



Article

The Role of Khorezm Bakhshis in The Development of Uzbek Epic Poetry

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Abstract: This article explores the historical and cultural significance of Khorezm bakhshis in shaping the epic tradition within Uzbek folklore. It traces the origins of bakhshi performance to ancient Khorezm, one of the cradles of early civilization, and examines the intertwining of spiritual, artistic, and oral traditions. Particular attention is paid to the figure of Oshiq Oydin Pir, considered the spiritual guide of bakhshis, whose influence permeates multiple epics such as Oshiq Najab, Xirmondali, and Oshiq Albani. Through a multidisciplinary approach—combining historical analysis, literary textual study, and ethnographic accounts—the research identifies how the oral poetic tradition of bakhshis, rooted in Zoroastrian rituals and later Sufi ideologies, contributed to the persistence and transformation of epic poetry in Central Asia. The study also examines the spiritual genealogy connecting Khorezm bakhshis to influential figures in Islamic mysticism and outlines their evolving societal roles. The findings underscore the integrative function of bakhshi art as a transmitter of historical memory, moral values, and communal identity. This research thus contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of Khorezm's oral epic performers in the construction of Uzbek national and cultural consciousness.

Keywords: Bakhshi performance, epic genre, the sacred book of Zoroastrianism "Avesto", the oldest bakhshi, Ashiq Aydin piri, ashqi bakhshis, "KitabidadamKorkut", Korkutota.

1. Introduction

Of course, it is necessary to link the emergence of bakhshi performance with the formation of the dastan genre. Some sources state that "in the 10th-11th centuries, dastans performed with the accompaniment of a dombra appeared. Such examples of the dastan emerged among the ancient nomadic Turkic tribes along the Caspian and Aral Seas. As the number of improvisers who created and performed epic poems increased, the traditions of mentorship began to emerge"[1], writes the historian T. Pardayev. If we approach the issue in connection with the formation of professional bakhshi art, we can agree with this opinion. However, various forms of bakhshi art in the form of songs, as mentioned above, date back to the period of primitive society. The formation and development of art in Khorezm, one of the centers of ancient culture, dates back to the pre-Christian era. In S.P. Tolstov's book "In Search of Ancient Khorezm Civilization," there are the following words that are important for the history of art: "On the walls of the ceremonial hall of the earthen fortress, in diamond-shaped cells, there are images of musicians. One of these paintings - an elegant yellow painting of a woman playing a harp - has been preserved intact. In the same room, a fragment of a pattern depicting a double drum in the form of a horn and a sand clock was also found. Under the "harp player's room," a fragment of a pattern depicting a person holding a curtain of a two-stringed instrument resembling a dombra was found, and in another room, an image of a woman playing with a mask was found. Similar images can be found in the Roman-era Syrian-

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Egyptian and partly in the art of the northern Black Sea region, in the images created in the Mediterranean oasis, as well as in the art of India and Iran. Thus, in these paintings, two artistic styles and two traditions are combined, but they underwent unique changes based on the art of ancient Khorezm" [2], [3].

2. Materials and Methods

This research adopts a qualitative historical-ethnographic approach to investigate the role of Khorezm bakhshis in the development of Uzbek epic poetry. Primary data were collected through the analysis of archival manuscripts, oral epics, and classical sources preserved in regional folklore repositories, such as the Folklore Department of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan. Textual comparisons were conducted across various dastans to identify recurring themes, symbolic structures, and mythological references linked to figures like Oshiq Oydin Pir and Korkut Ata.

It is natural that talented bakhshis emerged from among people who had achieved such high culture even before the Common Era. The creation of the sacred Zoroastrian book "Avesta" and the singing of its "goh"s by priests also laid the foundation for the emergence of priestly, shamanistic, and bakhshi professions. During the period of Zoroastrianism, there were fire temples in every Rustak (village, neighborhood), where priests promoted the book "Avesta." Perhaps for this reason, mythology related to the "Avesta" and "Shahnameh" always manifests itself in Khorezm epics. According to Bertels, in the first half of the 11th century, a Persian-speaking poet named Unsuriy lived and, along with writing lyrical poems, also created three epic poems. He lived and worked at the same time as Beruni. Al-Biruni translated his epics "Vamiq and Uzra," "Xing but-u surxbut" (White Idol and Red Idol), and "Shodbahru Aynul Hayot" into Arabic. Among these dastans, the work "Vomiq and Uzro" has survived to this day. Thus, as early as the 10th century, the creation of dastans based on various myths, their translation, and promotion were actively developed. The plot of many dastans created during that period has survived to this day with various changes. Of course, it's natural that there were talented individuals who could read and perform them. In Khorezm, boatmen and navigators on lakes and rivers recognize Prophet Noah as their spiritual guide. When blacksmiths begin work, they remember Prophet David. And the bakhshis of Khorezm revered Oshiq Oydin as their spiritual mentor.

3. Results and Discussion

This blessed person is also considered the spiritual guide of Turkmen bakhshis [4]. According to Tura Mirzaev, Mulla G'oyib is recognized as the spiritual guide of bards within the Samarkand epic tradition. There is also an epic of the same name about this person [5]. It should be noted that there was once a dastan called "Oshiq Oydin" [6].

Among Karakalpaks and Kazakhs, figures like Soppasli Sipira Jirov and in Azerbaijan, Korkut Ata, are also revered as the spiritual guide of bakhshis and zhyraus. The name of Oshiq Oydin Pir is often encountered in Khorezm epics such as "Xirmondali," "Oshiq Najab," and "Oshiq Alband." Especially in the dastan "Oshiq Najab," great attention is paid to the scope of his activities. Najab Oshiq served Oydin Pir and succeeded in receiving his dutor as a gift. In the epic "Khirmondali," Khirmondali, whom no one could defeat in terms of music and words, is defeated by Oshiq Oydin in an aitys. In the epic "Oshiq Alband," Oshiq Oydin Pir encounters Alband in the most critical moments of the epic hero's fate and gives him guidance and encouragement:

Tanisangiz nafas etgan piringman,
Oshiq'larning maqsadini bilurman,
Sango duo etganOydinpiringman,
Ko'pyig'lama, sevar yorni ko'rarsan [7],
and disappears from sight.

In the dastans, many legends are woven about this person, who was a mentor of lovers and bakhshis. It is said that the pir gives wine to the bakhshis who robbed his grave, and if a student drinks it, they become great musicians and bakhshis. In the manuscript of the dastan "Oshiq Mahmud," stored in the manuscript fund of the Folklore Department

of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan in inventory No. 1431, when Mahmudjon and Nigorkhan drowned and passed away, Oshiq Oydin pir revived them by playing the melody "Jon tana gir." Oshiq Oydin Pir traces back to a lineage connected with the first caliph Abu Bakr Siddiq. This series is a unique ideological movement, known as the Sufi series. This movement included Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Abul Hasan Haraqani, Abu Sayid Makhnai, Abdukholiq Gijduvani, Mansur Hallaj, Ahmad Yassavi, and Yusuf Hamadani. Precise information about this is written in the book "Tazkirat ul Husayin," where the sheikh of the mausoleum of Oshiq Oydin Pir is kept. The Sheikh's death occurred in 632 Hijri. The blessed city of Bustan has pilgrimage sites in both places in Diyarbakr and Baghdad." Bertels' book "Sufism and Sufi Literature" contains important information related to this period. In particular, in that book, he discusses the work "Avoriful-maorif" by an author named as-Suhrawardi, mentioning his great contribution to the development of literature and art. Emphasizing that he was a student of Gilani, he notes that he died in 1255 (AD) [8]. There is no doubt that this person was Oshiq Oydin pir. Because in the work "Tazkirat ul Husayn," which we mentioned above, it is said that the noble homeland of Ashug'iddin is Suhraward. Also, according to that book, the Sheikh had a work called "Awarif Sharif as Salahi Had," which was published in Mecca. In the epic "Oshiq Najab," it is mentioned that Oshiq Oydin lived in the city of Bostan, had 360 Sufis, and was 115 years old. Similar information is provided in "Khirmondali." There are also sources indicating that he lived for 16 years after the invasion of Genghis Khan. According to the latest data, the genealogy of Ashiq Aydin Pir is inextricably linked with the Iranian city of Suhraward. They were three relatives: Najib Suhrawardi, Sheikh Shahabiddin Abu Hafs Yahya Suhrawardi, Sheikh Shahabiddin Abu Hafs Umar Suhrawardi, and Najib Suhrawardi was their teacher [9]. According to an-Nasawi, Khwarazmshah Muhammad's prestige rose, he began to undertake grand undertakings, and it became known that he would achieve his goal of marching on Baghdad. To dissuade him from this goal, Shihabiddin as-Suhrawardi, known as the most respected sheikh of sheikhs, was sent as an ambassador to Khorezm. However, the Khwarazmshah received the sheikh with disdain. He didn't even allow her to sit when she entered his office after waiting in line for quite a while. Finally, the sheikh tells him that he wants to tell him about the Prophet's hadiths. The Khwarazmshah agreed to this, descended to his knees, and listened to the sheikh. Through hadith, the sheikh encourages him to abandon the intention of waging war. However, these efforts were in vain. Finally, he marched on Baghdad. However, his army is disorganized due to the whims of nature. Impressed by this, the Khwarazmshah regretted not following Suhrawardi's words and invited the sheikh to return to Khwarazm as an ambassador [10]. Shortly after, Genghis Khan's invasion occurred. It is very likely that the poor reception of Sheikh Shihabiddin Suhrawardi by the Khwarazmshah, the fulfillment of the Sheikh's prophecy, and the Khwarazmshah's humiliated death caused Oshiq Oydin's prestige among the people to rise to the rank of pir. Umar Suhrawardi's son, Sheikh Zayniddin (Zayniddin Bobo), was also a religious and public figure. He also came to Tashkent in the same field. This movement, known as the Sufi Sufi order of Suhrawardi, founded by Umar Suhrawardi, was formed on the basis of the ascetic school in Mesopotamia, and its members expanded due to artisans and educated intellectuals. The Suhrawardis were Sunni theologians who promoted moderate Sufi views. They recognized the inextricable link between secular and divine knowledge. In his 63-chapter work "Awarif ul-Maarif," Umar Suhrawardi writes that "secular knowledge is like milk, and divine knowledge is its cream." His works have been published in Arabic, Persian, German, and English. If one pays attention, Oshiq Oydin is known as the Qambar of the pir bakhshis, and Bobo as the pir of musicians. In the 90s of the last century, holding a competition of Oshik-bakhshis in the Vos fortress, where the tomb of Oshik Aydin Pir is located, became a tradition. In 1991, an international competition of bakhshis was held here. At this event, many bakhshis from Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan visited the tomb of the great spiritual mentor. In particular, bakhshis from Khorezm, Tashauz, and Karakalpak took an active part in this event [11]. The main character, active in all branches of the epic "Kitobi Dadam Korkut," is Korkut-ata. Different scholars have expressed different opinions about

this image. According to V.V. Bartold, he is not a hero, but an elder of the clan. It embodies folk wisdom [12]. Korkut-ata is a prophetic bakhshi and a legendary figure. In turn, he is a sorcerer, a shaman [13]. Therefore, Korkut-ata is not the main character of the book. However, based on his thoughts, appearance, all events, and his role in the fate of the characters, he plays the role of a hero who unites the entire work [14]. The great historian, in his work "Shajarai Tarokima," mentions Korkud-ata in 14 places. According to him, the son of Karakhuja, Korkud Inal Yavi, was the vizier of the khan, lived 295 years, served as a vizier during the reign of three khans, and performed extraordinary deeds. The entire Oghuz people submitted to him, and if a child was born, he would certainly come and give him a name [15]. According to T. Mirzaev, the heroic songs that make up the Salor Kazan cycle belonged to Turkic tribes who came from Eastern Turkestan, and in the 11th century, during the Seljuk period, this cycle spread to Asia Minor and the Caucasus, becoming part of "Kitobi Dadam Korkut" [16]. With the rise of the "Gorogly" cycle, the dastan about Korkud-ata was forgotten: by the beginning of the 19th century, based on the traditions of copying the epic "Kitobi Dadam Korkud" into written versions, the dastans of the "Gorogly" cycle began to be recorded. Kh.G. Korogly, who conducted serious research on Korkud-ata, in his article "Shaman, Commander-in-Chief, Ozan" (evolutionary image of dede - Korkuta) confirms the presence of shamanistic, ozan (bakhshi) qualities in Korkud-ata's personality, in turn, expresses doubt about his being a commander (commander-in-chief) [17]. In Kazakh-Kyrgyz myths, Korkut Ata is interpreted as the image of a shaman. Ethnographer Ch.Ch.Valikhanov connects the motif of Korkut-ata's escape from death with shamanism. In this legend of the Kyrgyz shamans, Korkut Ata is recognized as the first shaman. In the book "History of Dost Sultan," a written monument in Central Asia, Korkut Ata is described as the spiritual guide of bakhshis. For this reason, Kazakh bakhshis, before beginning the dastan, ask him for help, plead with him. In ancient legends, Korkud Ata is depicted as a shaman, while in later legends created under the influence of Islam, he was elevated to the rank of a saint. A. Divaev confirms the existence of a legend related to the toponym Khorkhut in the Kazanli region. According to him, Khorkhut's grave was preserved until 1880, after which it was washed away by the Syr Darya [18]. Abulgazi Bahadur-khan describes Korkud-ata as a wise vizier, while in the works of Rashididdin he is given in the form of bakhshi, Ozon. The term "ozon" is also found among the Turkmens. In one of Makhtumkuli's poems, there are such lines:

Davlat ela galar bo'lsa,
Boshdan burun o'zon galar.
Davlat eldan getar bo'lsa,
Mulla bilan to'zon galar [19].

The term "Ozon" was also used in Khorezm in the past. Abulgazi also mentions Korkud-ata as a military commander, and this information arose as a result of mixing the names of two persons. In addition, there is a clan of the same name among the Oghuz [20].

4. Conclusion

The idea of these two persons is also found in the works of K.A. Inostranov. Moreover, A.N. Kononov was one of the first to determine that the commander's name is written as Qirqud. In folklore works, Korkud-shaman, sorcerer, healer, and his connection to Islam are noted only formally. In historical works, this person is emphasized as one of the holy people of the Muslim religion. In this article by Kh.G. Korogly, issues related to the activities of Korkud-ata are analyzed in a wide range. All the above-mentioned details can embody the full image of the image of Korkud-ata. At the end of the article, the monument "Kitobi Dadam Qo'rqud," widespread among the western Oghuz, is mentioned. In all myths and legends, Korkud is embodied as an evolutionary image of a shaman, an ozon, a statesman, an advisor to the ruler, a wise mentor of the entire Oghuz people. His activity as a bakhshi has never been lost. In turn, there is no reason to search for its historical prototype.

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