

## THE IMAGERY OF FORTY WARRIORS IN THE "GOROGLY" EPIC SERIES

Shomirza Turdimov

Professor at the Institute of Uzbek  
Language, Literature and Folklore,

Doctor of Philological Sciences

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20609832>**Abstract**

The article discusses the history, composition, interpretations, and semantics of the "forty young warriors" (qirq yigit) imagery in the "Gorogly" epic series, as well as their functional role within the narrative. Particular attention is paid to the position of the forty warriors within the system of other traditional epic characters.

**Keywords:** forty warriors, "Gorogly" cycle, character/imagery, travel bowl (safar kosasi), epic, tradition.

**Introduction**

The forty warriors hold a distinct and significant position within the character hierarchy of the "Gorogly" epic cycle. In most parts of these epics, the forty warriors are mentioned alongside complementary terms such as the "forty-six host of heroes" (qirq olti gala botir), or in other instances, the "ninety-six bahodirs" [2, 11] or "ninety-six begs and twenty-nine commanders" [1]. Each of these terms carries its own specific semantic connotation. For example, it is sung:

"Avazkhon gathered his weapons of war, bound the seventeen-span diamond steel to his waist, prepared his coat of mail and shield, and mounted the back of Girot. He took the forty warriors with him, and made the ninety-six bahodirs his companions..." [2, 11]

**Literature Review**

Every triumph, honor, and victory achieved by Gorogly—as well as any "painful" word uttered regarding his shortcomings or dignity—equally concerns and reflects upon the forty warriors. Upon closer examination, the structured organization of the forty warriors, their assembly, their rights, and their artistic representation within the epics reveal the presence of a distinct epic code or law (yasoq). When these perspectives are synthesized into a single system, the entire framework of this yasoq manifests vividly before us. At the beginning of the epic "Avazkhon", performed by Muhammadqul Jonmurod ogli Polkan, the bard addresses Gorogly's forty warriors:

"Is it any less of a privilege for you, forty warriors,  
To gather brave men from every tribe,  
To pour wine into the Chinese bowl,  
To love fairies instead of mortal maidens,  
And to dynamically wear robes of every color?" [2, 11]

Speaking on behalf of the forty warriors, Sahmon Polvon turns to Goroglybek and says, "May God protect you from humiliation in this world," while expressing the collective, ultimate grievance of the warriors: "No offspring was born from a brave man like you to inherit your throne; this is the one missing element among the forty warriors." This collective lamentation is voiced precisely in accordance with the strict requirements of this epic code [2, 11].

**Research Methodology**

This article examines the history, structural composition, interpretations, semantics, and narrative roles of the forty warriors imagery within the "Gorogly" epics. Special attention is directed toward analyzing the position of the forty warriors within the broader system of traditional epic characters.

### Analysis and Results

Although the "forty warriors" are frequently mentioned in the "Gorogly" epics, most narratives do not enumerate all of them by name. Traditionally, it has become standard practice to explicitly name prominent warriors such as Kholdorkhon, Saqmon, Asad, Shodmon Mergan, Tolak Botir, Doniyor Oталиq, Temirkhon, Chaman ogli Olbegi, and Chaqqon ogli Safobek. Nevertheless, when we inquired about the forty warriors of Gorogly from Shodmon Bakhshi—a contemporary representative of the Sherabad school of epic poetry—he provided the following comprehensive list:

"What I have heard and learned from my masters, Qodir Bakhshi, Qora Bakhshi, Khushvaqt Bakhshi, and Chori Bakhshi, regarding the names of Gorogly's forty warriors is as follows:

1. Hasankhon from Vayangan. 2. Esan the Mighty from Istanbul. 3. Avazkhon from Georgia. 4. Asad Govaz (the heavy-set) from Asqar. 5. Kholdorkhon from Chin-Mochin (China). 6. Bashir Beldor from Balkh. 7. Tolak from Gumbirgon. 8. Konak from the Manghit tribe. 9. Mulla Botir from the Moytan tribe. 10. Kenja Chotir from the Kenagas tribe. 11. Habash from India. 12. Abash from Kashmir. 13. Ruslan the Wild from Rum. 14. Jaqqi from the Jalayir tribe. 15. Isoh from Isfahan. 16. Nortoy Kor from the Nayman tribe. 17. Ashir the Great from Adash. 18. Adash from the Arabs. 19. Qodir from Qandahar. 20. Sodir from the Saroy tribe. 21. Zoyid from Zangivor. 22. Khoyit from the land of Habash. 23. Toqmor from Turkistan. 24. Choqmor from the Chuvash tribe. 25. Shoxil from Shabiston. 26. Xaqqul from the Xunxor land. 27. Tirkash from the city of Tub. 28. Arkash from the Armenian land. 29. Doqqi from Dagestan. 30. Joqqi from Jazoyir (Algeria). 31. Tora from Turkistan. 32. Jora from the Juz tribe. 33. Dosmamat from the Dormon tribe. 34. Samat from Susamil. 35. Shodmon Mergan from the Qipchoq tribe. 36. Khudoybergan from the Kazakhs. 37. Yusufbek from Chambil. 38. Toyir Kekni (the proud-walking) from the Tajiks. 39. Boqi from Bolquvon. 40. Soqi from Chiltanbel. 41. Hasan Kolbar from Mount Qof. 42. Hasan Chopson from Mount Qof. 43. Hasan Yakdasta from Mount Qof. 44. Yusubbek from Chambil. 45. Uspbek from Chambil. 46. Qoraxon from Chambil."

"This is what is meant by 'Gorogly's forty-six host of heroes'," explained Shodmon Bakhshi [4]. He further clarified that, according to tradition, the core forty warriors are joined by Gorogly's three Hasans (Hasan Kolbar, Hasan Chopson, Hasan Yakdasta), alongside Avazkhon, Hasankhon, and Soqibulbul, collectively making up the forty-six host of heroes.

At the beginning of the epic "Jahongir" [6, 7], performed by Qora Bakhshi Umirov—another major figure of the Sherabad epic school—it is narrated that when Gorogly turned to the Chiltans (forty invisible holy spirits) in desperate hope of having a child, the spirits took pity on him and blessed him, saying: "You shall select forty young warriors from forty different cities, and these warriors will be your devoted children until Judgement Day." The epic explains the origin of the forty warriors through the following verses:

"...Over this you shall wear your coat of mail and shield,  
You shall gather forty warriors from forty cities.  
Lend your ear to this counsel, my sultan,  
You shall cherish all forty of them as your own children..." [3, 154]

The bard proceeds to detail the names and origins of these forty warriors in a similar manner, matching the sequence and locations provided by Shodmon Bakhshi. These epic passages illuminate and solidify the collective regional understanding of the "Gorogly" cycle.



The data provided by Shodmon Bakhshi perfectly aligns with the traditional knowledge preserved by Qora Bakhshi and other Sherabad bards regarding the composition of the forty warriors.

The lists provided by Qora Bakhshi and Shodmon Bakhshi represent the structural composition of the forty warriors as maintained within the epic traditions of Southern Uzbekistan, specifically the Sherabad school. It is worth noting that most names are delivered using stylistic alliteration linking the name to the geographic location (e.g., "...Qandahordan Qodirni, Saroy eldan Sodirni, Zangivordan Zoyidni..."). This exact structural approach is observable across other epic schools as well. For instance, in the epic "Intizor" performed by Fozil Shoir, the narrative describes:

"Look, here comes Hasanjon, riding atop Majdumkok, shining brightly; beside him travels his companion Yusufkhon on a black horse; out of respect for Avazjon, look, the outstanding shooters Asad and Shodmon have arrived, and Kholdorkhon came behind them, making his horse prance. Newly arrived at Gorogly's side, Eshmurod and Toshmurod assembled, and those who joined later—Jonazar, Xonnazar, Eshmirza, and Xushmirza—all arrived."

The characters described as "those who joined later" do not exist within the traditional fixed enumeration. This indicates that the bard improvised (*badiha*) to round out the count on the spot, demonstrating that these specific names do not strictly correspond to the formalized system of the Sherabad masters.

The characters within the ranks of the forty warriors are uniquely distinguished by their specific traits, virtues, martial skills, and individual capacities. For instance, in the epic "The Sentencing of Avazkhon to Death", when Bektosh Arab inquires, "Where did you learn this knowledge of military strategy and warfare?", Avazkhon replies:

"If I may declare my master to you,  
I learned the art of combat from Gorogly" [7, 175].

This indicates that the warriors primarily received their foundational training in military arts directly from Gorogly himself. The text continues, describing how other skills were acquired from specific specialized warriors:

"To completely crush the enemy to the ground,  
And to ensure the fired arrow unerringly hits its mark,  
Was learned from the auspicious Kholdorkhon."

Among the warriors, Kholdorkhon possessed the longest shooting range, and his arrows were the most precise.

"To restrain horses with six flags,  
To herd livestock across the pastures of Mount Asqar,  
And to ambush enemies from nine stages away,  
I learned from Chaman ogli Olbegi."

Chaman ogli Olbegi was exceptionally strategic; he could anticipate enemy movements in advance and discreetly block all their potential escape routes and turns.

"To charge directly into the enemy ranks,  
To deliver swift punishment upon sighting the foe,  
And to consistently seize their wealth and livestock as plunder,  
I learned from Chaqqon ogli Safobek."

Chaqqon ogli Safobek specialized in surprise maneuvers, capturing enemy assets before they could detect his presence.

"All of them embarked on journeys across the world,  
These words come from a warrior of the arena like me,  
Having studied under masters, I have always risked my life,  
I received my education from Asad and Shodmon."



Asad and Shodmon were renowned as peerless, legendary marksmen. These highly specialized attributes of individual warriors within the forty allowed them to play specific operational roles based on the narrative needs of different epics within the cycle. For example, in the epic "Malika Ayyor", when a marksman who cannot afford to miss a single shot is required for a critical task, Asad and Shodmon are specifically selected. Ahmad Sardor and Kholdor Mahram are also highlighted within these ranks.

In the version of "Avazkhon" performed by Polkan Shoir, the departure of the forty warriors is depicted with Ahmad Sardor leading the martial column:

"With his stallion prancing underneath,  
While the onlookers watched in awe and fear,  
The white banner of Goroglybek hoisted high,  
Ahmad charged forward, making the ground shake,  
The standard-bearer Ahmad set forth;  
The sharp-eyed Shodmon set forth..."

Here, Ahmad Sardor is distinctly designated as the standard-bearer (tug' boshi). The epics note that the forty warriors routinely split into two wings of twenty men each; Ahmad Sardor commanded one wing, while Kholdor Mahram led the other. The marksmen Asad and Shodmon operated within Ahmad Sardor's wing, which is why they are frequently mentioned alongside him and execute his commands without question.

### Conclusion

When examining the names of the forty warriors and the host of heroes, it becomes apparent that almost all of them appear alongside permanent epithets. Consider the following formulations: Ahmad Sardor – the elder of the Turkmen people, the collar of the sable robe, the standard-bearer; Kholdorkhon Mahram; Sahmon Polvon; Asad and Shodmon – the sharp-eyed marksmen; Tolak Botir; Doniyor Otaliq; alongside Hasan Kolbar, Hasan Chopson, and Hasan Yakdasta.

The forty warriors gathered daily at the teahouse in Chambil. Each warrior maintained a strictly defined position and specific structural duty. Everyone adhered flawlessly to the established rules and protocol of the assembly. Indeed, a number of epics begin precisely with a breach of this protocol by characters like Avazkhon or Hasankhon, or with the moment Gorogly presents the travel bowl (safar kosasi) to the forty warriors to issue a formal challenge. In the version of "Avazkhon" performed by Yusuf Ota Qosimov, Gorogly addresses the forty warriors in the teahouse:

"...Whoever safely brings back Avazkhon,  
I shall let him ride this Girot of mine.  
Gorogly says, I have wept and yearned bitterly,  
Is there any volunteer from the right or the left wing?"

Gorogly repeated these words three times, turning the bowl, yet no voice emerged to declare, "I will go." On the fourth turn, the sixteen-year-old Hasankhon stood up before the forty warriors with his golden plume on his head, took the bowl from Gorogly's hand, drank its contents completely, and declared, "I shall go":

"Your son Hasan has been waiting for you,  
Send me forth with your blessings as my companion,  
I shall journey to confront Xunxor,  
I have now volunteered for this task right here..."

The epic elements of the "teahouse," the "seating protocol in the teahouse," the "travel bowl," and other ritualistic practices each possess profound symbolic weight. These structural components and their symbolic-metaphorical meanings warrant separate, specialized research. Similarly, individual warriors like the marksmen Asad and Shodmon or Tolak Botir deserve



targeted academic attention based on their unique attributes, actions, narrative functions, and contributions across the entire epic series.

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