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PRINCIPLES OF SOURCE STUDY IN MODERN TURKISH HISTORIOGRAPHY REGARDING THE HERITAGE OF CENTRAL ASIAN SCHOLARS FROM THE 9TH–12TH CENTURIES

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Abstract. This article examines the principal approaches to source study in contemporary Turkish historiography concerning the intellectual heritage of Central Asian scholars of the ninth–twelfth centuries. It focuses on the methodological principles used to investigate the works of such prominent thinkers as Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Abu Ali ibn Sina, Muhammad al-Khwarizmi, and Mahmud al-Kashgari. Particular attention is paid to the critical examination of manuscripts, the verification of authorship and textual authenticity, historical contextualization, comparative analysis, and the interpretation of translations and commentaries. The study employs historiographical analysis, source criticism, comparative methods, and contextual analysis to examine how these principles contribute to reconstructing the intellectual history of medieval Central Asia. It argues that a comprehensive understanding of the scholars' legacy requires researchers to distinguish original texts from later interpretations, assess the historical circumstances in which works were produced and transmitted, and compare evidence from different linguistic and scholarly traditions.

Keywords: Turkish historiography, source studies, Central Asia, medieval scholarship, manuscript studies, textual criticism, al-Farabi, al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, al-Khwarizmi, intellectual history.

Introduction. The ninth–twelfth centuries represent a significant period in the intellectual history of Central Asia. During this era, scholars working in cities and cultural centers such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Khwarazm, and Farab contributed to the development of mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, linguistics, geography, and historical thought. Their works circulated across linguistic and geographical boundaries and became part of broader intellectual traditions in the Islamic world and beyond.

Among the most prominent representatives of this intellectual heritage were Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Abu Ali ibn Sina, Muhammad al-Khwarizmi, and Mahmud al-Kashgari. Their scholarly contributions have attracted the attention of historians, philosophers, philologists, historians of science, and manuscript specialists. Nevertheless, reconstructing their intellectual activities presents several methodological challenges. These include the survival of works in different manuscript versions, uncertainty regarding the authorship of some texts, differences between editions and translations, and the need to distinguish historical evidence from later interpretations.

Source study is therefore essential to the critical examination of medieval Central Asian scholarship. It involves more than collecting written materials: researchers must establish the provenance, chronology, authorship, textual reliability, historical context, and intended purpose of

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each source. The significance of these questions is particularly evident in the study of medieval intellectual history, where a surviving text may have undergone copying, revision, translation, or interpretation over several centuries.

Research materials and methods. This article employs a qualitative research design based on historiographical analysis and the principles of historical source criticism. It draws on selected Turkish-language scholarly publications, reference works, bibliographical studies, and relevant international research concerning medieval Central Asian intellectual history.

The methodological framework consists of five complementary approaches.

Historiographical analysis is used to examine how medieval Central Asian scholars and their works have been represented in modern scholarship. It considers the questions researchers ask, the types of evidence they prioritize, and the interpretations they develop. This approach also helps distinguish studies concerned primarily with a scholar's biography from those investigating the transmission, reception, and interpretation of their works.

Manuscript criticism examines the physical and textual characteristics of surviving manuscript witnesses. Relevant questions include the date and place of copying, scribal notes, ownership marks, marginalia, textual omissions, and differences between versions.

Textual criticism compares available witnesses to establish a more reliable text and identify changes introduced during transmission. The earliest surviving manuscript is not necessarily identical to the author's original composition, and the relationship between manuscript witnesses must be assessed rather than assumed.

These principles are especially important when investigating works attributed to al-Farabi, al-Biruni, and Ibn Sina, whose writings circulated through extensive scholarly networks.

Historical-contextual analysis situates texts within the political, social, religious, linguistic, and intellectual environments in which they were composed and transmitted. This approach helps researchers avoid interpreting medieval works exclusively through modern categories. It also allows them to examine relationships between scholarly production, institutions of learning, patronage, translation practices, and communication among intellectual communities.

Comparative and interdisciplinary analysis. Comparative analysis examines different manuscript versions, translations, commentaries, and scholarly interpretations of the same work. Where appropriate, it also compares accounts from different linguistic traditions. An interdisciplinary perspective combines methods from history, philology, philosophy, the history of science, and codicology. This is particularly valuable when a text contains scientific terminology, philosophical arguments, biographical information, or references to earlier intellectual traditions.

Bibliographical verification involves checking titles, authorship, publication details, manuscript catalogues, and the scholarly history of a text. It also requires distinguishing primary sources from modern editions, translations, reference entries, and secondary interpretations.

The article is a qualitative methodological study rather than a comprehensive survey of all Turkish-language publications on medieval Central Asian scholars. Consequently, its findings identify analytical principles and research directions rather than making quantitative claims about the entire field.

Research results. The study identifies several major categories of evidence relevant to researching the intellectual heritage of Central Asian scholars.

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First, original scholarly works and their manuscript witnesses. These include philosophical treatises, medical encyclopaedias, mathematical texts, astronomical works, geographical studies, and linguistic compilations. They provide direct evidence of the concepts, methods, and arguments developed by medieval scholars.

Second, biographical and bibliographical sources. Medieval biographical dictionaries, lists of scholarly works, and accounts of intellectual networks can help reconstruct scholarly careers and patterns of transmission. However, such sources may contain chronological inconsistencies, retrospective interpretations, or uncertain attributions.

Third, commentaries and intellectual responses. Later commentaries, critiques, summaries, and adaptations reveal how medieval scholars were read and interpreted by subsequent generations. These sources are particularly important for understanding the reception of philosophical and scientific ideas.

Fourth, manuscript catalogues and modern critical editions. Catalogues provide information about the location, physical description, and recorded attribution of manuscript witnesses. Critical editions offer scholarly reconstructions of texts and document relevant variants. Neither should be treated as infallible: cataloguing information and editorial decisions require evaluation in relation to the available evidence.

Fifth, modern historiographical publications. Scholarly articles, monographs, reference works, and bibliographical surveys provide interpretations of the primary evidence. They are essential for understanding the development of research, but their conclusions should be distinguished from statements made in the medieval sources themselves.

Taken together, these categories provide a foundation for examining not only what medieval scholars wrote, but also how their works survived, circulated, and acquired new meanings.

One of the most important principles of source criticism is the verification of a work's authenticity and attribution. A text traditionally associated with a particular scholar cannot automatically be accepted as an authentic work without considering the available evidence.

Researchers should examine manuscript dates, textual references, stylistic characteristics, terminology, historical allusions, and the relationship between the work and other writings attributed to the same author. Where possible, these findings should be compared with independent historical evidence.

The entry on Ibn Sina in the Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi illustrates the importance of this principle. It notes that, although a substantial body of Ibn Sina's writings survives in multiple copies, questions concerning the authenticity of certain works and the status of some short treatises have not been fully resolved.

This observation demonstrates why the number of surviving manuscripts alone cannot establish authenticity. Multiple copies may derive from a shared textual ancestor, while a work attributed to a famous scholar may have been transmitted under that scholar's name at a later date.

Accordingly, source criticism should distinguish between confirmed authorship, probable attribution, disputed attribution, and uncertain authorship. This distinction is essential for avoiding the incorporation of unverified material into the reconstruction of medieval intellectual history.

Manuscript transmission and textual variation. The second major principle is the examination of textual transmission. Medieval scholarly works were copied by hand, often over long periods and across different geographical regions. During this process, scribal errors, omissions, explanatory additions, and textual revisions could occur.

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Researchers must therefore consider the relationship between surviving manuscript witnesses rather than treating each copy as an independent or equally authoritative representation of the original work.

A rigorous textual investigation should include:

- Identifying and describing relevant manuscript witnesses.
- Establishing their approximate chronology and provenance where evidence permits.
- Comparing textual variants, omissions, additions, and alternative readings.
- Examining marginal notes, ownership records, and evidence of scholarly use.
- Explaining the principles used to establish the text of a modern edition.

These procedures are particularly relevant when examining scientific and philosophical works, because a small difference in terminology or a copied numerical error can change the interpretation of an argument or calculation.

The methodological implication is that the history of a text must be investigated alongside its intellectual content. Understanding how a work was transmitted helps researchers distinguish the author's arguments from changes introduced during later copying and interpretation.

A third principle is the contextual interpretation of sources. The works of al-Farabi, al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, al-Khwarizmi, and Mahmud al-Kashgari emerged within distinct historical and intellectual circumstances. Their ideas cannot be adequately understood without considering the scholarly traditions, languages, institutions, and debates that shaped their production.

For example, the study of Ibn Sina's medical and philosophical writings requires attention to earlier Greek, Arabic, and Islamic intellectual traditions, as well as to the author's own conceptual contributions. The works of al-Biruni require consideration of his approaches to mathematics, astronomy, geography, chronology, and the comparative study of cultures.

Contextual analysis should not, however, reduce a scholar's work to the political or religious circumstances of the period. Instead, it should explain the relationship between historical conditions and the specific arguments, observations, and methods found in the text.

This principle also applies to intellectual exchange across regions. The movement of scholarly works through translation, teaching, commentary, and manuscript copying demonstrates that medieval knowledge was not confined to modern national boundaries. Consequently, contemporary Turkish historiography can contribute to the study of Central Asian scholars by situating their works within wider intellectual networks that connected Central Asia with Anatolia and other centres of learning. Such interpretations must nevertheless be supported by specific textual, documentary, or bibliographical evidence.

The intellectual heritage of medieval Central Asia survives through works written in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic, as well as through later translations into other languages. Each linguistic tradition presents particular challenges for source criticism. A translated text may clarify the meaning of a work for modern readers, but it may also introduce interpretive decisions that are not immediately apparent. Technical terms, philosophical concepts, scientific classifications, and historical names may not have exact equivalents across languages.

For this reason, researchers should distinguish between the original text, a critical edition, a translation, and a modern interpretation. Where possible, important passages should be checked against the original-language text or a reliable scholarly edition.

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Comparative analysis is also necessary when different scholarly traditions interpret the same thinker in different ways. A Turkish-language study may emphasize the reception of a philosopher within the history of Islamic thought, while a Central Asian study may focus on the scholar's regional background, intellectual environment, or contribution to the history of science. These perspectives need not be mutually exclusive, but their evidential foundations and interpretive assumptions should be examined.

The methodological objective is not to establish the superiority of one national historiography over another. It is to identify how different research traditions contribute to a more complete and critically supported understanding of the sources.

Selected Turkish-language publications illustrate several approaches relevant to the study of medieval Central Asian intellectual history.

The Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi provides scholarly reference entries that summarize the lives, writings, and intellectual positions of major figures. Such entries are useful for establishing a research starting point, identifying major works, and locating further bibliography. They should be used as reference tools rather than substitutes for examining primary sources.

Ian Whitaker's 2011 survey, The Present State of Studies of al-Biruni: A Survey and Bibliography, reviews scholarship on al-Biruni and provides a bibliographical framework for further investigation. This type of research is important because it makes the development of scholarship more visible and helps identify areas requiring additional study.

A broader methodological comparison can also be drawn from A. Ahat Andican's 2017 article examining the authenticity of Tüzükat-i Timuri. Although the work concerns a later historical period and does not directly address the ninth–twelfth-century scholars examined here, it illustrates the importance of checking manuscript evidence, the appearance of a work in earlier historical accounts, and inconsistencies between a text and independently established events.

These publications demonstrate the value of combining reference scholarship, bibliographical review, and source criticism. At the same time, a full assessment of contemporary Turkish historiography would require a broader and systematically defined corpus of Turkish-language monographs, journal articles, critical editions, dissertations, and manuscript catalogues.

The methodological findings can be summarized in the following framework.

Principle	**Main research question**	**Analytical purpose**
Provenance	Where and when was the source produced or copied?	Establish the historical circumstances of the source
Authorship	Is the work reliably attributed to the named scholar?	Evaluate authenticity and attribution
Textual criticism	How do surviving versions differ?	Identify textual changes and establish a reliable reading
Contextual analysis	What intellectual and historical conditions shaped the text?	Interpret the work within its historical setting
Linguistic comparison	How do terminology and meaning change across languages?	Reduce errors caused by translation
Comparative analysis	How do different sources and	Test claims and identify points of

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	interpretations relate to one another?	agreement or disagreement
Historiographical analysis	How have modern scholars interpreted the evidence?	Distinguish primary evidence from later scholarly conclusions

The framework is intended as a practical guide rather than a claim that all contemporary Turkish researchers follow an identical procedure. Its application should be adapted to the specific source, discipline, and research question.

Research discussion. The results indicate that source criticism is central to reconstructing the intellectual heritage of Central Asian scholars from the ninth–twelfth centuries. The reliability of historical conclusions depends not only on the quantity of surviving material but also on the quality of the procedures used to examine it.

The first major implication concerns the distinction between a scholar's historical works and the later traditions associated with their name. Medieval intellectual figures often acquired reputations that extended beyond the evidence contained in their authentic writings. A critical historiographical approach must therefore distinguish documented contributions from later attributions, legends, and retrospective interpretations.

The second implication concerns the relationship between textual and intellectual history. Establishing the wording of a text is not merely a technical preliminary. It directly affects how researchers interpret scientific concepts, philosophical arguments, and historical observations. Manuscript comparison and authorship verification should therefore be integrated into the interpretation of intellectual content rather than treated as separate activities.

The third implication concerns the role of translation. Arabic, Persian, and Turkic sources have circulated through complex networks of translation and commentary. Modern Turkish scholarship can help make these traditions accessible to a wider readership, but translations must be examined critically. Researchers should identify the edition used, assess the translator's methodological choices, and consult the original language when important interpretive questions arise.

The fourth implication concerns comparative historiography. The study of medieval Central Asian scholars benefits from collaboration between researchers in Türkiye, Uzbekistan, and other countries with relevant manuscript collections and scholarly traditions. Such collaboration can facilitate the comparison of catalogues, the identification of manuscript witnesses, and the evaluation of competing interpretations.

However, comparisons between national historiographies should not be based on assumptions about national identity or presumed scholarly priorities. They should instead be grounded in identifiable publications, research methods, source choices, and interpretations. This is particularly important because modern national categories do not always correspond to the multilingual and interconnected intellectual environments of the medieval period.

The fifth implication is the need for transparent research practices. Studies should clearly identify the editions, translations, and manuscript catalogues on which their conclusions depend. Uncertain dates, disputed attributions, and gaps in the evidence should be explicitly acknowledged. Such transparency makes it easier for other scholars to verify findings and refine existing interpretations.

Several limitations must also be acknowledged. The present article offers a methodological synthesis based on selected publications rather than a systematic review of all contemporary Turkish historiography concerning Central Asian scholars. It does not establish the frequency with which

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individual methods are used by Turkish researchers, nor does it claim that the selected publications represent every scholarly approach in Türkiye.

Future research could address these limitations by compiling a structured bibliography of Turkish-language scholarship on al-Farabi, al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, al-Khwarizmi, and Mahmud al-Kashgari. A more extensive study could classify publications by discipline, date, source type, manuscript collection, and methodology. It could also compare Turkish-language research with scholarship produced in Uzbekistan and other international academic contexts.

Conclusion. The study of Central Asian scholars of the ninth–twelfth centuries requires a rigorous and interdisciplinary approach to historical sources. The examination of contemporary Turkish scholarship highlights several principles that are particularly important: verification of authorship and authenticity, analysis of manuscript transmission, contextual interpretation, comparative examination of languages and translations, and critical assessment of modern historiographical interpretations.

These principles are interconnected. Authorship verification establishes the evidential status of a text; manuscript criticism helps reconstruct its transmission; contextual analysis clarifies its historical significance; and comparative historiography reveals how its meaning has been interpreted across different scholarly traditions.

Further research should develop a systematic corpus of Turkish-language scholarship and compare its methods and conclusions with research conducted in Central Asia and internationally. Such a comparative approach would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the scientific, philosophical, and cultural achievements of medieval Central Asian scholars.

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