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**Zilola Qo`chqarovna Eshanova**  
Andijon State University  
dpt. Uzbek Language and Literature,  
Senior Lecturer  
[z\\_eshanova@mail.ru](mailto:z_eshanova@mail.ru)

### SECTION 29. Literatura.Folklore.

## THE IMAGE OF ASQARTOG' AND THE MOTIF OF INITIATION

**Abstract:** As mythological image the image of Asqartog' performs an important literary-aesthetic function in the Uzbek dostons (folk poems). Based on the doston 'Go'ro'g'li' the article provides literary interpretation of the Asqartog' mountain as the place of initiation (testing) and as the place of habitat of mystic 'erans'.

**Key words:** mythology, cult, the image of mountain, mythological interpretation, mythological place of habitat, folk poems, epic place, the motif of testing-initiation, the hierarchy of 'erans', the system of 'alpism', the cave of chiltans (forty people), the 'antahur' wine.

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### Introduction

The image of Asqartog' often met in the Uzbek dostons [8, p.11] with its deep roots and perfect sight is a literary mythological image and it needs a special investigation.

Nearly all the Uzbek folk poems (dostons) mention the name of Asqartog', particularly popular dostons as 'Go'ro'g'li' and 'Alpomish' can't do without it. They also contain the names of other mountains but Asqartog' has its own interpretation and explanation.

We can see that the image of Asqartog' not only mentioned in the folk poems but also has widely been absorbed into the imagination of people. It is to be noted that the image of Asqartog' is a necessary component of not only Uzbek dostons but also of the Kazakh epic poems. This fact shows that the area of using the image of Asqartog' is not limited and this image has deep traditional roots.

### Materials and Methods

The fact that the existing materials on this matter has not yet been collected into one unit and did not draw the attention of the specialists in this field serve as the reason of the fact that the image of this mountain has not taken its worthy place in the system of other sacred mountains of the world. As a result of which this mountain has not yet been mentioned in the mythological dictionaries such as "Мифы народов мира"[6, p.311-314]

An expert in the field of Uzbek folklore C. H. Mirzayeva shows Asqartog' as an epic place and

stresses that it appears before the hero as a place of his serious testing [7, p.84].

Another expert in the field of folklore Sh. Turdimov paid a special attention to the etymology of this name and its place in the events of the poem [9, p.46]. The author expressed notable ideas about this mountain but he did not investigate the problem properly. It is worth to mention that the scholar compares the Asqartog' with the mythological Greek mountain 'Olimp' and gives the etymological characteristics of the word Asqartog' dividing it into component parts: 'as – fire' and 'qar – mountain' meaning a mountain of fire, a mountain of the sun'. or a place of worshipping, a place where sacred 'erans', the spirits of ancestors live.

At the same time the fact that comparing the image of Asqartog' with the image of Asqarbel in the Kazakh doston 'Alpamis Batir' the scholar tried to restore the ancient Turkish tradition of imagination system of place of habitat of 'erans' can be considered as an important step in the development of the history of Asqartog'.

In the Uzbek dostons Asqartog' is usually treated as the place of habitat of 'erans' – the sponsor ghosts as well as the place where the hero is tested by the sponsor ghosts. In all of the Uzbek dostons the hero is supported by the sponsor ghosts.- the 'erans'.

The important support for the heroes by the 'erans' in his birth, education, formation of courage during the whole of his life have been interpreted by the authors in accord with the inner rules in all of the dostons.



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As has been narrated by Po'lkan Shoir in the doston 'Birth of Go'ro'g'li' in search of his lost horse Go'ro'g'li travels a very long way. His adventures on the way have been interpreted perfectly well. The author Po'lkan Shoir leads the reader through the villages and town known to the reader and takes him to the far away mythological place. This place is shown to the hero in his dream. In other words, the long way and the adventures of travel is explained to the epic hero by means of dream or foretelling. Thus the epic hero is taken to the place of habitat of 'erans' – the ghostly spirited sponsors and educated there.

While Go'ro'g'li tired of the travel was sleeping the 'erans' came and surrounded him and Bobo Qambar informs him about his fate in future and reminds him that would find his beloved horse here. Following the information told by a fortune teller Go'ro'g'li goes to 'Sanam chorbog' and walking through that garden he walks through 'Bog'iram' and reaches to the place of habitat of the 'erans' on the 'Afsar tog'. There in the cave he meets the 'chiltans' (forty people). According to the interpretation of the author the distance between Go'ro'g'li and the place of habitat of the 'erans', i.e. Hizr and chiltans is a long way. It is difficult for other people to reach there.

As is narrated by Chori Bakhshi Umirov in the 'G'oyibnoma' doston the wounded Go'ro'g'li was taken by his horse G'iroto to the cave forty chiltans on Asqartog

"The horse took Go'ro'g'li to the cave 'forty chiltans', entered into the cave by crawling and left Go'ro'g'li there supporting him carefully" [10, p.53]

A raised trestle-bed for forty guys to have rest. "On the back of Asqartog' between two peaks, where the sun can't reach there was a wood of spruce with spring water running streams through the wood.

Avazkhon and other forty guys raised a trestle-bed for them to rest. [9, p.54] These descriptions show that this was a place of habitat for the ghostly spirits – 'theerans' and that heroes under the care of the sponsor ghosts could freely enter this area.

The treatment of Go'ro'g'li and his followers under the care and support of devoted guards in this territory freely shows that this independent territory was under the care of 'the erans' – the sponsor ghostly spirits.

As is stated in the Go'ro'g'li doston the forty chiltans often get together in this cave, therefore in the texts of doston we often come across with the phrase 'the cave of chiltans'. As is stated in the text "...near the cave where chiltans get together there was a great spruce tree and spring water was running in the stream". [10, p.61] Such kind of description is a usual phenomenon for the cave of chiltans.

A researcher S.M. Andreyev who studied the manner of life of chiltans states the places of gathering of chiltans were usually in the far away

corners of cities and villages or in the mountain caves or graveyards..[2, p.340]

A Investigating the genesis of the image of chiltans and their peculiarities a specialist in the science of folklore Sh. Turdimov states that they used to live in the caves of mountains and usually helped people under difficulties as well as they used to punish those who were guilty of breaching the law and moral rules. The roots of such motives could be found in the legends about the 'owners' of mountains widely spread among the Altaic Turks. Relying on the correspondence of such notions with that of the Uzbek doston the author states that at the dawn of such images there stand legends about the ancient 'owners of mountains'. [9, p.49]

The caves of chiltans are usually described mystically. At the end of his life Go'ro'g'li addresses the ghostly spirits, Avazkhon and his followers: 'I am fully satisfied with your attention to me, I am grateful to all of you. It is time for me to leave, and everything is left at your disposal. Be healthy, safe and sound. Take care of your motherland and pray for its sake, good-bye', and left for chiltan cave. The surrounding people also followed him and saw that forty chiltans were sitting in the cave. And Go'ro'g'li joined them. Some time later they looked into the cave again and they saw nobody there. Joining the chiltans as the forty first member Go'ro'g'li disappeared in the cave. [10, p.75]

In this very case an attention should be paid to the fact that having joined the forty chiltans Go'ro'g'li disappeared in the cave. This description forms an imagination that the 'erans' appear before the others as mountain or a cave. Only before the specially chosen people they appear as human beings or as 'erans'. It can be recognized as a simple reflexion of peoples' imaginations or viewpoints on this matter.

The descriptions of the manner of life of 'the erans', their unnatural power and other peculiarities are treated in the Uzbek doston as an important literary interpretation. The most important stages of the hero's life take place in this very place. One of such stages is the motif where the future hero is tested by the 'erans'. The scene where Hizr delivers lessons of the method of fighting can be recognized as a component part of the formation of 'alpic' system [9, p.31].

Behind this literary description there is a deep meaning, i.e. physical development of Go'ro'g'li, his mastering all the secrets of fight from the representatives of the space and the fact that he was an incomparable warrior and that he can fight against a thousand warriors, the secrets of his victory is the result of the fact that he was taught by the 'erans'.

In the doston 'Alpomish' such a literary description is used as information when the hero was imprisoned and the reasons of his remaining alive.

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“When Alpomish was born Shohimardon pir (A sacred person, saint) came there and took him in his hands and called him Hakimbek and put his finger traces on his right back. As Shohimardon pir had educated him he was wouldn't burn in the fire, he wouldn't die when he was beaten by the sword, he also wouldn't die even when he was shot by the gun”[1, p. 225].

The education process by Shohimardon pir was not reflected in the narration of the doston. It is mentioned only in this point. But this very remind is enough for the reader to have necessary information and imagination. Because it is out of doubt that the hero who learnt the secrets of winning battle has unlimited power and courage and is always victorious. Both physical and spiritual education of the hero is carried out by the ‘erans’. This process is reflected in the doston in scene of testing (initiation) of the hero.

The description of this process is fully described in the doston ‘The Childhood of Alpomish’. “Hazrat Qutbil a'lam ordered: “The person who would give this child is the Prophet Hizr. We order him to beg all of his aims from the God properly. You also join the process of praying for his sake. We also pray for his sake with good intentions. Let Hazrat Hizr pray first of all”.

Go'ro'g'li came up to Hizr alayhissalom and ciltans surrounded him and other ‘erans’ supported him by saying ‘omin’. Turning to Go'ro'g'li Hizr alayhissalom said: “Ask whatever you wish, we will give you whatever you want, our child should be taught how to behave in the society, he should learn to be a good warrior”. His words mean that the process of learning the rules of behavior and rules of handling the battle also was included into the process of initiation.

The Qodir shoir version of the doston says that the ‘erans’ gave advice to the hero in turn and this fact shows that all the ‘erans’ took an active part in the process of spiritual educating the hero. Then the ‘erans’ said: “Come nearer, Go'ro'g'li sit here and listen to what you are told. Try to keep them in mind”.

One of the elderly people began to talk:  
Look at the wheat, it is divided into two parts,  
It is impossible to light the lamp without the candle,  
It is better to do a kind act to someone  
Than your pray for thousand years  
Another one says:  
The god gave the man the possibility of speaking  
Doing bad things you may get punished,  
This way you know who is good and who is bad,  
Don't pass without greeting the people you met.  
This way each of the ‘erans’ teach the hero the rules of behavior. The process of testing and

initializing him takes place the place of habitat of the ‘erans’ on the ranges of Asqartog’.

### **The place of initiation of the hero of Asqartog’.**

The process of initiation of the hero has special stages. Sh. Turdimov states that ‘the erans’ in their place of habitat they process the body and soul of the hero with heavenly rays and water (or wine) and cure him of different diseases and make him healthy, teach him the secrets of ‘alpism’, and recreate him anew as a real ‘alp’ (powerful warrior)”[9, p.31-33]. The fact that the author stresses that the process of testing the hero takes place on the mountain Asqartog’ is of great importance. But it should be kept in mind that on the way to Asqartog’ the hero has a lot of testing adventures preparing himself for initiation. And this process seems to us is a kind of testing stage for the hero.

### **1. The stage of preparing the hero for the initiation process.**

The description of this process is given in the motif of stealing the hero's stallion. The reason of taking the stallion to Asqartog’ is motif of preparing him there for ‘alpism’ This case is described by Po'lkan shoir in the following manner: The purpose of the sacred saints from stealing Go'ro'g'li's stallion was that in search of his stallion Go'ro'g'li should travel different countries and get acquainted with their style of life, that he should be able to differentiate the good from bad, learn how to love his motherland, and appreciate his own country people, acknowledge his own mistakes and find out everything the God had created for him. And at last breach his main aim. And now took advantage of all the possibilities of gaining life experiments from different rulers and receiving positive prays from the sacred saints enriched his own knowledge of life”.

All of the doston narrating Go'ro'g'li's childhood state that he finds his lost stallion on Asqartog’. On the way to Asqartog’ the hero spiritually gets ready for initiation ceremony.

### **2. Arrival of the hero at the place of initiation.**

All the versions of doston state that the hero reaches the place of habitat of ‘erans’ on Asqartog’ following the instructions of one of the ‘erans’ – either Hizr or Bobo Qambar. This place is interpreted in all versions of doston as a mountain. The same interpretation can be seen in the version narrated by Rahmatulla Yusuf o'g'li.

In the version narrated by Po'lkan shoir the place of initiation is described more clearly:”

Go'ro'g'libek was happy, with the purpose of getting his horse he bend his body slowly and entered the cave where ‘erans’ were sitting in a circle and greeted them:”Assalom alaykum”.

The hero's age, spiritual state also indicate that he was ready for the initiation ceremony and the

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'erans' made him come to this sacred place on Asqartog for the sake of his horse- G'irok.

### 3. The place of initiation and the hierarchy of 'erans'.

In the doston as a place of initiation mainly the cave on the mountain. But in some places the small territory on the mountain is described as a place of initiation. The fact that this cave was not a mere ordinary cave is narrated in the in the Po'lkan shoir version of the doston "Go'ro'g'li's childhood" Hizr describes this place to Go'ro'g'li in the following way:"My child you came to the sacred place, my child you came to the place which makes you spiritually rich, my child you came to a paradise".

When saints tell you to wish anything  
You must ask for an able child  
My child you came to a birth house".

[3, p.127]

As can be understood from Hizr's description this place was a sacred area, a place of highly spirited saints, a place equal to a paradise, as well as the place where one can have his child by God.

At first Go'ro'g'li doesn't recognize the 'erans', he thinks that they were robbers who has stolen his stallion. The doston informs us the 'erans' were a kind of structure with their own inner rules of behavior. On the throne on the mountain his Excellency great ruler was presiding and the of his servants were waiting for his order willingly.

There were seven people of his informers telling him about the events happening in seven parts of the world. Forty chiltans were awaiting his orders ever ready to perform them willingly. Three hundred and sixty heroic soldiers are performing the everyday affairs at his disposal. His Excellency Hazrati Hizr, saint Ilyos and Gavsul G'yios as ministers are handling all of his orders to ordinary people to carry them out."[3, p.128]. This description shows the essence of the structure of the 'erans'. This structure as has been mentioned above, consists of 'Qutb-ul-Qutb (Qutb-ul-A'lam) – the ruler of the 'erans', three ministers, seven generals, forty chiltans and three hundred and sixty guards, as well as Hizr, Ilyos and G'avsul G'yios who were responsible for general control over other members of this structure. All of the above mentioned figures will take part in the initiation process of Go'ro'g'li.

### 4. Testing of the hero in the process of the hero's initiation.

Last stage initiation of the epic hero takes place in the cave of chiltans. At the very moment Hizr noticed that Go'ro'g'li was alert and his eyes were wondering and he seemed to be running away. And Hizr warned him:" Go'ro'g'li, if the horse is yours so give a proof of it and take it free of charge.

As is narrated by Fozil shoir Go'ro'g'li chose his own horse from among a number of horses like G'irko'k. This process of choosing the horse takes place directly on Asqartog'.

This case shows that educated by the 'erans' the horse finds its real owner. Though "Alpomish" doston doesn't mention that the ceremony of choosing the horse took place on the mountain but there are hints showing the fact that this ceremony happened by the participation of the 'erans'. This case is usually reflected by the motions repeated three times, therefore the number 'three' is considered to be a magic one in the ceremonies of folklore [4, p.152].

### 5. The initiation process. The hero becomes 'alp' (a powerful hero)

The epic hero is tested in the cave of chiltans by the 'erans'. In the epos this process takes place in the form of drinking the 'antahur' wine. Like the epic hero the epic horse drinks the 'antahur' wine and turns into a great powerful horse which suits the powerful general.

Go'ro'g'li's initiation process is described in the doston perfectly well. In the " Malla savdogar" (Yellow tradesman) doston states that his adopted son Avazkhon also went through this testing. The tel of the doston says:"At the age of eleven Avazkhon was taken to Sooldooz mountain. On the mountain there was a big spruce-tree and he made a place to stay under this tree. The forty chiltans, Hizr bobo also came there and had a talk with them. Next morning the 'muazzin/ called people to pray and after the prey the 'darveshs' (the pilgrims) came to a circle. Go'ro'g'li asked the chiltans to pray for his benefit. The forty chiltans made a prey begging the Heaven to defend him from the gunshot. Hizr bobo was so kind that he stood up and his belt around Avazkhon. [5, p.296].

As is seen from this information that Avazkhon too was tested on the Sooldooz mountain and had an initiation ceremony.

The fact that all the heroic adventures of Avazkhon that had taken place on earth and underground is closely connected with the initiation the he had on the mountain. These fact found their reflection in the doston of Go'ro'g'li series.

"Malla savdogar" doston informs us that Avazkhon was initiated on the Sooldooz mountain. In other doston this mountain is said to be a part of Asqartog'.

The fact that the hero is initiated in the cave of the mountain can be seen not only in the Uzbek folklore but also in the folklore of other nations throughout the world and this fact is closely connected with the cult (the object of worship) of the mountain.

According to this viewpoint the mountain is characterized as the very center, the axis of the world containing all the peculiarities of space. On earth this axis is tightly connected with the north pole star and under the ground it is connected with the lower world. The axis is considered to be the very central point of the earth.



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The most attracting point is that in most of the mythological traditions the image of mountain is accompanied with world (space) tree. In some cases the image of the tree is not mentioned, but in most cases the images of the mountain and the tree accompany each other. The mountain is divided into three parts. On its upper level the high spirits live, in the lower level evils live and in its middle level humans live.[6, p.311]. Asqartog' described in the 'Go'ro'g'li' series of dostons is interpreted as the most perfect image of folklore is of great importance.

**6. The hero is given all of his wishes and taught the best qualities. Obtaining all the attributes of 'alpism' (powerfulness), the horse and its attributes. He is warned of his fate and duties.**

The motif of begging the Creator at the place of habitat of the 'erans' which is characterized as the place of wealth, kind spirit, paradise and the birth place of child is the main point of the epic plot of Go'ro'g'li asks from his 'pirs' to give him the horse G'irkok, two beautiful girls, who were taken from Rayhon, and instead of Holjuvon to bring Zaqdinoy and becoming the king of the country.

The 'erans' foretell him that Go'ro'g'li and his horse will live to be one hundred and Soqibulbul will be great, Zaydinoy will be brought from the land Rayhon, and he will ravage his enemies, Yunus and Misqol pari will get married, and he will be the ruler of his country, Chambil-Chortoq will not be conquered, at the dooms-day it will be flooded, Avazkhon and Hasankhon will have their sons, Holdor mahram from Vazygan and forty guys from forty tribes will be on his service, and in this world his name will remain but not his generation. The 'erans' gave him weapons of 'alpism' and horse with its attributes as well as two feathers –one white and one black and explained the secrets of these feathers. The epic hero becomes aware of his own fate and his duties particularly at the 'erans' place of habitat. It is not in vain that he was warned about his fate particularly at the place of habitat of 'erans. Because in the imagination of the folk one can be aware of his fate

only at the sacred place of habitat of 'erans. In the doston 'Go'ro'g'li' such an imagination and hope is described in the literary form.

**7. The last wish of the epic hero and his way to first heroism.**

After his recreation as an 'alp' he understood the power and strength of this place and its owners and understood his own mistakes. Hizr explained him that whatever had happened it became his fate and cannot be redone. The fact that the decision of the fate connected with his wishes i.e. Goro'g'li's name would remain but not his generation, that he would have adopted sons serves as the main basis for a number of other dostons.

After having had the good wishes of the 'erans' on the Asqartog' the epic hero starts his first adventure – to revenge his enemy –Rayhon podsho.

The power and courage of the hero, and that he was a chosen person is described in connection with events taking place in the cave of Asqartog'. Therefore it is worth special mentioning that the motives connected with these cases should be stressed specially.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the above mentioned analysis and interpretations we can state that the image of Asqartog in the plot of the Uzbek dostons serves as a means of accumulation.

In the cave of Asqartog' the epic hero is tested by the epic sponsors; they teach him, educate as an 'alp' (a powerful image) as a result of which mentally and physically and spiritually he changes. At the same time he is warned about his future fate and at last he grows into a powerful undefeatable hero who can act successfully both on earth and underground.

In the composition of folk poems the image of mountain is used alongside with motives of test-initiating and provides fantastic spirit to the description of the mountain as a mythological place as well as to the qualities of the epic hero.

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