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HISTORICAL AND LITERARY FEATURES OF CLASSICAL PERSIAN LITERARY SOURCES

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Abstract. This article examines the historical and literary features of classical Persian literary sources and their significance in the development of Persian literature. Particular attention is paid to manuscripts, historical chronicles, epic works, lyrical poetry, and didactic texts as important sources reflecting the cultural, social, and intellectual life of their periods. The study analyses their thematic scope, genre diversity, artistic imagery, symbolism, narrative structure, and linguistic characteristics. It also considers the works of prominent classical Persian authors and their contribution to the formation of literary traditions. The findings demonstrate that classical Persian literary sources possess not only considerable artistic value but also serve as essential materials for studying the historical memory, cultural identity, ethical ideals, and worldview of Persian-speaking societies.

Keywords: literary sources, manuscripts, historical chronicles, literary tradition, genre, artistic imagery, symbolism, cultural heritage, historical memory.

Introduction: Classical Persian literature occupies a prominent place in the history of world civilization due to its rich intellectual heritage, genre diversity, and distinctive artistic traditions. Its literary sources – including manuscripts, epic poems, historical chronicles, lyrical works, mystical writings, and didactic texts – provide valuable information about the political, social, cultural, and spiritual life of Persian-speaking societies. These sources are significant not only as literary monuments but also as historical documents reflecting the worldview, moral values, and cultural identity of different periods.

The works of such prominent authors as Ferdowsi, Saadi, Hafez, Rumi, Nizami, and Jami played an important role in shaping the thematic and aesthetic principles of classical Persian literature. Their writings address universal issues, including justice, love, morality, human dignity, spiritual perfection, and the relationship between the individual and society. The artistic value of these works is manifested through symbolism, allegory, metaphorical language, narrative complexity, and philosophical depth.

The study of classical Persian literary sources requires an interdisciplinary approach combining literary, historical, textual, and cultural analysis. Such an approach makes it possible to identify the relationship between literary works and their historical context while determining their role in the development of regional and global literary traditions. Therefore, this article examines the principal historical and literary features of classical Persian sources, their genre and thematic characteristics, and their contribution to the preservation and transmission of Persian cultural heritage.

Materials and methods: The research materials comprise selected classical Persian literary sources, including Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, Saadi's Gulistan and Bustan, Nizami Ganjavi's Khamsa, Rumi's Masnavi-ye Ma'navi, Hafez's Divan, and Jami's Haft Awrang. Historical chronicles, medieval manuscripts, biographical works, and modern scholarly studies devoted to Persian literary history were also used as supplementary sources.

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The study applies historical-literary, comparative, textual, descriptive, and hermeneutic methods. According to Jan Rypka, Persian literature should be examined in close connection with the political, cultural, and intellectual conditions of the historical period in which it developed [1]. Therefore, the historical-literary method was used to identify the influence of dynastic changes, religious thought, court culture, and social relations on classical Persian texts.

The comparative method enabled the identification of common and distinctive features in epic, lyrical, mystical, and didactic works. E.G.Browne considers Persian literature an evolving tradition shaped through the interaction of historical experience, literary conventions, and intellectual movements [2]. Based on this approach, the selected texts were compared according to their themes, genres, systems of imagery, narrative structures, and ethical concepts.

Textual analysis was employed to examine manuscripts, textual variants, composition, vocabulary, symbols, and figurative devices. In line with Jerome McGann's view, a literary text should be studied not as an isolated verbal construction but as a product of particular historical and material circumstances [3]. Accordingly, attention was paid to the relationship between textual form, manuscript transmission, and cultural context.

The hermeneutic method was applied to interpret the allegorical, mystical, moral, and philosophical meanings of classical Persian works. Hans-Georg Gadamer maintains that interpretation develops through interaction between the historical horizon of a text and that of its reader [4]. This principle made it possible to analyse classical works by considering both their original contexts and their subsequent reception.

In addition, descriptive and analytical methods were used to classify the principal genres, motifs, characters, poetic devices, and stylistic features of the selected sources. The combination of these methods provided an integrated analysis of classical Persian literary sources as both artistic works and records of historical and cultural memory.

Results and discussion: The analysis demonstrates that classical Persian literary sources combine historical evidence with artistic interpretation. Works such as Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, Saadi's Gulistan and Bustan, Nizami's Khamsa, Rumi's Masnavi-ye Ma'navi, Hafez's Divan, and Jami's Haft Awrang reflect the political, social, ethical, and spiritual conditions of their respective periods. However, these texts do not merely record historical events; they reinterpret them through literary imagination, symbolism, and philosophical reflection.

One of the principal findings is the close relationship between genre and historical function. Epic literature preserves collective memory and ideas of national identity. In the Shahnameh, historical and legendary narratives are integrated into a unified representation of Iran's cultural past. As E. G. Browne observes, Ferdowsi's poem occupies a central position in preserving Persian historical consciousness and literary identity. Thus, epic narration performs both artistic and cultural functions.

Didactic works such as Saadi's Gulistan and Bustan present social relations, moral values, governance, justice, and human behaviour through anecdotes, parables, and aphoristic statements. Their structural conciseness makes complex ethical ideas accessible to a broad readership. The combination of prose and poetry in the Gulistan also demonstrates the flexible genre system of classical Persian literature.

The works of Rumi and Hafez reveal the importance of mystical symbolism. Images such as the beloved, wine, the journey, light, and separation frequently convey meanings that extend beyond their literal content. According to Annemarie Schimmel, Persian mystical poetry transforms spiritual

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experience into a complex system of poetic images and symbols. Consequently, such texts require contextual and hermeneutic interpretation rather than exclusively literal analysis.

The comparative analysis also identifies several common characteristics of classical Persian sources: thematic universality, philosophical depth, intertextuality, allegorical expression, rhythmic organisation, and the integration of ethical instruction with aesthetic form. At the same time, each author demonstrates a distinctive literary style. Ferdowsi is characterised by epic monumentality, Saadi by didactic clarity, Nizami by narrative sophistication, Rumi by mystical-philosophical dynamism, Hafez by lyrical ambiguity, and Jami by the synthesis of literary and Sufi traditions.

The findings confirm Jan Rypka's position that Persian literary history developed through continuous interaction among courtly culture, religious thought, oral traditions, and written literature. Manuscript transmission also contributed to textual variation, as copyists, commentators, and later editors occasionally modified the linguistic or structural features of individual works. Therefore, textual criticism is essential for distinguishing original textual elements from later additions and variants.

Overall, classical Persian literary sources possess a dual character: they are outstanding artistic creations and valuable records of historical-cultural memory. Their lasting significance results from the harmonious combination of historical content, universal themes, sophisticated poetic form, and moral-philosophical ideas. These features enabled classical Persian literature to influence not only Persian-speaking societies but also Turkic, Arabic, South Asian, and European literary traditions.

Conclusion: The study demonstrates that classical Persian literary sources represent a synthesis of historical memory, artistic imagination, and philosophical thought. The works of Ferdowsi, Saadi, Nizami, Rumi, Hafez, and Jami not only reflect the political, social, and cultural conditions of their periods but also interpret universal themes such as justice, morality, love, human dignity, and spiritual perfection.

The analysis reveals that epic, lyrical, didactic, narrative, and mystical texts differ in their genre structures while sharing symbolism, allegory, intertextuality, philosophical depth, and refined poetic expression. These features contributed to the formation and continuity of Persian literary traditions. Manuscript transmission and textual variation also confirm the importance of textual and historical analysis in interpreting classical works.

Thus, classical Persian literary sources should be regarded both as significant artistic achievements and as valuable records of cultural and historical experience. Their study contributes to a deeper understanding of Persian-speaking societies and the influence of Persian literature on Turkic, Arabic, South Asian, and European literary traditions. Further research may focus on comparative textual studies, manuscript variants, translation history, and the contemporary reception of classical Persian literature.

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