

## **Internal medial formulas in the Khorezm epic ‘Gorogly**

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**Abstract.** This article, drawing on relevant examples from the cycle of dastans of the Khorezm epic Gorogly, highlights the ideological and compositional essence of internal medial formulas. All manifestations of internal medial formulas are examined in a systematic manner.

**Keywords:** epic, dastan, bakhshi, internal medial formulas, Gorogly, Girat, “magic formulas,” mythology, shamanism.

Continuing the discussion on traditional formulas in the Khorezm epic Gorogly, namely their examples in the form of external medial formulas [8], we shall now analyze their internal variety, which likewise plays an important role in the structure of the dastans.

When performing a dastan, the bakhshi, in order to maintain contact with the audience, makes use not only of external medial formulas but also of various internal medial formulas. These are employed to reveal the true character of the figures acting within the dastan, to highlight their active participation in the course of events, to awaken in the listeners a positive perception of the ideal hero, and to shape their attitude toward his deeds as exemplary. Their extensive use testifies to the mastery of the bakhshi. Without relying on internal medial formulas, the narrative structure would not be able to fully reach the audience or arouse their interest in the events taking place within the work. Therefore, the performer turns to formulas that, in traditional form, had been employed by his predecessor bakhshis for an effective depiction of unfolding events. “Every bakhshi undoubtedly makes use, in his individual creativity, of the material that for many centuries has served as a tradition and a means” [5, p. 218]. For, as it has been noted, “The essence of oral epic

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creativity is based on the inseparability of tradition and improvisation. And formulas therein appear as an integral part of the unity of the dastan's language" [3, p. 175].

The internal medial formulas to which we refer primarily serve as an important means of illuminating the actions of the leading figures in the dastan. The medial formulas associated with these figures appear in the structure of the dastan in the following forms.

***a) Formulas that define the characters' images or describe the objects belonging to them***

With the beginning of events in every literary work, attention is given to its leading figure. In dastans, this becomes even more prominent. For this reason, the titles of nearly all dastans are associated with the name of the main hero.

After reciting the initial formula, the bakhshi proceeds to the portrait of the central character. The epic Gorogly likewise follows this tradition. Since the main hero embodies the beloved and revered image of Gorogly among the people, the bakhshi elevates this figure to an ideal level, portraying him with the highest degree of pathos. The portrait of Gorogly is repeatedly mentioned in many versions of the epic; however, the formulas defining his image have undergone only minor changes. In the first version of the epic, his portrait is given as follows: "Handsome, with a height of two and a half gaz, a breadth of one gaz, with curled mustaches, and eyes burning with fire — a formidable youth..." (Manuscript, p. 45). In another place: "Mounted on a horse ready to soar into the sky, with a height of two gaz, a breadth of one and a half gaz, with curled mustaches, and eyes burning with fire — a youth..." (Manuscript, p. 49). In a third depiction, the formula is repeated with slight variation: "Riding a horse that, if struck to the ground, would soar into the sky, with radiant eyes, able to lift an ox on each shoulder without effort, with curled mustaches — a formidable youth..." (Manuscript, p. 32). It is evident that, in portraying the main hero to familiarize the audience with his appearance, the bakhshi places primary emphasis on the might and stately physique of this figure.

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A depiction of the main hero in such a manner is characteristic of the bakhshis of the Turkic peoples. The formula cited above, with certain variations, is also found in the Turkmen Gorogly: "...with a chest like a shield, thick black eyebrows, curled mustaches, a radiant face, eyes burning with fire, of medium height and broad shoulders — if you were to place a seven-year-old ox upon his back, he would easily carry it away, a truly valiant youth" [1, p. 465].

The origins of these fixed formulas share a common foundation, for the bakhshis performing the epics of the Turkic peoples, beyond their own nation, have from ancient times maintained among themselves the traditions of mentorship and apprenticeship.

In any epic, the leading figure acting as the central character does not act alone, but possesses a miraculous weapon, a battle horse, and other attributes, the depiction of which likewise employs numerous medial formulas. These formulas help listeners of the dastan to penetrate more deeply into the essence of the events. Upon reaching maturity, Gorogly becomes the owner of Girat, and later of weapons in the form of a bow and a sword. For this purpose, he travels to Isfahan, where he meets skilled masters. They present him with a bow that no one before had been able to lift: "Gorogly, with a single effort, drew it to his chest... it is said that the ends of the bow met each other" (Manuscript, p. 45).

In turn, Gorogly becomes the owner of the "Isfahan sword." In many parts of the epic, descriptions of the bow and arrows, as well as of the sword, occur frequently. The characterization of this weapon is also found in the Turkmen and Azerbaijani versions. In both versions the bow is mentioned; however, in the Turkmen version the sword is replaced by a spear, while in the Azerbaijani version it is defined as a "Misri sword."

The description of the hero's weapons is conveyed through specific formulas which, in the end, begin to arouse the listeners' interest. The depiction of the horse's virtues — its saddling, stature, and movement — likewise fully complements the image of the main hero. With regard to Girat, the following portrayals are employed:

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“With a single leap, Girat flew over the fortress wall and disappeared from sight” (Gorogly, p. 342); “Girat, gathering all his strength, soared like a falcon” (Gorogly, p. 115); “With every stride Girat covered four gaz, with every gallop forty gaz of land, scattering white foam from his mouth, pricking his ears like pens, raising his tail like a banner, and running tirelessly as though toward Mount Qaf” (Gorogly, p. 60). These descriptions are repeated almost without change by the bakhshi even when Avazkhan arrives riding Girat. There also exist fixed formulas that are pronounced specifically when saddling the horse and preparing for the journey: “They saddled their horses tightly, firmly, so that they could not be taken, could not be overcome, securely and steadfastly” (Gorogly, p. 101). Such formulas, describing the main hero and the objects belonging to him, are widely used by performing bakhshis. “However, their introduction into the work at a particular place and in the proper context is linked to the individual talent of the specific performer–folk poet” [9, p. 256].

The formulas depicting the leading figures participating in the work, regardless of their conventional use in a stereotypical manner across a broad repertoire, are shaped by the bakhshi according to his own mastery. They are performed in a lofty, pathos-filled spirit, allowing the listeners to experience artistic and aesthetic delight from such portrayals, while also instilling in them boundless respect and reverence toward these figures.

***b) Formulas describing the actions of the characters***

Since, in the process of performing a dastan, the main factor determining the development of events is the central hero, the bakhshi pays special attention to the activity of this figure and employs every means possible to awaken a lively interest in him among the listeners. One such means is the description of the hero’s actions.

The bakhshi strives for such a vivid and full-blooded portrayal of the epic hero’s actions that, if he possesses the requisite mastery, he is able to capture the attention of all listeners. The actions of the dastan’s heroes and their struggles are depicted not in brief form, but in detail; only when performed through a particular

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system and with the aid of medial formulas does it become possible to awaken the listeners' interest in the events. Therefore, the bakhshi, according to his abilities, employs these formulas, resorting to figurative expressions.

In the epic Gorogly, such formulas also occupy an important place. In most of these formulas, words characteristic of movement are used, such as “Urho-ur, surho-sur,” along with toponyms denoting space and various onyms: “After Gorogly finished speaking, Girat crossed mountains and rocks, lakes and deserts, dust and storm, gardens and wastelands, and gradually arrived in the land of Chamlibel” (Gorogly, p. 94). At times, a modified form of this stylistic structure is given: “Bos-ho-bos, sur-ho-sur, passing through several stations, over hills and ridges, lakes and deserts, he reached the Turkmen steppe” (Gorogly, p. 134).

The words employed in these formulas in paired form, yet at the same time denoting opposite directions, serve as highly effective expressive devices for imprinting in the listener's mind the hero's swift movement and his various adventures. At the same time, they are close to rhymed prose, which imparts a special resonance and dynamism to the speech.

Formulas of this kind are encountered in abundance in written versions. Naturally, although these versions are read within a limited audience and without musical accompaniment, they have not completely lost the features characteristic of folk creativity in its oral variants. Medial formulas are distinctive of the written style; at times they are imbued with a religious spirit, fulfilling an important function in lending the text resonance and effectiveness.

Throughout the events of the epic, the hero and his companions move along different routes, carrying out swift actions that consist of relentless struggle and rivalry. The depiction in the dastans of the confrontation between two opposing figures likewise finds its effective expression in specific formulas.

The bakhshi strives to depict these episodes with special pathos. In such medial formulas, battles are described in a highly hyperbolic manner, often compared to the wars of historically renowned commanders: “Crying out the name of Allah like a

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roaring lion, seizing like a tiger, they rushed upon the enemy as cats fall upon mice; Ur-ho-ur, qir-ho-qir, the fighting went on. Such a war that shook the heavens and the sky had not occurred since the time of Alexander” (Gorogly, p. 187). In many places of the epic, modified versions of this structure occur: “Taking his spear in hand, he launched into battle; blood flowed like blood, water like water. Dust rose, turning everything into darkness; man could not be distinguished from man, as if in a grave. According to the elders, such a battle had not been seen since the time of Rustam of the dastans” (Gorogly, p. 345).

The performance of internal medial formulas from the structure of the dastans, in a highly hyperbolic form and at the same time in rhymed prose, at the highest level of pathos, brings the events of the dastan to life and strengthens the listeners’ positive attitude toward the main hero, contributing to his idealization. Factors of this kind possess great artistic and aesthetic value in attracting the audience to the essence of the unfolding events and in preventing them, even for a moment, from feeling boredom. Formulas of this type are also frequently encountered in versions of the epic that spread among other Turkic peoples, whose genetic origins are of a common character.

### **c) Formulas included in dialogue**

The development of events depicted in the dastan begins with the hero’s struggle toward certain aims against his adversary and concludes with the outcome of this confrontation. This feature is characteristic mainly of the heroic epic or the heroic-romantic dastans. The epic Gorogly belongs to the latter type of dastan, and therefore it abounds in episodes connected with battles and duels. These battle episodes fully refute such one-sided opinions as that “the heroes of the Khorezm dastans are not inclined to participate in the defense of the homeland or in physical contests” [6, p. 65].

Formulas that enter into dialogue and define the conflict situation are found in the dastan Bazirgan. Such formulas in the Khorezm dastans are presented in poetic

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form. Regardless of the form in which the dialogues are rendered, their structure abounds in stable word formulas.

**Gorogly:**

Today you did not recognize who I am,  
You failed to test the valor of a brave man,  
Your corpse will lie in the desert unseen,  
Pay your tithe and be gone, Bazirgan!

**Bazirgan:**

Today I did not know who you were,  
Never have I set eyes on a man like you before.  
In open battle I have never perished,  
And Bazirgan pays no tithe unless he is slain.

I shall take the fire from your very eyes,  
A true youth does not turn back from his word.  
Mountains will tremble from Gorogly's strike—  
Pay your tithe and be gone, Bazirgan!

— If I spill not your blood, I am dishonored;  
If I seize not your fairy-maiden, I am left in regret;  
If I do not sever your head and lay waste to your land,  
Bazirgan shall never retreat to Seistan!

(Gorogly, p. 366)

Such lines from these poetic excerpts as “I shall take the fire from your very eyes”, “From the mighty strike of Gorogly even the mountains tremble”, “I am dishonored if I do not spill your blood”, “If I do not sever your head and lay waste to



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your land” are considered the most effective formulas employed in dialogues, and they are also actively used in verbal duels found in other specimens of the epic.

Thus, the dialogues—verbal duels—employed in the dastans are also carried out through specific formulas, which perform mediative functions in intensifying the conflict of the narrative to its utmost degree, imparting to it a fierce character. At the same time, they fulfill an important artistic and aesthetic role by drawing the listeners’ attention to the events of the dastan and enhancing their interest.

***c) Formulas defining depictions of natural scenes***

Any artistic work, in depicting characters acting within a certain space, seeks to reveal their essence against the backdrop of nature and within a landscape. Likewise, the bakhshi performing a dastan, while narrating the activities of the characters, often moves the events from one location to another along with them. On the other hand, dastans—especially their romantic type—are closely connected with love adventures, so events frequently unfold in gardens, flowerbeds, along riverbanks, or in luxurious estates. This circumstance naturally compels the bakhshi to create vivid depictions of natural scenes.

Most of the events in the epic Gorogly also take place in Eram Garden, on Mount Kuh-i-Qaf, in Sarchaman Garden, in Gorogly’s palace, and in other marvelous locations. As a result, there emerges a remarkable depiction of the natural landscape. These descriptions lend the events a special sense of mystery, attracting the listeners’ attention and awakening in them a feeling of love for beauty and goodness. Naturally, this aspect is largely connected to the bakhshi’s skill and talent. Therefore, the depiction of natural scenes varies in prominence across different dastans. The portrayal of the landscape is closely related to the location where the events unfold.

In the epic Gorogly, such depictions often appear when describing the dwelling of the peri (fairy), a paradise-like garden where princesses reside surrounded by forty attendants. For example, in the episode “Yunus Peri,” Eram Garden, the dwelling of Ogha Yunus Peri, is described as follows: “At one moment, one could see, in the



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middle of the mountain, water rushing turbulently from both sides, springs surging and gushing, nightingales singing chirp by chirp, emerging from a place like this” (Gorogly, p. 62).

In the episode “Marriage of Avaz,” the garden, which serves as the dwelling of the daughter of the Georgian ruler Lak, is depicted as follows:

“...as one enters the garden, nightingales sing, cotton plants release their fragrance, doves recite praises, springs flow in every direction, flowers bloom, and the season appears to be spring” (Gorogly, p. 107).

When such depictions are employed, nature appears in its wholeness. Naturally, when flowers are mentioned, the narrative also introduces babbling spring water, nightingale songs, and cooing doves, creating a specific structural pattern. This is most often observed in expressing the emotional states of the characters, as well as the situational context of locations connected with love relationships in the dastan. Each bakhshi approaches these formulas according to his own measure. In the dastans performed by Bola Bakhshi, these formulas are infrequent and usually presented briefly. Among the representatives of the Northern dastan school, in particular in the dastans performed by Tursun Bakhshi, there is a more active use of formulas related to the depiction of nature. The second example mentioned above refers to Tursun Bakhshi and immediately attracts attention due to its variety.

**d) “Magical formulas”**

Although the examples from the Gorogly cycle emerged relatively later in their formation compared to other heroic dastans, they contain numerous episodes associated with archaic epics, mythology, and magic. In the epic Gorogly, these episodes carry a religious undertone, appearing in the form of appeals to Khizr, spiritual mentors, and often to Allah.

Epic heroes sometimes face serious trials, and realizing their inability to overcome these obstacles by physical means, they seek assistance from a protective power. Thanks to the strength of this patron or Allah, in the context of magic, they manage to find a way out of the critical situation. The formulas associated with such

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episodes have scarcely survived in the oral versions, which is connected with changes in socio-political life in the 20th century.

In the episode The Old Woman, Gorogly, in search of the kidnapped Girat, sets out on foot and, becoming fatigued, "...reached the riverbank, performed a full ablution, offered two rak'ahs of prayer in gratitude, faced the qibla, and, remembering his spiritual mentor, recited a supplication" (Manuscript, p. 81). After this, Ali Shahimardan suddenly appears, places him on his horse, and carries him to his destination.

Another episode is presented in the dastan Avazkhan. In it, Gorogly sets out on a journey to rescue Avazkhan from captivity and also experiences hardships. An old woman appears before him, breaking a vessel against the wall and spreading flames around. Deeply astonished, he then recites a prayer: "Algaraz Goroglybek." After reciting this supplication, Khwaja Khizr immediately appears, recites Surah Yasin, and the fire is extinguished. The old woman strikes another bottle against the wall, and the entire place is flooded with water. Once again, Khwaja Khizr recites Surah Tabarak, and the danger disappears (Manuscript, p. 141).

With the aid of such a protective power, Gorogly achieves his goals. Similar scenes occur frequently. Before them, phrases are often recited such as, "Zor-zor, he wept and recited a supplication," "Astonished and bewildered, he recited a supplication," and "Remembering his spiritual mentor, he implored God in a supplication." At this moment, a figure in the form of Khizr or Ali appears, resolving the problematic situation. In the oral versions of these episodes, they unfold without a direct appeal to divine power, which itself suddenly appears in situations where the hero finds himself in a hopeless position.

In the Eastern Uzbek version, particularly in the dastan Khush Keldi, such episodes are abundant. In these dastans, Gorogly, after reciting a prayer, transforms or accomplishes his goal by rubbing his face with feathers provided by the chiltans [10, p. 110]. These magical episodes and the associated formulas are, to some extent,

connected with shamanism. For example, Turkmen bakhshis, in turn, practiced healing and spellcasting.

The word bakhshi “in the folk context also means ‘sorcerer’” [7, p. 40]. At the same time, the transition from one form to another—that is, the aspect of transformation—is connected with mythology and shamanism. Notably, the heroes of the dastan often use formulas in the form of appeals to the chiltans and erans before their transformation. Tuvan shamans also addressed the erans before performing this act [4, p. 23]. The origins of the phenomenon associated with transformation have, to some extent, been preserved in the Khorezm epic Gorogly. In the epic, Gorogly sometimes changes his appearance not by reciting a prayer but simply through ordinary disguise. This reflects the fact that, over time, the events in the epic underwent significant evolution and acquired a more realistic character.

Thus, even in the narration of magical episodes in the dastans, certain formulas are invoked through which the listeners’ attention is drawn into a magical world. The origins of these formulas are primarily rooted in mythology and shamanism, later incorporating religious doctrines. As society developed and people’s worldview evolved, these episodes acquired a more realistic character, losing their original essence. In oral versions, their manifestations have been significantly reduced. Nevertheless, in any case, as one of the factors defining the imaginative quality inherent in folklore, they occasionally appear, imparting a magical spirit to the work.

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