

## THE HARMONY OF HISTORICAL TRUTH AND LEGENDARY HEROISM (On the Example of the Epic “Oychinor”)

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**Annotation:** This article discusses the historical roots of the epic *Oychinor*, as well as the real individuals, events, and places reflected in it, and their artistic interpretations within the epic.

**Keywords:** bakhshi, epic, motif, historical basis, real personality.

Among the priceless and rich heritage of Uzbek oral folk creativity, the epic *Oychinor* occupies a special, inseparable, and firmly established place. This epic work not only belongs to the golden fund of Uzbek folklore, but is also valued as an important monument embodying the deepest layers of the people's spiritual world, national values, and historical memory. The creator and famous performer of the epic is Qodir Rahimov (Qodir bakhshi), a major, authoritative, and incomparable representative of the folkloric traditions of Surkhandarya region. His voice, his mastery of the *dombra*, and his art of narration astonish generations, making him one of the brightest heirs of the ancient bakhshi school of the mountainous areas of the Surkhan valley.

In Qodir Rahimov's rich and diverse repertoire, the epic *Oychinor* has long been recognized and valued as one of the classical, complete, and unsurpassed samples of Uzbek epic traditions. This epic intertwines motifs of heroism, sincere love, harsh betrayal, and complex destinies in an organic, masterful unity. Enriched with inspiration and elements taken from the ancient customs, struggles, and victories of the Uzbek people's long historical past, the epic draws listeners into a journey to earlier centuries, awakening in their hearts feelings of national pride, justice, and loyalty, while also revealing the boundless spiritual richness of the Uzbek nation.

Although the plot of the epic primarily displays legendary and romantic features, it incorporates real events and figures from Uzbek history. In particular, the political conflicts in Central Asia during the 15th–16th centuries, the strife between the Timurids and the Uzbeks, form the historical foundation of the epic.

*Oychinor* belongs to the bakhshi tradition of Uzbek folklore and has been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Qodir Rahimov is recognized as one of its major narrators, and the epic is widely spread in the folkloric centers of Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya regions.

The historical basis of the epic is linked to the history of Central Asia at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century—a period distinguished by the fragmentation of the Timurid dynasty, the rise of Uzbek khanates, and persistent political struggles. The main historical elements reflected in the epic center around the conflict between Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur and Muhammad Shaybani Khan. These two figures, prominent heroes in Uzbek history, have their lives and activities thoroughly described in historical sources such as *Baburnama*.

The events in the epic unfold in real geographic regions such as Boysun and Hisor mountains, the Kattapay plain, Andijan, Samarkand, and the vicinity of the Amu Darya. These locations were significant political and economic centers during the Timurid era.

The introduction of the epic begins with a description of geographical places:

“In ancient times, below the Boysun mountains, beneath the Hisor range, above the Kokbuloq area, there was a land called Kattapay...” [4, p. 24]

This beginning not only evokes cultural feelings in listeners but also strengthens the socio-historical meaning of the narrative.

One of the historical foundations of *Oychinor* is the presence of real individuals among its characters. The conflict between Babur and Shaybani Khan is artistically portrayed in the epic and is based on historical events.

Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur (1483–1530) was one of the last representatives of the Timurid dynasty and the ruler of the Fergana Valley. He ascended the throne of Andijan in 1494 but, after being defeated in battles against the Uzbek khan Muhammad Shaybani, was forced to leave Fergana in 1504. In the epic, Babur is depicted as a just, wise, and pious king. His relationship with Qaysarбек (a treacherous vizier) and his opposition to Shaybani Khan form the central part of the epic. Historically, Babur was defeated by Shaybani and migrated to Afghanistan and later to India. References in the epic to *Baburnama* and other works hint at Babur's literary heritage.

**Muhammad Shaybani Khan (1451–1510)** was the founder of the Shaybanid dynasty. He wrested Samarkand, Bukhara, and Fergana from the Timurids. In the epic, Shaybani is depicted as aggressive and expansionist, while his conversation and riddle exchange with Babur at the riverside is enriched with folkloric elements:

“In my right hand I hold something harder than liquid;

If you can name it, water will flow from a dry skull. What is it?”

Shaybani thought for a moment and replied, “It is *qurut* (dried yogurt).”

“In my left hand there is something round, and inside it are a thousand round things. What is it?”

Shaybani again replied, “It must be a pomegranate.”

“Correct,” said Babur.

“Now my last question: Why does a tree shake?”

“A tree shakes because of the worm that grows inside it.” [4,72]

This dialogue between Babur and Shaybani Khan by the river is filled with the deep wisdom of folklore. Each riddle reflects the era's understanding of nature and life.

Moreover, the riverside conversation not only mirrors the natural and philosophical notions of the period but also symbolically reveals the inner “worm” of human nature—betrayal, hunger for power, and self-destruction. By answering the final riddle, Shaybani unknowingly predicts his own fate. Although he recognizes the worm in the tree, he fails to see the “worm” within himself.

Thus, the conversation by the river represents not merely the meeting of two rulers but the clash of two worldviews—Babur symbolizing wisdom, patience, and renewal, and Shaybani symbolizing strength and conquest but also inner fragility.

Historically, Shaybani conquered most of Central Asia and expelled Babur. In the epic, the conversation at the Amu Darya unites the folkloric riddle motif with real historical events.

In the epic, Qaysarбек is portrayed as Babur's treacherous vizier. Although no vizier by this name is known in real history, inner betrayals and court intrigues were frequent in the Timurid period. The character of Qaysarбек corresponds to the widely found folkloric archetype of the “treacherous vizier” and may have been inspired by the actions of certain viziers mentioned in *Baburnama*.

After Babur's father dies, Qaysar becomes his vizier. Because Babur is still young, Qaysar expects to manipulate him. However, Babur proves himself wiser and more independent than his father:

He even laughs at some of Qaysar's advice, saying:

“If your vizier is wise, your land will prosper;

But if your vizier is foolish, a prosperous land will fall into ruin.” [4,61]

Qaysarбек, upon hearing that Shaybani Khan shows generosity toward nobles, begins to secretly meet with him in pursuit of wealth. Keldiyor and Berdiyor were also men of Shaybani Khan. When Babur fought Shaybani briefly in Andijan, he was deceived by Qaysar's counsel and fled the city, abandoning it. Eventually, he arrived at Kattapay, where he sowed crops and gathered soldiers, preparing for another battle with Shaybani. Qaysar was aware of this plan, which implies that he could have passed Babur's intentions to the enemy—showing the continuing nature of his betrayal.

The main reason for betrayal in the epic is greed—personal gain. This reflects a common historical reality of the Timurid period, when viziers often betrayed rulers for familial or tribal interests.

In Uzbek and broader Eastern folklore, the image of the treacherous vizier is one of the most common, typical, and significant archetypes. Though appearing as the closest advisor to the ruler, he betrays the king, the land, and the people because of greed, desire for power, or collusion with the enemy. This archetype serves a moral and didactic function in folklore: it glorifies justice, condemns betrayal, and reveals the complex nature of governance.

These figures form the historical foundation of the epic. Their actions are based on real events from Uzbek history but are enriched with folkloric elements.

The main events in the epic are rooted in the following components of Uzbek history:

#### **Babur's retreat and his conflict with Shaybani Khan.**

In the epic, Babur is depicted as leaving Andijan and fleeing toward Kattapay and the Hissar Mountains. In real history, after being defeated by Shaybani in 1504, Babur abandoned Fergana and wandered through the mountainous regions (including the Hissar and Boysun areas) for several years. He describes this period in detail in his *Baburnama*.

The scene of the conversation and riddles along the Amu Darya is a folkloric motif, yet it alludes to Shaybani's conquest of Central Asia. By 1507, Shaybani had taken Samarkand and Bukhara, while Babur escaped to Afghanistan.

The locations mentioned in the epic—Boysun, the Hissar Mountains, Kattapay, Andijan, Samarkand, and the Amu Darya—are real places. These regions were central to the struggles between the Timurids and the Uzbeks. For example, Andijan was Babur's birthplace, while Hissar was one of the routes he used when fleeing.

Although the motifs of animals (such as the bear) and *pari* (fairy) figures—for example, Oychinor presenting herself to Ernazar as the child of Oysha Pari from Mount Qof—belong to folklore, they are woven around historical events.

Even though the epic "*Oychinor*" is based on historical foundations, its nature is primarily legendary. Oychinor's heroic feats—such as her vow to avenge Qaysar, setting out to find her father, mounting Keldiyor's horse, taking his sword, beheading Berdiyor and Keldiyor, and then delivering Qaysar to Babur despite his desperate pleas—along with the presence of fairy motifs, belong to classical elements of Uzbek folklore. Nonetheless, the epic preserves the historical memory of the Uzbek people: the fall of the Timurids, the rise of Uzbek khanates, and the enduring spirit of struggle among the nation.

Researchers studying the historical foundations of Uzbek epics emphasize that they are inspired by real events. "*Oychinor*" belongs to this category. The events and characters in historical epics are closely connected to the social life, lifestyle, and customs of the people from the distant past.

As a vivid example of Uzbek folklore, the epic "*Oychinor*" is grounded in historical realities. It intertwines the political struggles of the 15th–16th centuries and the lives of figures such as Babur and Shaybani Khan with folkloric motifs. This epic is not only a heroic tale but also an

integral part of the historical memory of the Uzbek people. Through storytellers (bakhshi) like Qodir Rahimov, it continues to be passed down to future generations, showcasing the richness of Uzbek culture. Everyone who reads the epic feels a connection to the roots of their own history.

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