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THE IMAGE OF THE PEOPLE'S HERO IN USMON QO'CHQOR'S SHIROQ AND H. W. LONGFELLOW'S THE SONG OF HIAWATHA

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Abstract. This article offers a comparative analysis of two heroic images rooted in national folklore: Shiroq in the poem *Shiroq* by the Uzbek poet Usmon Qo'chqor and Hiawatha in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855). Both works transform ancient oral legends into modern literary texts and present a hero who acts for the sake of his people. Using comparative-historical, typological and mythopoetic methods, the study identifies the similarities and differences between the two characters in terms of origin, social status, type of conflict, means of heroism and the ideal they embody. The results show that Shiroq represents a tragic, self-sacrificing patriot who defends his homeland against foreign invasion, whereas Hiawatha is a cultural hero and peacemaker who brings knowledge and unity to his people. Despite these differences, both images express a shared idea: the value of the individual is measured by his service to the community. The findings may be useful for comparative literature courses and for research on the reception of folklore in national poetry.

Keywords: Usmon Qo'chqor, Shiroq, Longfellow, Hiawatha, people's hero, comparative literature, folklore, epic poem, self-sacrifice, cultural hero.

1. Introduction

Every nation preserves in its collective memory figures who embody its moral ideals. Such figures usually originate in oral tradition and later receive new life in written literature, where poets reinterpret them in the light of the concerns of their own time. Comparing heroes of this kind across cultures allows scholars to see what is universal in the human understanding of heroism and what is shaped by specific historical and national experience.

The legend of Shiroq, a Saka herdsman who sacrificed himself to save his people from the army of the Persian king Darius I, is one of the oldest heroic stories connected with the territory of present-day Uzbekistan. It is widely known through school textbooks and has inspired poets and artists, among them Usmon Qo'chqor, a poet born in 1955 in the Shofirkon district of Bukhara region, whose

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poem *Shiroq* presents the legendary herdsman as a symbol of patriotism (Qo'chqor, 2018). On the other side of the world, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882) turned the legends of the Ojibwe people, recorded by the ethnologist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (1839), into *The Song of Hiawatha*, one of the most widely read poems of nineteenth-century America (Longfellow, 1855; Calhoun, 2004).

The two works belong to different languages, epochs and literary traditions, and there is no question of direct influence between them. Precisely for this reason, a typological comparison is productive: it reveals how two poets, working independently, built the image of a hero who serves his people. The aim of this article is to compare the images of Shiroq and Hiawatha and to determine the common and distinctive features of the people's hero in Uzbek and American poetry. To achieve this aim, the following tasks were set: to describe the folklore and historical sources of both works; to analyse the main features of each hero; and to interpret the similarities and differences in their cultural context.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical basis of the study is formed by works on comparative literature and the theory of the hero. R. Wellek and A. Warren (1949) distinguished between the study of direct influence and the comparison of literary phenomena that arise independently, and the second approach is followed here. V. M. Zhirmunsky (1979) developed the concept of typological analogies, explaining similar motifs in unrelated literatures by similar stages of social and cultural development. S. Bassnett's (1993) critical introduction to comparative literature emphasised the importance of cultural context in any cross-national comparison. J. Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* described the universal pattern of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949), while N. Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* offered a classification of literary modes, including the tragic and the mythic, that is useful for distinguishing the two heroes (Frye, 1957).

The story of Shiroq is known from the *Stratagems* of the second-century Greek author Polyaenus, who described how a Saka horse-keeper named Sirakes disfigured himself, came to the Persians as a supposed fugitive and led them into a waterless desert (Polyaenus, 1994, VII.12). Herodotus's account of Darius's campaign against the Scythians provides the broader historical background of Persian expansion into the steppe (Herodotus, 2003, Book IV). In Uzbek scholarship the legend is regularly discussed in the context of patriotic education, and literary interpretations of it, including Usmon Qo'chqor's poem, have been treated primarily as expressions of national self-awareness.

Research on *The Song of Hiawatha* is extensive. C. C. Calhoun's (2004) biography of Longfellow reconstructs the composition of the poem and its reliance on Schoolcraft's *Algic Researches* and on the trochaic metre of the Finnish *Kalevala*. D. Gioia (1993) reassessed Longfellow's reputation after its decline in the modernist period. A. Trachtenberg and P. J. Deloria analysed the role of the poem in shaping the image of Native Americans in American culture and noted its romanticised and partly idealised character (Deloria, 1998; Trachtenberg, 2004). However, comparative studies that place Hiawatha alongside heroes of Central Asian literature remain rare, and no specialised study comparing Hiawatha with Shiroq has been found. This gap determines the novelty of the present article.

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3. Methods

The research material consists of two primary texts: Usmon Qo'chqor's poem Shiroq and Longfellow's The Song of Hiawatha, which comprises twenty-two cantos written in unrhymed trochaic tetrameter (Longfellow, 1855). The following methods were applied:

Comparative-historical method, to examine the folklore and historical sources of each work and the way the poets transformed them;

Typological method, to identify parallel features of the two heroes that arose without direct contact between the literatures;

Mythopoetic analysis, to interpret the heroes in terms of archetypal patterns such as the trial, the sacrifice and the departure;

Image analysis, to describe each character according to a common set of criteria: source of the plot, social status, main conflict, means of heroism, attitude to death and the ideal embodied.

The criteria were chosen so that each hero could be described on equal terms, and the results were summarised in a comparative table.

4. Results

The analysis showed that both heroes are deeply rooted in folklore and that both poets treat their hero as the embodiment of the people's spirit. At the same time, the heroes differ significantly in nature. The main findings are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of Shiroq and Hiawatha

Criterion	Shiroq (U. Qo'chqor)	Hiawatha (H. W. Longfellow)
Source of the plot	Saka legend recorded by Polyaenus (Stratagems, VII.12)	Ojibwe legends collected by H. R. Schoolcraft
Social status	Ordinary herdsman, a man of the people	Semi-divine hero, son of the West Wind
Main conflict	Foreign invasion (army of Darius I)	Natural hardship, evil forces, intertribal enmity
Means of heroism	Deception and self-mutilation for the homeland	Wisdom, cultural innovation, peacemaking
Attitude to death	Conscious self-sacrifice	Symbolic departure to the West
Ideal embodied	Patriotism and selfless devotion	Civilising mission and reconciliation

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Shiroq is presented as an ordinary member of the community, a herdsman with no supernatural powers. His only weapons are courage, cunning and the readiness to give up his own body and life. In the legend, he cuts off his nose and ears, convinces the Persians that he was mutilated by his own rulers and leads their army into the desert, where it suffers from thirst for days (Polyaenus, 1994). When the deception is revealed, he openly declares that he has saved his people, and he is killed. In Qo'chqor's poetic interpretation, this act is the centre of the image: the hero's suffering is transformed into a moral victory, and his death becomes a lesson of devotion to the homeland (Qo'chqor, 2018).

Hiawatha, in contrast, has a miraculous origin: he is the son of the West Wind, Mudjekeewis, and the mortal Wenonah, and he is raised by his grandmother Nokomis. His life follows the pattern of the cultural hero described by Campbell (1949). He fasts and wrestles with Mondamin, from whose body maize grows; he builds the first canoe, defeats the sorcerer Pearl-Feather, teaches his people picture-writing and calls for peace among the tribes (Longfellow, 1855). His sorrows, especially the famine and the death of his wife Minnehaha, test him but do not end his mission. At the close of the poem he departs westward to the land of the Hereafter, a symbolic departure rather than a violent death.

5. Discussion

The results allow us to distinguish two types of the people's hero. Shiroq belongs to the tragic-heroic type: his heroism is concentrated in a single decisive act, and its meaning is inseparable from his death. Hiawatha belongs to the type of the cultural hero, whose heroism unfolds over a whole life and consists of a series of gifts to his people. In Frye's terms, Shiroq approaches the tragic mode, in which the hero is isolated and destroyed, while Hiawatha remains closer to the mythic and romantic modes, in which the hero is superior to ordinary people and his story ends in transfiguration (Frye, 1957).

These differences correspond to the historical situations reflected in the source legends. The Shiroq legend arose in the context of real military conflict between the nomadic Saka and the Achaemenid empire (Herodotus, 2003); therefore, the central value of the story is the defence of freedom and land against an external enemy. Longfellow, by contrast, built his poem from myths about the origins of agriculture, crafts and customs, and he wrote it at a time when American literature was seeking a native mythology (Calhoun, 2004; Gioia, 1993). Hiawatha's main enemies are not foreign armies but hunger, evil magic and discord, and his principal achievement is reconciliation.

Both images also reveal the position of their authors. For Usmon Qo'chqor, writing in the period of the revival of national identity in Uzbekistan, Shiroq serves as a model of patriotism and as a link between modern readers and the ancient history of their land. Longfellow's poem, while sympathetic to its hero, has been criticised by scholars such as Trachtenberg (2004) and Deloria (1998) for presenting Native American culture through a romantic lens: the final canto, in which Hiawatha welcomes the missionaries and leaves his people, can be read as an acceptance of the replacement of indigenous culture. Thus, the American poem combines admiration for the hero with a sense of the inevitable end of his world, whereas the Uzbek poem affirms the continuity of national memory.

Despite these contrasts, the two heroes share essential features. Both act not for personal glory but for the community; both endure trials that demand extraordinary endurance; and both leave the world after fulfilling their mission. In Zhirmunsky's sense, this is a typological analogy: similar ideals

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of service and self-giving arise independently in different cultures because they answer universal human needs for protection, unity and moral example (Zhirmunsky, 1979).

6. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Shiroq and Hiawatha shows that the image of the people's hero can take different forms while expressing a common humanistic idea. Shiroq, in Usmon Qo'chqor's poem, is a tragic patriot of humble origin whose single act of self-sacrifice saves his people from foreign conquest. Hiawatha, in Longfellow's poem, is a semi-divine cultural hero who brings his people food, knowledge and peace and finally departs to the West. The first image emphasises devotion to the homeland; the second emphasises enlightenment and reconciliation.

Both works demonstrate how written poetry preserves and reinterprets folklore, turning ancient legends into instruments of national self-understanding. Further research may extend this comparison to other heroic figures of Uzbek and world literature, such as Tomaris and Alpomish, and examine the artistic means, including metre, imagery and narrative structure, through which poets construct the image of the hero.

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