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# THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF THE TAXMIS GENRE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UZBEK, TURKISH AND AZERBAIJANI LITERATURES

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## Abstract

This article investigates the genesis and developmental stages of the taxmis genre in classical Eastern poetry, with particular focus on a comparative analysis of Uzbek, Turkish, and Azerbaijani literary traditions. Drawing on primary sources and recent scholarship, the study traces the genre from its roots in ninth-century Andalusian Arabic literature through its classical formulation in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Persianate poetry, to its canonical elaboration in Uzbek literature through the work of Alisher Navoi (1441–1501). The corpus-based evidence from Turkish literary studies — identifying 2,944 tahmis compositions across 970 classical divans — and documentation of a continuous Azerbaijani tahmis tradition on Fuzuli's ghazals from the seventeenth to the twentieth century together confirm that the genre operated according to identical formal and aesthetic principles across all three literatures. The comparative analysis demonstrates that taxmis functioned not merely as a formal exercise but as a medium of inter-generational literary dialogue, aesthetic competition, and the transmission of poetic heritage. The study employs a historical-comparative methodology and contributes to the broader understanding of the unified character of the Persianate–Turkic literary heritage.

**Keywords:** Taxmis; tahmis; muxammas; musammat; classical Uzbek poetry; Alisher Navoi; Turkish classical literature; Azerbaijani literature; comparative Turkic poetics; nazira tradition; tahmis-i hod.



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## **Introduction**

The taxmis genre is among the most widely practiced, yet comparatively under-theorized, verse forms in classical Eastern literature. Derived from the Arabic root xamsa ("five"), the term designates the art of transforming an existing ghazal or qasida into a five-verse stanza form by prefixing three new lines to each of the original couplets. The resulting poem — in which the base text (zemin) and the added verses (zamime) coexist within a unified poetic structure — constitutes the taxmis as an independent literary work.

The scholarly significance of this genre operates on at least three levels. First, taxmis represents a distinctly intertextual phenomenon, uniting two poets — sometimes separated by centuries — within a single literary artefact. Second, it serves as a living expression of the master-apprentice tradition, of poetic succession and spiritual-aesthetic continuity. Third, it constitutes one of the most demanding tests of verse-craft, since the taxmis author must preserve full congruence with the base text in metre, rhyme, radif (refrain), and thematic content while contributing substantively new meaning.

The present study aims to clarify the historical genesis of the taxmis genre and to trace its developmental stages in Uzbek, Turkish, and Azerbaijani literatures through a systematic comparative analysis. In doing so, it addresses a significant gap in existing scholarship: while individual national traditions have been studied, a comparative synthesis across these three literary cultures has not yet been undertaken.

The article makes two principal contributions. First, it provides a historically grounded account of the genre's formation from Andalusian Arabic origins through its Persianate and Turkic elaborations. Second, drawing on recent Turkish and Azerbaijani scholarship alongside established Uzbek sources, it demonstrates that taxmis operated according to structurally and aesthetically identical principles across all three traditions, thereby underlining the unified character of the broader Persianate–Turkic literary heritage.

## **Materials and Methods**



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This study adopts a historical-comparative methodology. The primary analytical approach combines close textual reading of canonical taxmis compositions with a systematic survey of the secondary literature in Uzbek, Turkish, and Azerbaijani literary scholarship.

Primary sources consulted include Alisher Navoi's collected works (*Xazoyin ul-maoniy*), the theoretical treatise *Funun ul-balog'a* by Shaykh Ahmad Taroziy (1436–37), and selected tahmis compositions from the classical Uzbek, Ottoman Turkish, and Azerbaijani canons. Secondary literature encompasses monographs, doctoral dissertations, and peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1963 and 2025.

The comparative framework is organised around four analytical axes: (i) terminological and definitional coherence across literary traditions; (ii) the historical genesis and periodisation of the genre; (iii) formal structural properties, including stanza form, rhyme scheme, and metre; and (iv) the functional and aesthetic roles assigned to the genre within each tradition. Where quantitative data are available — notably the corpus survey conducted by Yakışır (2023) across 970 Ottoman Turkish divans — these are incorporated to supplement the qualitative analysis.

A deliberate methodological choice has been made to treat the three literary traditions as part of a shared Persianate–Turkic cultural continuum rather than as wholly discrete national literatures, while remaining attentive to the distinctive developmental trajectories evident within each.

### **Results. Historical Genesis: From Andalusia to Mawarannahr**

The roots of the taxmis genre can be traced to ninth-century Andalusian Arabic literature. A substantial body of scholarship locates the emergence of musammat (stanzaic verse) forms in the development of the muwashshah ("girdled" or "belted" poetry) in al-Andalus from the late ninth century onward. The genre is conventionally attributed to the Andalusian Arab poet Muqaddam ibn Muofa (Abdusattorov, 2012: 208).

The first theoretical account of the musammat was provided in the eleventh century by Umar Raduyani in his treatise *Tarjuman al-balagha*:



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"Musammat means composing verses in groups. A verse consists of four lines or more; all its sections must be written in the same form to the end of the verse; and all must be rhymed throughout — as for the rhyme, it may be uniform or contrasting" (cited in Xalliyeva, 2000: 10).

This foundational definition established the structural principle applicable to all stanzaic forms, including the five-line muxammas.

In Persian–Tajik literature, the crystallisation of the muxammas is associated with Khwaja Kirmani in the fourteenth century. Prior to this period the form existed as an independent structural entity; from the fifteenth century onward it became routinely combined with the tazmin practice (using another poet's ghazal as a structural base), yielding the classical taxmis as understood in Uzbek literary discourse. Early canonical examples include tahmis compositions on the ghazals of Hofiz Shirazi and Sa'di (Hakimov, 2017: 81–82).

In Uzbek written literature, the muxammas genre as an independent verse form was first established by Hofiz Khorazmi in the 1430s. The literary scholar M. Sulaymonov characterises his muxammas as "the earliest classical example of these genres in Uzbek literature" (Sulaymonov, 1996: 12). Simultaneously, Shaykh Ahmad Taroziy's theoretical treatise *Funun ul-balog'a* (1436–37) provided the first formal theoretical definition of the muxammas and musammat within the Uzbek literary context, marking the genre's official entry into the local literary tradition (Taroziy, 2002: 84).

### **The Classical Peak: Alisher Navoi and the Consolidation of the Taxmis Tradition**

The canonical elaboration of the taxmis genre in Uzbek literature is directly associated with the work of Alisher Navoi (1441–1501). According to D. Yusupova's detailed study of Navoi's collected works, the *Xazoyin ul-maoniy* anthology contains ten taxmis compositions: three based on the ghazals of his predecessor Lutfi, and seven based on Navoi's own ghazals (Yusupova, 2013: 146).

Navoi's practice of composing tahmis-i hod — completing his own previously written ghazals into five-verse stanzas — was a genuine innovation within the literary history of Uzbek poetry. As A. Abdug'ofurov observes:



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"It was Navoi who first introduced the practice of composing tahmis on one's own ghazals in the history of our literature. His creative activity in this area subsequently played a decisive role in elevating the muxammas to a leading position in our poetry, second only to the ghazal itself" (Abdug'ofurov, 1978: 27–33).

The designation "ruhafzo muxammaslar" ("soul-nourishing muxammas") which Navoi applied to his own taxmis compositions in the preface to the Badoye' ul-bidoya divan is itself significant: it signals that the taxmis was conceived not as a technical exercise but as a form of spiritual-aesthetic expression (Navoi MAT, Vol. 1, 1987: 22).

G. Boltayeva's authoritative assessment of Navoi's tahmis on Lutfi's ghazal confirms the genre's achieved artistic maturity:

"In this tahmis, the great poet Alisher Navoi's creative mastery, mode of thought, world-view, philosophical reflections, poetic language and unique artistic figurative devices have all found expression" (Boltayeva, 2024: 113).

### **The Genre in Turkish and Azerbaijani Literatures: A Comparative Survey**

In classical Turkish literature, the scale of the taxmis tradition has been quantified by Yakışır (2023) through a systematic corpus-based survey:

"Examining nearly 970 divans, it was ascertained that 2,944 tahmis [compositions] had been written. This demonstrates that tahmis is among the most frequently preferred verse forms in our literature" (Yakışır, 2023: 193).

This statistical evidence unambiguously confirms the genre's centrality in classical Ottoman Turkish poetry and provides a direct quantitative parallel to its prominence in the Uzbek tradition.

The same corpus survey yielded a further finding of comparative importance: of more than 660 poets identified as having written tahmis across the nearly 1,000 divans examined, only 18 composed tahmis-i hod (Yakışır, 2023: 194). In Turkish literature, the earliest practitioner of this form is identified as Revânî (d. 1523–24) — a date contemporaneous with the late Navoi period. Whether this parallelism reflects direct cultural transmission, independent convergence, or a combination of both remains an open question for further research.



On the formal-theoretical plane, Parlakkılıç Mucan (2025) provides the following definition, which is precisely congruent with definitions found in the Uzbek scholarly tradition:

"Tahmis, one of the verse forms consisting of bands [stanzas] in classical Turkish poetry, is formed by adding three verses in the same metre in front of a ghazal or qasida. [...] Tahmis is among the most frequently composed verse forms within the musammat category, and generally consists of five to seven bands. The rhyme scheme is of the form aaaaa, bbbba, cccca, dddda. Generally, in the last or second-to-last band, the mahlas [pen-name] of both the tahmis poet and the poet of the base poem appear" (Parlakkılıç Mucan, 2025: 133).

In Azerbaijani literature, F. Seyidov (2012) has conducted a sustained comparative study of tahmis and nazira compositions on Fuzuli's ghazals spanning the seventeenth to the twentieth century. He frames the taxmis as a mode of literary competition:

"To tahmis a poem is more difficult than to write a nazira for it. Three lines are added before each couplet of the tahmised poem; congruence in metre, rhyme, radif, thought, and meaning must be observed" (Seyidov, 2012: 148).

The parallel between Azerbaijani poets' sustained engagement with Fuzuli's ghazals and Uzbek poets' equivalent engagement with those of Navoi is particularly striking: in both traditions, the canonical ghazals of the founding master function as inexhaustible matrices for successive generations of taxmis practitioners.

Finally, Keleş (2015) has demonstrated that the genre extended beyond the ghazal to the qasida form. Her analysis of İzmirli Hasan Servet's (d. 1868) tahmis on the mi'rajiyya qasida of Bosnian Sâbit (d. 1712) — itself a nazira on a seventeenth-century precursor — illustrates taxmis's capacity to unite poets separated by an entire century within a single text (Keleş, 2015: 148). This observation directly parallels the temporal dynamics observable in the Uzbek taxmis tradition.

## **Discussion**

### **Structural and Aesthetic Convergence**

The comparative evidence assembled above demonstrates a high degree of convergence in the structural and aesthetic principles governing taxmis across the



three literary traditions examined. All three employ identical formal requirements: the added verses (zamime) must conform precisely to the metre, rhyme, and radif of the base text (zemin), while simultaneously contributing thematically coherent new meaning. The stanza counts, rhyme schemes, and conventions surrounding the attribution of the dual pen-name in the concluding band are likewise consistent.

This convergence is not incidental. All three traditions share a common literary genealogy in Persianate classical poetry, operate within the same prosodic system (aruz/arūz), and subscribe to the same canon of aesthetic criteria inherited from the shared tradition of Arabo-Persian literary theory. The taxmis genre thus constitutes one of the clearest indices of the unified character of the broader Persianate–Turkic literary heritage.

### **Divergences and Tradition-Specific Developments**

Alongside this convergence, the comparative analysis also reveals tradition-specific patterns of development. In the Uzbek tradition, Navoi's introduction of tahmis-i hod — composing taxmis on one's own ghazals — represents a genuine innovation. This practice, though rare by definition (Yakışır's Turkish corpus study found only 18 practitioners of tahmis-i hod among 660 tahmis poets), signals a reflexive turn in which the genre becomes an instrument of self-commentary and textual deepening.

In Turkish literature, the sheer quantitative weight of the taxmis tradition (2,944 compositions in 970 divans) suggests a degree of genre normalisation arguably exceeding that evident in the Uzbek tradition, though direct comparative data for the Uzbek corpus are not yet available. In Azerbaijani literature, the long continuity of tahmis practice on Fuzuli's ghazals — extending across at least three centuries — is a particularly striking example of a tradition-specific "canonical ghazal" serving as a permanent matrix for successively renewed poetic engagement.

### **Taxmis as Inter-Generational Literary Dialogue**

A key finding of this comparative study is that, across all three traditions, taxmis functioned as considerably more than a technical exercise. R. Majidiy's



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characterisation of the genre's function in the Uzbek context applies with equal force to the Turkish and Azerbaijani evidence:

"Composing a muxammas served to broaden the poet's creative scope, to deepen engagement with the work of eminent predecessors, to acquire the creative legacy they left behind, and to transmit their progressive ideas to the people" (Majidiy, 1963: 89).

This function — simultaneously retrospective (honouring the master's text) and prospective (adapting it to new contexts and audiences) — accounts for the genre's remarkable durability. The fact that Navoi's ghazals continue to attract taxmis compositions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, just as Fuzuli's ghazals do in the Azerbaijani context, testifies to a form of literary vitality that formal taxonomies alone cannot capture.

## **Conclusion**

This comparative study has established four principal conclusions.

First, the taxmis genre traces a continuous historical trajectory from its origins in ninth-century Andalusian Arabic poetry, through its classical formulation in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Persianate literature, to its canonical elaboration in fifteenth-century Uzbek literature under Alisher Navoi. This developmental trajectory is broadly shared by Turkish and Azerbaijani literary traditions, confirming the genre's emplacement within a common Persianate–Turkic cultural continuum.

Second, Navoi's practice of tahmis-i hod — completing his own ghazals into five-verse stanzas — constitutes a distinctive innovation within this shared heritage. The near-simultaneous emergence of the same practice in Turkish literature (Revânî, d. 1523–24) raises important questions about the mechanisms of literary transmission and independent convergence that merit further comparative investigation.

Third, the formal and aesthetic principles governing taxmis — the requirements of zemin–zamime congruence, metrical conformity, rhyme-scheme consistency, and thematic integration — are structurally identical across the three traditions examined. This identity is a direct expression of the shared prosodic, rhetorical, and aesthetic inheritance common to all three literatures.



Fourth, taxmis exhibits remarkable durability across all three traditions, persisting as a living literary practice well into the modern period. This durability reflects the genre's capacity to function not only as a formal structure but as a vehicle for inter-generational dialogue, canonical homage, and the continuous renewal of the poetic heritage.

Future research might productively address the quantitative dimensions of the Uzbek taxmis corpus (comparable to Yakışır's Turkish survey), the mechanisms of cross-traditional influence between Uzbek, Turkish, and Azerbaijani practitioners in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, and the genre's transformations in twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetry.

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