"My note": error and emendation in copies of the works of 'Ali Shir Nava'i

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Wednesday, March 20th, 2013, 11:00 AM

IMU Hoosier Room

The works of the fifteenth-century Central Asian statesman and poet 'Ali Shir Nava'i exist in hundreds of manuscript copies produced during the sixteenth-nineteenth centuries. Nava'i's body of work consists of some thirty works of prose and poetry in either Persian or Chaghatay Turkic, and authorised redactions of these works still survive in manuscript form, offering what may be regarded as definitive texts or readings. While many manuscripts produced after this time correspond with these early redactions, there are even more which diverge from the de facto definitive texts, and are evidence of editorial judgment and critical engagement on the part of copyists and readers through the Turco-Persian literary sphere, encompassing the Ottoman Empire, Safavid Iran, Central Asia, and Mughal India. Preliminary results of the examination of some of these manuscripts reveals evidence of both deliberate emendation and forced or unforced error in the reproduction of Nava'i's work, and that the nature of his corpus, which is dominated by poetry, lends itself to manipulation and reconfiguration, depending upon the tastes of copyists and readers, conditioned by tradition and expectation, in a process that evokes reception theory. In short, the transmission of Nava'i's work is conditioned by the aesthetics of response, in which the audience helps determine the form of the text.

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