciousness significantly influenced the scholar's principles for selecting and theoretically analyzing literary works, as well as evaluating literary figures.

Keywords: literary heritage, worldview, tradition, individuality, poetic mastery, historical-literary process, concept, methodology, historicity, tendentiousness.

Introduction

The name of the renowned orientalist (Iranologist and Turkologist) scholar Yevgeny Eduardovich Bertels (1890-1957) and his substantial research and translations were already well-known and respected not only in the former Soviet Union, but also in Iran and the Arab world, particularly in Damascus. He left an exceptionally rich scientific legacy in the field of studying the history, culture, and literature of Turkic peoples. Notably, he authored numerous articles, commentaries, and monographs about the era, life, and works of great poets and thinkers who left a significant mark on the development of classical national literatures in Turkic languages: Alisher Navoi, Muhammad Fuzuliy, and Maxtunquli Firogiy (Firogi). He conducted comparative studies of the economic-political and cultural-educational life of the periods in which they lived and worked, as well as their creative heritage. By identifying common and unique aspects, he strived to uncover the secrets of their poetic mastery.

With the exception of works such as "Biographical and literary information about Mir Alisher Navoi, including excerpts from his works" [15. 287-351] by French researcher M.Belin, and "Reflections on the Statesman and Poet Mir Nizomiddin Alisher" [16] by Russian scholar M. Nikitsky, most studies in Western European and Russian Oriental scholarship had formed a biased attitude towards the personality and works of Alisher Navoi, who played a significant role in the socio-political, cultural, and literary life of his time and elevated our national literature to great heights. Due to insufficient knowledge of the unique characteristics of the great Eastern literature and inadequate familiarity with classical texts in the Turkic language, attempts were made to evaluate Navoi as merely an imitator of Persian poetry.

Methodology

This article analyzes the contribution of the orientalist Y.E.Bertels to the field of Navoi studies. In addressing the article's topic, a comprehensive analysis was employed, utilizing sociological,

historical-cultural, historical-comparative, and comparative-typological approaches of contextual analysis, as well as comparative, biographical, and psychological methods.

Research Result

In his work “Navoi and Attor” [8. 377-421], Ye.E. Bertels convincingly demonstrated through a comparison of the plot events in the epics “Mantiq ut-Tayr” and “Lison ut-Tayr” that Navoi, as a possessor of unparalleled life experience, profound worldview, unique talent, immense potential, and poetic mastery, approached the existing tradition creatively and composed a distinctive work in response to Fariduddin Attor. While studying the structural composition, ideological and artistic features, and symbolic imagery of “Lison ut-Tayr”, Bertels endeavored to comprehend the philosophical and Sufi essence of the work and to come as close as possible to understanding Navoi’s poetic nature. Consequently, he wrote: “There are great artists who compel us to bow before them”. Undoubtedly, this was an expression of profound respect for Navoi’s personality and extraordinary talent.

In his article “Persian Literature in Central Asia” [6. 199-228], Y.E. Bertels compiled valuable factual information about Eastern classics: Abu Abdullo Rudakiy, Abu Shukur Balxiy, Shaxid Balxiy, Abu Mansur Daqiqiy, Abulqosim Firdavsiy, Abulqosim Unsuriy, Farruxiy, Minuchehriy, Hoqoniy, Nizomiy Ganjaviy, Xusrav Dehlaviy, Farididdin Attor, Hakim Sanoiy, Jaloliddin Rumi, Hofiz Sheroziy, Kamol Xo’jandiy, Alisher Navoiy, Abdurahmon Jomiy, Muhammad Fuzuliy, Abdurahmon Mushfiqiy. He conducted a comparative analysis of works belonging to lyrical genres such as *ghazal*, *qasida*, *to’rtlik*, *masnavi*, and *qit’a*. Although all these works were written in Persian, there were significant differences and signs of creative originality among them. Therefore, the scholar concluded that they cannot be interpreted either within the framework of traditionalism or chronologically as the same literary phenomenon that arose as a result of literary influence.

He regarded the close economic, cultural, and literary connections among Eastern peoples as a historically necessary phenomenon. However, he rejected the concept of attributing dominance to literary influence and, on this basis, defining the uniqueness of national literatures [6. 15]. This demonstrates that E.E. Bertels was scientifically, theoretically, and methodologically astute, and that he approached the issue correctly based on the principle of historicism as early as the 1950s and 1960s.

Davlatshoh Samarqandiy, one of the prominent literary scholars of the 15th century, noted in his work “Tazkirat ush-shuaro” that Alisher Navoi’s ghazals surpassed those of the great medieval Persian-speaking poets Mavlono Anvari and Zohir Faryobiy in poetic genius. E.E. Bertels, while mentioning Mirzo Bobur and others among the aforementioned bilingual poets, observes that their works had a powerful influence even in India. The scholar points out that comparing various aspects of the creative heritage of Turkic-speaking poets, such as certain plot lines, systems of poetic imagery, mastery in using metaphors, diverse styles, and metrical patterns, as well as juxtaposing them with folklore samples of Eastern peoples, can yield significant results. Indeed, his views, which were not yet fully explored at the time and could become subjects of promising research, were an attempt to outline, to some extent, the content of subsequent studies.

E.E. Bertels’ articles such as “Layli and Majnun”, “Navoi and Eastern Literature”, “The Oldest Translations of Navoi into Western European Languages”, “On the Question of Navoi’s Worldview”, “The Oldest Manuscript of Alisher Navoi’s ‘Xamsa’”, Prof. A.Sa’diy’s “The Works of Navoi as the Highest Level of Development of Uzbek Classical Literature” (Review of the Dissertation), “The Great Uzbek Poet” (a collection of articles published under the editorship of Oybek), as well as monographic studies such as “Nizomi”, “Navoi”, “Jomiy”, and “The Epic of Iskandar” (“Roman ob Aleksandre”) consistently continued the topic of Persian-Tajik and Turkic-language literatures.

As we have seen, among these reviews and articles, research on Alisher Navoi's period, worldview, manuscripts of his works, translations, and their content and essence occupies a considerable place. Undoubtedly, they served as a certain foundation for the creation of the monograph "Navoi" [7. 21].

As we examine the contents of the monograph, we observe that E.E. Bertels has provided it with a detailed preface. Following this, the scholar begins his analysis of socio-historical processes with the struggle for the throne that erupted in Samarkand among the Timurid princes at the end of 1404 - after Amir Timur the Conqueror set out on his campaign to China and subsequently passed away in Otrar.

E.E. Bertels, in discussing Herat, puts forward the theory that the city's name is recorded in the historical and literary monument "Avesta", that it was known as Ariye in ancient Greek, and that possibly the foundation of this city was the fortress of Alexandria, constructed by Alexander the Great.

In our view, during the second millennium BCE, local people (most likely Aryans) inhabited the area around the Harirud River. It is not without reason that the ancient Greeks referred to it as Ariye. Indeed, even ancient Indian sources note that Aryavarta was the sacred land of the Aryans who dwelled in Central Asia and neighboring regions.

E.E. Bertels emphasizes that a high culture had emerged in Herat even before the time of Sultan Husayn and Navoi. However, he adheres to the utopian idea of Soviet ideologues that "two different cultures coexist within each national culture". As a result, he endorses the class-based view that the broad masses of people did not benefit from the advanced culture that flourished in Herat during that period. These masses were excessively oppressed by the burden of various taxes, the tyranny of unscrupulous officials who abused their authority, and the arduous labor associated with cleaning irrigation networks [7. 21].

Unfortunately, this concept also influences the scholar's approach to selecting and theoretically analyzing literary works. E.E. Bertels, in an attempt to portray a certain poet or thinker as "progressive" in relation to their time, tends to distance them as much as possible from the ruling circles and bring them spiritually closer to the common people. Consequently, he seeks to find certain contradictions in the relationship between the ruler Sultan Husayn and the thinker Navoi.

The Orientalist scholar E.E. Bertels enumerates nine poets (Nizami Ganjavi, Abdurrahman Jumi, Ashraf, Mawlana Ali, Fasih Rumi, Khoja Imadaddin Lahuri, Amir Shaykhim Suhayli, Abdullah Xatifi, Kotib Turshizi) who ventured to write substantial works, particularly "Xamsa", following Abulqasim Firdavsi's "Shohnoma". He compares their works where appropriate. Bertels rightly emphasizes that following and successfully continuing the literary tradition demands great knowledge, talent, and potential from the creator. However, he considers that being among the "Xamsa" authors not only brings honor to the writer but also improves their economic standing [7. 34].

Discussing the Turkic poetry created during the Timurid period, Bertels deems it inappropriate to label the literary language of this era as the "Chagatai language". He notes that there exists a less common term, "Central Asian Turkic Literary Language of the Islamic Period". In this context, he refers to the views of Alexander Samaylovich [17. 147-162]. Bertels opines that the term "ancient Uzbek language" is lexically and morphologically justified. The scholar analyzes, to the extent possible, the works of renowned representatives of this literature such as Sakkoki, Lutfiy, Atoyi, and Husayni. He strives to determine their place in the literary-historical process. Bertels evaluates the Persian and Arabic layers in Turkic poetry as a departure from oral folk art and the living language.

Subsequently, E.E. Bertels provides an overview of the history of Alisher Navoi's literary studies. He comments on numerous works conducted in Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran,

Russia, and European countries, from “Badoe’ ul-lug’at”, which emerged in the final years of Navoi's life, up to 1946. After duly acknowledging each researcher's contributions and adhering fully to academic ethics, he begins his reflections on Alisher Navoi, starting with his birth and childhood. For some reason, the scholar designates the great poet's birth date as February 10th, rather than the 9th to which we are accustomed. He explains Navoi's development as a poet by linking it to the literary and artistic family environment, palace education, and the influence of mentors. Specifically, he recounts Navoi's devotion to Qosim Anvar's poems, his meeting with the historian Sharafiddin Ali Yazdi in Taft, his correspondence with Amir Shohiy, his deep affection for Attar, and finally, his recognition as a talented poet even before turning fifteen. It is evident that E.E.Bertels reconstructed this biography based on Navoi's works and the opinions of his contemporaries.

In the monograph, E.E.Bertels extensively discusses how Navoi, despite not actively seeking positions, saw his status in public life steadily rise, and how his responsibilities, amidst various intrigues, distracted him from the creative work he desired. He describes the dark factions that incited Majididdin Muhammad to undermine the friendship between Navoi and Sulton Husayn Bayqara, and the palace conflicts that surfaced both covertly and overtly. He also takes note of Navoi's creative activities and the beneficial projects that arose under his patronage. Bertels dedicates a special section to highlighting Navoi's friendly relations and creative collaborations with Abdurahmon Jami. Following this, he discusses the creation of the great “Xamsa”.

As emphasized in the Afterword to the monograph, in conducting such an extensive study, the author benefited from conversations and advice of poets, writers, scholars, and thinkers such as Oybek, Gafur Gulom, Xodi Zarif, Solih Qosimov, Solih Mutallibov, Gulom Karimov, Buyuk Karimiy, and Alexander Semyonov. Upon closer examination, it is not difficult to discern the strong influence of E.E.Bertels' views not only on Uzbek Navoi studies but also on artistic and cultural works created about Alisher Navoi: Oybek's novel “Navoi”, Izzat Sulton and Uygun's drama “Alisher Navoi”, and the feature film about the life and work of Navoi. Indeed, the monograph “Navoi” by the renowned orientalist E.E.Bertels served as a kind of standard in shaping our literary and aesthetic perspectives during the Soviet era.

Discussion

Uzbek Navoi studies have not remained confined to the research of E.E.Bertels. Significant work has been carried out in this field on the eve of independence and during the years of independence. Notably: During the independence years, 10-volume and 20-volume collections of Alisher Navoi's complete works were published. A 30-volume compilation of Uzbek Navoi studies from the independence period and the “Navoi Encyclopedia” were created. The international conference “Alisher Navoi and the 21st Century” is being held regularly. In N. Komilov's “Tasavvuf” [9], S. Olimov's “Love, Lover, and Beloved” (“Ishq, oshiq va ma'shuq”) [16], Sh. Sharipov's “The Truth of Lisonut-tayr” [20], and many other studies, the ideas from E.E.Bertels' research have been developed in new directions.

Based on the scope of the article, even when considering the issue through the example of a single Navoi scholar - Academician Shuhrat Sirojiddinov - one can form a certain impression about the scale and significance of the work accomplished. For instance, on the eve of independence, the scholar's concise Russian-language studies “Navoi: Historiography. Literary Studies” and “Persian-Tajik Written Sources of the 15th-16th Centuries on the Uzbek Poet and Thinker Alisher Navoi” emerged. A textbook “Introduction to Islamic Philosophy: The Science of Word”, exploring the mysteries of Sufi philosophy, was published. His monograph “Philosophical Sources of Uzbek Classical Literature”, intended for literary scholars, textologists, source researchers, and poetry enthusiasts, serves as a unique introduction to our classical literature. His observations in this vein were summarized in the substantial monograph “Alisher Navoi. (Comparative-typological, textological analysis of sources)”. The textbook “Navoi Studies”, co-authored by Shuhrat Sirojiddinov, Dilnavoz Yusupova, and

Olimjon Davlatov, not only covers the most important information related to Alisher Navoi's life and work and the poetics of his works but also provides new interpretations of the great thinker's oeuvre. Sh. Sirojiddinov's manual "Lessons in Textology" compiles information on describing and classifying manuscript sources, approaches to working with them based on textological principles, fundamental principles and forms of text composition, as well as methodological guidelines.

Indeed, the vast opportunities granted by independence have opened the door to extensive possibilities for the consistent and uninterrupted continuation of such endeavors.

Conclusions

It is evident that E.E. Bertels was one of the orientalist scholars who made a significant contribution to the development of Navoi studies. In his research, the scholar recognized Alisher Navoi and Abdurahmon Jomiy as great creative figures who played an important role in the cultural and literary life of the two peoples living in Xuroson and Mavoraunnahr. He studied their lives and works with great enthusiasm.

The orientalist scholar, when discussing the city of Samarkand, which was a major cultural center of the Timurids in Mawarannahr, emphasized that its history is even older than that of Herat. He notes that in this region, during the reign of Mirzo Ulugbek, great thinkers such as Qozizoda Rumi, Giyasiddin Jamshid, and Muiniddin Koshani lived and worked in Samarkand.

Drawing on the passages in Alisher Navoi's epic poem "Saddi Iskandariy" that express tones of complaint, he reflects on the reasons for the failure of poets such as Kotibiy, Mavlono Orifiy, and Badriddin Haliliy, who attempted to write epics during that period. He analyzes a number of works created in genres such as *qasida*, *tarix*, *muammo*, and *munozara*.

The scholar viewed Navoi's lyrics as an extremely rich treasure that embodied all the achievements of Uzbek and Persian poetry. He considered the poet's ghazals as the most perfect and aesthetically impactful examples of classical ghazal writing. He concluded that these works had a strong influence not only on Uzbek poetry but also on the further development of poetry among other Turkic-speaking peoples, such as Turkmen, Azerbaijani, and Turkish. Consequently, he also emphasized the need to examine the issue of literary influence on the scale of all-Turkic literature and to conduct extensive comparative analyses.

The observations of the Oriental scholar also vividly demonstrate thinking and evaluation influenced by the principle of class. Unfortunately, this factor, explained by the era in which he lived, also shapes E.E. Bertels' worldview in his holistic assessment of Navoi's life and work. He wishes to see the humanist Alisher Navoi not among the ranks of kings and officials, but alongside the hardworking and suffering people. Thus, he is compelled to follow the tendentious views characteristic of Soviet literary studies.

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