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THE COMPOSITION AND VARIANT DIVERSITY OF THE KHOREZM "GOROGLI" EPIC CYCLE

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Abstract. This paper offers a scholarly examination of the epic narratives that make up the Khorezm redaction of "Gorogli", a foremost monument of the Uzbek oral epic heritage. Attention is directed to how the eighteen dostons of the cycle came to be written down, the position they hold within bakhshi repertoires, the variants in which they survive, and the features that set them apart from other Turkic redactions. The paper argues that the Khorezm cycle constitutes an epic system in its own right.

Keywords: "Gorogli" epic; Khorezm redaction; doston; bakhshi; oral tradition; textual variant; epic cycle.

Across the oral traditions of the Turkic peoples, "Gorogli" circulates as a heroic doston of wide reach and many redactions, giving artistic form to the historical memory, social ideals, and aesthetic outlook of the communities that transmit it. Every regional redaction draws upon the cultural conventions of its own locality and is marked accordingly by a particular plot architecture, cast of images, stock of motifs, and repertoire of poetic devices. The epic therefore invites assessment on two levels at once: as a pan-Turkic phenomenon in typological terms, and as a regionally diversified literary inheritance.

The Uzbek variants of the "Gorogli" dostons fall, in turn, into two groups:

1. the Khorezm variant;
2. variants disseminated across the other regions of Uzbekistan [3].

In scale, in manner of performance, and in musical delivery, the dostons of the Khorezm redaction stand at a marked remove from the bakhshi output of other regions. Those "Gorogli" dostons held in the repertoires of the bakhshis of Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, and Samarkand incline as a rule toward expansive plot development, elaborated description, and intricate composition; the Khorezm redaction, by contrast, renders its events in a more compressed, rapid, and tightly reasoned fashion. Shaping the artistic and aesthetic character of these dostons in an equally distinctive way are the melodic idiom proper to the Khorezm bakhshi tradition, its technique of performance, and the interplay between singer and instrument [2].

Within Uzbek folklore, the Khorezm redaction of "Gorogli" carries a scholarly and theoretical weight of its own, standing as a significant regional embodiment of the pan-Turkic epic tradition. That this redaction should contain a series of self-standing dostons encountered in no other Turkic variant follows directly from the particular creative conventions of the Khorezm bakhshi school. The imprint of the local folklore environment upon these dostons is discernible not in plot alone, but equally in their system of images, their artistic means, and their mode of performance.

The conclusion of the folklorist M. Saidov that "among the Uzbek people, this epic must first of all be sought in Khorezm" is not without foundation, but rather testifies to the deep rooting of the "Gorogli" tradition in this region. Likewise, P. Kichigulov, who investigated the Turkmen "Gorogli" epic, also indicates the Tashauz–Khiva zone as the principal centre of the epic's dissemination. The views of both scholars complement one another and are considered scientifically well founded. For the Khorezm oasis has historically been a territory where the cultural, linguistic, and folkloric traditions of the Uzbek and Turkmen peoples intersected, and this factor is reckoned among the important socio-cultural factors that shaped the rich variability of the "Gorogli" epic.

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The Khorezm “Gorogli” cycle was first published as a separate collection in 2004, into which 16 epics were incorporated. This publication was the first important step along the path of systematically assembling the epic materials preserved within the Khorezm bakhshi tradition. Subsequently, through Book 4 of the “Oshiqnoma” collection, the cycle was supplemented with two further epics, and its overall extent came to constitute 18 epics. As a result, the Khorezm “Gorogli” cycle took shape as a relatively complete and integral corpus. Within the framework of the present thesis, the genesis of these epics, their recording from a folkloristic standpoint, their state of preservation, and the problem of variability are specially investigated.

The Khorezm “Gorogli” cycle is not a random compilation, but an integral artistic system possessing internal logical connection and founded upon a sequence of epic events. The cycle begins with the epic “The Birth of Gorogli” and concludes with the epic “The Death of Gorogli”. This compositional construction makes it possible to reflect the hero's entire life path — from his birth to his death — on an epic scale, and creates a basis for evaluating the cycle as a series of epics organized upon a biographical principle.

The initial epics of the cycle elucidate Gorogli’s childhood period, his coming of age, and the process of his attaining social status. In particular, the epics “The Birth of Gorogli”, “The Marriage of Gorogli”, and “Rayhon Arab” are regarded as the principal epic texts reflecting the stage of the hero’s formation. These epics were recorded chiefly from the performance of the renowned Bola Bakhshi by S. Ruzimboyev in the years 1978–1981. To date, no other regional or performance variants of these texts have been identified, which makes it possible to evaluate them as rare folklore specimens characteristic of the Khorezm bakhshi school.

Within the composition of the Khorezm “Gorogli” cycle, the epics devoted to the image of Avaz stand out as a separate system and acquire important functional significance in the development of the epic plot. Such epics as “The Bringing of Avaz”, “The Marriage of Avaz”, “Avaz’s Grievance”, and “Avazkhon” elucidate not only Avaz’s heroic activity, but also his complex social, moral, and emotional relations with Gorogli. Certain of these epics have been preserved in the repertoire of several bakhshis and khalfas, and have been recorded in written variants alongside oral performance. This circumstance demonstrates the wide popularization of the image of Avaz within the Khorezm bakhshi tradition.

The epics “The Forty Thousands”, “The Old Woman”, and “Parizod’s Grievance”, which intensify dramatic conflicts and give artistic interpretation to social problems, occupy an important place in the cycle. In these texts, such questions as the individual and society, justice and violence, fidelity and betrayal are expressed in epic interpretation. The epic “Parizod’s Grievance» in particular, in that it is not encountered in other Turkic versions, vividly manifests the rarity and regional distinctiveness of the Khorezm “Gorogli” cycle.

Such epics as “Khirmondali”, “Khandon Botir”, and “Safar Mahram” are likewise characteristic solely of the Khorezm version and appreciably broaden the scope of the cycle's epic events. These epics were recorded in various years by S. Ruzimboyev from the performance of various bakhshis and are at the present time preserved in folklore archives. These texts demonstrate the repertoire richness and creative potential of the Khorezm bakhshi school.

In the concluding part of the cycle, the final stage of the hero's fate is artistically reflected through the epics “Gorogli’s Journey to Darband” and “The Death of Gorogli”. The epic “The Death of Gorogli” in particular acquires special scholarly significance in that it is encountered very rarely in the repertoire of the bakhshis and has to date been preserved in a single variant. This circumstance demonstrates the rarity of the text and its being a valuable source for future comparative investigations.

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In general, since the epics of the Khorezm “Gorogli” cycle were recorded in different periods and from the performance of different bakhshis, their linguistic features, lexical composition, stylistic strata, and poetic construction differ appreciably from one another. At the same time, the distinctive performance style of each bakhshi, his musical interpretation, and his improvisational possibilities have likewise increased the degree of variability of the texts.

The texts incorporated into the collection of the epics of the Khorezm “Gorogli” cycle published in 2004 do not, from the standpoint of source study, share a single origin. In this publication, only the epic “Avazkhon” is given on the basis of a text recorded by the folklorist J. Qobulniyozov and introduced into scholarly circulation. All the remaining epics, however, were recorded in various years by Professor S. Ruzimboyev from the performance of the accomplished representatives of the Khorezm bakhshi tradition — Bola Bakhshi Qurbonnazar Abdullayev of Khiva, Abdulla Bakhshi Bobojonov of Ellikqal’a, Tursun Bakhshi Jumaniyozov of Mang'it, and Jumaboy Bakhshi Xudayberganov of Gurlan — and were prepared for publication on the basis of scholarly editing. This circumstance demonstrates that the collection relies, on the one hand, upon authentic folklore materials, and on the other, that it has passed through a thorough process of scholarly preparation [1].

In general, the Khorezm “Gorogli” cycle, with its rich epic composition, the variegation of its plots, its rare epics, and its relatively well-preserved variants, is regarded as one of the most important and reliable sources of Uzbek folklore. That certain epics within the cycle are encountered only in the territory of Khorezm demonstrates that this version possesses a distinct epic system formed independently of other Turkic variants. For this reason, the profound study of these epics from the standpoint of source study, textology, linguo-folkloristics, and comparative epic studies, as well as their publication on a scholarly basis, acquires important methodological and theoretical significance in the systematic investigation of Uzbek folk oral creativity.

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