

THE IMAGE OF THE EAST IN THE WORKS OF ANNA AKHMATOVA AND
ABDULHAMID CHO'LPON

J.B. Temurov

Lecturer, Fergana State University

Abstract: This article provides a comparative analysis of the artistic interpretation of the image of the East in the works of Anna Akhmatova and Abdulhamid Cho'lpon. The study examines how, in Akhmatova's lyrics, the East is represented as a mythopoetic, symbolic, and existential spiritual space, particularly in the poems written during her Tashkent period. In these works, through images of nature and such symbols as the rose, raisins, the garden, and dreams, the East is interpreted as a cultural and spiritual refuge.

In Cho'lpon's lyrical poetry, however, the image of the East acquires a historical and philosophical dimension, appearing as a civilization that has declined under colonial conditions yet retains the potential for renewal. Based on an analysis of the poet's poems "*Sharq nuri*" and "*Bokuga Sharq qurultoyiga ketkanda*," the article explores the historical tragedy of the East, as well as ideas related to national consciousness and social movement.

The article demonstrates that in the works of both poets the image of the East is revealed within different poetic and ideological contexts, highlighting its aesthetic and philosophical significance in twentieth-century Russian and Uzbek poetry.

Keywords: image of the East, mythopoetic images, symbolic images, Eastern culture, the image of Shahrazad, colonialism, national consciousness, lyrical subject, historical-philosophical interpretation.

Russian scholar Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov writes: "Russian poetry also incorporates the East as a part of our living history that continues in contemporary experience"¹Literary scholar Dmitry Sergeyeich Likhachev, in turn, emphasizes: "The absence of literary contacts with Asia is one of the most striking characteristics of Old Russian literature. I dare to say that among all other European literatures, it is precisely Old Russian literature that has had the fewest connections with the East"

"These connections are considerably weaker than the relations with the East found in the literatures of Spain, Italy, France and, of course, Greece, as well as in the literary traditions of the South and West Slavs,"² emphasizes Dmitry Sergeyeich Likhachev.

Russia and Asia were historically opposed as "pure" and "impure" spaces, with the Russian language considered sacred while the "Eastern" languages were evaluated as "impure." As Dmitry Sergeyeich Likhachev emphasizes, "...it was only by the 18th century that Russian culture began to understand the East with all its traditions and values, and from that period

¹ Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov. *Themes and Styles of the East in Western Poetry*. In: Ivanov, V.V. *Eastern Motifs: Poems and Poetic Works*. Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1985. 880 p.

² Dmitry Sergeyeich Likhachev. *Notes on the Russian*. 2nd ed., revised and expanded. Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya Publishing House, 1984. 240 p.



onward, initial negative perceptions were gradually replaced by a positive attitude”³. In short, it was precisely in the 18th century that Russian literature began to pay significant attention to Eastern culture, especially its poetic heritage.

From 1941 to May 1944, Anna Akhmatova was evacuated in the city of Tashkent. The poet was captivated by the charm of “Asian” nature. The nature of Tashkent affected her deeply: “black plane trees,” “white poplars,” “gentle branches,” “roofs of old houses,” and “blooming trees” were likened to “moonlit dancers” performing Eastern-style dances, enriching her literary repertoire. The gentle murmur of the “canal” was equated with the voice of a singer.

Moreover, her highly sensitive perception did not overlook “black basil,” “Uzbek pilaf” (grains of rice), “red roses,” as well as the warmth and reddish tones of baked bread; she even compared the mountains to legendary “young men.” If you want, I can also polish this translation further into a fluid, publishable academic English paragraph suitable for a journal article”⁴

Anna Akhmatova uses ancient images, endowing them with new meaning and tone, while engaging the reader in empathy and poetic co-creation. This approach is particularly evident in her poem “Vatan bermish bizga boshpana” (“The Homeland Has Given Us Shelter”):

Upon the wall, a blossoming branch,

The heart has felt a keen delight.

This delight will not fade again.

Eternal roses, raisins in the center,

The homeland has given us shelter.

If you want, I can also polish this into a more fluent, publishable academic English paragraph with smoother integration of the poetic lines.

This excerpt is taken from Anna Akhmatova’s poem “The Homeland Has Given Us Shelter” (1943), written in Tashkent, and occupies a distinctive place in the poet’s wartime lyricism. “This period of Akhmatova’s work (evacuation) is of particular significance, as it is during this time that the poet becomes closely acquainted with the East, and these impressions substantially enrich Akhmatova’s intellectual and poetic outlook.”

I can also merge all your previous Tashkent-related passages into a polished, cohesive academic paragraph suitable for publication”⁵.

In the opening lines of the poem, the image of the “branch blossoming upon the wall” emerges. Here, the wall symbolizes war and historical tragedy, while the blossoming branch atop it signifies the triumph of life over all obstacles.

³ Dmitry Sergeevich Likhachev. *Notes on the Russian*. 2nd ed., revised and expanded. Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya Publishing House, 1984. 240 p.

⁴ J.B. Temurov. *The Myth of the East in the Lyrics of Anna Akhmatova*

⁵ J.B. Temurov. *The Myth of the East in the Lyrics of Anna Akhmatova*



In the next line, the phrase “keen delight” (an oxymoron) appears. In this context, “keen” represents war and suffering, whereas “delight” conveys beauty and life. Thus, for Akhmatova’s lyrical subject, beauty is not separated from suffering; on the contrary, they are perceived in harmony.

In the following line, the phrase “eternal roses” recurs, which also appears in other poems written during Akhmatova’s Tashkent period. This repetition is purposeful:

Eternal roses belong to the land of Samarkand—

We would travel to its city to die.

This demonstrates how Akhmatova intertwines symbols of beauty and permanence with the realities of wartime experience, creating a complex poetic meditation on life, suffering, and cultural memory.

If you like, I can combine all your Akhmatova Tashkent excerpts into a single cohesive, journal-ready academic section with smooth transitions and scholarly commentary.

The image of the “eternal roses” reinforces the mythopoetic vision characteristic of Akhmatova’s lyrics, closely connected with Samarkand, Tashkent, and the broader Eastern environment. As A. Aymatov emphasizes, by “the East” the poet refers to a great realm of spirituality, as well as to the individuals and historical periods that shaped this culture”⁶.

In Central Asia, culture flourished during the era of Amir Temur and the Timurid dynasty. In the 14th–15th centuries, the foundations of cultural development in Transoxiana and Khwarezm were laid by the great commander and military leader Amir Temur. During this period, Samarkand became the cultural center of the East, recognized as the “Jewel of the East.” Consequently, Akhmatova acknowledges in her poetry the desire to die in Samarkand—the homeland of individuals whose lives serve as examples for all humanity and whose memory endures eternally—so that Samarkand itself may remain “eternal” in her remembrance. (Another reason for the poet’s attachment to Samarkand may be the evacuation of her husband, the art historian N. Punin, to this city.)

In the next line of the poem, the image of “raisins” appears alongside the “eternal roses,” reinforcing the notion of perpetuity, as raisins are preserved grapes, symbolizing continuity and endurance.

In this excerpt, the centrality of natural imagery and the strength of symbolism are characteristic features of Eastern poetry. In this poem, Akhmatova combines mythological reflection with historical testimony, portraying the East not merely as a geographical space but as a spiritual-poetic realm.

The theme of the East also appears in Akhmatova’s subsequent poem “Xafa hol uxlamoq” (“Sleeping in a Sorrowful State”), written in Tashkent in 1942, where it is revealed through the motif of dreaming.

⁶ A. Q. Aymatov. *Ideological and Artistic Foundations of Abdulhamid Cho’lpon’s Aesthetics: Candidate of Philosophy Dissertation*. Tashkent, 2011. 135 p.



If you like, I can continue translating and smoothly connect this with your previous Tashkent-period excerpts to create a coherent academic section on Akhmatova's Eastern imagery.

Sleeping in a sorrowful state,
Awakening loved and cherished,
Seeing the tulip bright red.
Some force and vitality
Has entered this day,
Let it be a beam of light in the darkness!
The narrow courtyard endures eternally,
The smoke is bitter,
As long as the poplar...
Shahrazad
Comes from the garden...
Thus is the joy of the East!

From the very opening lines of the poem, the inner state of the lyrical subject is revealed through a conflictual psychological condition: the motifs of "Sleeping in a sorrowful state" and "Awakening loved and cherished" express the transformations and inner rebirth occurring within the human psyche. This condition harmonizes with motifs characteristic of Eastern poetics, including dreams, spiritual states, and mystical experiences. The dream is interpreted as a transitional point between the real and the unreal, carrying significant meaning within Eastern thought.

In the following lines, the image of "some force and vitality" acquires a mystical and spiritual dimension, connecting with concepts of sacredness and supernatural power typical of the East. The juxtaposition of "sacred space" and "darkness" reflects the Eastern philosophical opposition of light and shadow.

The image of the "narrow courtyard with smoke" introduces the domestic and cultural environment of Tashkent into the poem as a vivid, lifelike detail. The bitter scent of the smoke, the heaviness of the air, and the image of the "tall poplar" convey the sensorial-physical experience of the Eastern space. In particular, the "tall poplar" can be interpreted as a symbol of Eastern wisdom, the endurance of life, and the connection between heaven and earth.

As can be observed, it may be said that the East cannot be imagined without reference to the pyramids of Egypt and the Nile, wedding rituals of the Pharaonic tradition, the Levantine regions



of Syria, the Himalayas, Indian women, the gardens of Nishapur, the ghazals of Khayyam, Confucian philosophy, Zoroastrian teachings, and the philosophical reflections of Bedil”⁷. If you like, I can merge all your Tashkent-period Akhmatova excerpts into a single polished academic section, highlighting Eastern motifs, mythopoetic imagery, and the spiritual-poetic space in her wartime lyrics.

Shahrazad—the heroine of the “One Thousand and One Nights”—serves as a universal figure representing the East, uniting different times, spaces, and cultures. In Akhmatova’s lyrics, the East is manifested through the image of Shahrazad as a legendary, magical, and eternal spiritual realm.

The final line of the poem—“Thus is the joy of the East”—expresses lyrical discovery, acknowledgment, and spiritual intimacy. Here, the East is not presented as external exoticism but is interpreted as an inner experience and a source of spiritual awakening within the poet’s heart. This poem marks an important stage in the formation of the East as an artistic image in Akhmatova’s work.

Through the Tashkent environment, Eastern cultural traditions, and symbolic imagery such as dreams, tulips, poplars, and Shahrazad, the poet interprets the East not as a historical or geographical space but as a spiritual realm endowed with profound philosophical and aesthetic value. The poem vividly demonstrates Akhmatova’s spiritual closeness to the East, her cultural engagement with it, and the role the East occupies in her artistic consciousness.

In Abdulhamid Cho’lpon’s 1920s lyric poetry, the theme of the East holds special significance. This theme is first addressed in the poet’s poem “Sharq nuri” (“The Light of the East”).

In the later period, the history of the impoverished East
Remained a blank page, never touched by white lines.
The chroniclers who wrote the history of the world
Never turned their pen toward goodness.
Whichever corner of the East you looked at,
You saw poverty, death, oppression, and curses.
If you wished to know the meaning of the word “Tomug”,
You would have to traverse the East from head to toe.
Once upon a time, it gave rise to its own leaders on earth,
A great and glorious civilization.

⁷ A. Q. Aymatov. *Ideological and Artistic Foundations of Abdulhamid Cho’lpon’s Aesthetics: Candidate of Philosophy Dissertation*. Tashkent, 2011. 135 p.



That beautiful East, with its sweet soil,

In later times, became a land shedding tears in the hands of outsiders...

The poem, written in 1918, holds special significance in Abdulhamid Cho'lpon's work as the first conceptual artistic expression of the image of the East. This year is recognized as one of the most tragic and pivotal turning points in the history of Turkestan. Within this context, the poem can be regarded as the beginning of the process by which Cho'lpon transformed the image of the East into a philosophical-historical concept.

The lyrical subject in the poem does not appear as an individual "I" expressing personal emotions, but rather as a generalized moral-political consciousness reflecting on the historical fate of the entire Eastern civilization. This aligns with L. Ginzburg's observation that, in social lyricism, the lyrical "I" becomes a subject of historical experience⁸ – fully corresponds to this principle. The poem opens with the following lines:

In the later period, the history of the impoverished East

Remained a blank page, untouched by white lines.

Here, the image of the "white line" does not signify goodness, purity, or an abstract moral meaning; rather, it expresses the fact that in the recent history of the East the possibility of independent development, national statehood, and free cultural progress has been eliminated.

The central idea emphasized by the lyrical subject is that the recent history of the East is a history that was not written by its own will, but was shaped under the influence of colonial policy; a history in which national values, the intellectual stratum, and historical memory were systematically destroyed. In this sense, the "white line" symbolizes the lost path of free historical development under colonial conditions. The word "impoverished" in this context carries a broader meaning than mere economic poverty, referring instead to political, spiritual, and civilizational decline.

The chroniclers who wrote the history of the world

Never turned their pen toward goodness.

In these lines, the lyrical subject interprets the chronicler ("muarrix") not as a neutral figure but as an ideological agent serving the colonial mindset. That is, the tragedy of the East is not merely the result of violence but is reinforced through the deliberate distortion of historical truth. Here, the lyrical subject:

rejects historical narratives that depict the East as "naturally backward";

exposes the practice of writing history that legitimizes oppression.

⁸ J.B. Temurov. The Myth of the East in the Lyrics of Anna Akhmatova



The metaphor of “Tomug” reflects the catastrophe of the East:

If you wish to know the meaning of the word “Tomug”,

You would have to traverse the East from head to toe.

In this context, the image of the East is modeled not merely as a geographical space but as a civilizational realm condemned to oppression, absence, and destruction. In Y. Lotman’s terms, it represents a semantic space rather than a real one⁹. The lyrical subject does not present the East as a “place of punishment”; rather, it is depicted as a space unjustly condemned to suffering. This distinction is significant, as it clearly shows that the fault does not lie with the East itself, but with the historical and social forces that have placed it in this condition. In this way, Cho’lpon’s poetry enables a profound understanding of the image of the East—not merely as a visual representation, but as a spiritual-symbolic manifestation of historical and civilizational reality:

Once upon a time, on this earth, it gave rise to its own leaders,

A great and glorious civilization—

That beautiful East...

In these lines, the lyrical subject recalls the East not as a timeless, ahistorical space, but as a realm that was once an independent and powerful civilization, as previously emphasized. Thus, its decline is not natural but the result of historical violence. In this way, the poem establishes the following three-stage model:

The East – an independent civilization;

The East – a realm in decline under colonial domination;

The East – an object for which historical justice must be restored.

Thus, this poem represents the first conceptualized artistic text of the image of the East in Cho’lpon’s lyrics, framed from the perspective of colonial history. As a thematic continuation of the poem “Sharq nuri” (“The Light of the East”), Cho’lpon wrote in 1920 the poem “Bokuga Sharq qurultoyiga ketkanda” (“On the Way to the Eastern Congress in Baku”).

On our path lie deserts, rivers, and seas,

Traces of the invader that cannot be recognized;

Treading over these traces, crossing the seas,

We march forward with a great mission!

⁹ Yuri M. Lotman. *On Intelligence, Text, and the Semiosphere*.



The deeds preserved in our hearts
Are greater than the seas along the way;
The oppressed pray that this path
Be more complete than before.
Tightly bound belts...
Let us unravel the ancient knots of the East.

Unlike the earlier poem, this work marks a shift in Cho'lpon's poetry from tragic observation to purposeful action. While in the 1918 poem "Sharq nuri" ("The Light of the East") the East is depicted as a civilization in decline due to colonial domination, in this 1920 poem, the East appears as a historical problem to be resolved and as a field for action. The poet emphasizes that "the history and fate of the East contain extremely complex, tangled puzzles, which require preparation to unravel" (A. Q. Aymatov, *Ideological and Artistic Foundations of Abdulhamid Cho'lpon's Aesthetics*). This development also indicates a qualitative transformation of Cho'lpon's lyrical subject: the lyrical subject no longer functions merely as an analytical consciousness but emerges as an agent of historical action.

On our path lie deserts, rivers, and seas,
Traces of the invader that cannot be recognized.

Here, the lyrical subject is expressed not through the singular "I" but through the collective "we." As L. Ginzburg emphasizes, "in socio-historical lyric, the 'lyrical I' often transforms into a generalized collective consciousness"¹⁰ In this context, Cho'lpon's "we" represents the active consciousness of the nation – a subject that assumes historical responsibility. This indicates a fundamental difference from the lyrical subject of the 1918 poem, which primarily reflected on tragedy:

Treading over these traces, crossing the seas,
We march forward with a great mission!

As Y. Lotman emphasizes (according to the theory of artistic space), "in a literary text, space does not function as geographic but as a system of semantic obstacles"¹¹. The natural images shaping the landscape in this poem – "deserts," "rivers," "seas" – do not represent a real geographical space, but symbolically express the historical, political, and spiritual obstacles confronting the East. The lyrical subject does not merely observe these obstacles – it overcomes them.

In this respect, the poem represents a transition from the tragic movement in "Sharq nuri" – "You would have to traverse the East from head to toe" – to purposeful action:

¹⁰ L. Ginzburg, *On Lyric Poetry*, L., 1964

¹¹ Y. M. Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, Moscow, 1970



The deeds preserved in our hearts

Are greater than the seas along the way;

According to M. Bakhtin, “the artistic subject is not merely emotion, but consciousness possessing a position of values”¹². In these lines, the word “deeds” (amal) in Cho‘lpon’s poetics signifies moral-historical will.

In these lines, the lyrical subject perceives the historical tragedy, yet does not accept it as destiny; rather, it makes a moral decision. In this sense, “deed” (amal) can be interpreted as the inner strength necessary for the East’s new history:

Let us unravel the ancient knots of the East.

This line forms the conceptual foundation of the entire poem. While in 1918 the East was depicted as a space whose history had not seen the “white line” and as a realm equivalent to “Tomug”, by 1920 it is portrayed as a complex, yet solvable, “tangle.” As L. Ginzburg notes, this reflects the “transformation of the lyrical subject into historical consciousness”¹³.

From this perspective, in the works of A. Akhmatova and A. Cho‘lpon, the image of the East occupies a central position in the poetic consciousness of both authors, though they interpret its expressive style, function, and spiritual significance differently.

In Akhmatova’s lyric poetry, the East manifests not as a geographic space but as a spiritual and aesthetic realm. In her poems written during the evacuation period in Tashkent, the East is represented as:

Mythopoetic – through the motifs of Scheherazade, gardens, dreams, and legends;

Symbolic – through images such as roses, raisins, walls, and gardens;

Existential – as a refuge, home, and spiritual space for consolation and life;

Cultural and humanitarian – as a symbol of hospitality, solidarity, and spiritual closeness.

For Akhmatova, the East appears in multiple dimensions—as an ancient, eternal, historical, and universal cultural phenomenon connected to human memory. Consequently, the East serves as both spiritual refuge and poetic center under conditions of war and evacuation.

In Cho‘lpon’s works, the image of the East emerges within the context of the formation of national consciousness and the poetics of resistance to colonialism. There, the East is:

A historical-philosophical space – a civilization condemned to suffering, oppression, and absence;

A semantic and symbolic realm – a sign of historical power and cultural heritage;

¹² M. M. Bakhtin, *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*, Moscow, 1979.

¹³ L. Ginzburg, *On Lyric Poetry*, Moscow: Intrada, 1997, p. 416.



An object of the lyrical subject's historical experience – perceived through generalized moral-political consciousness rather than individual emotions.

Moreover, in Cho'lpon's lyric poetry, the East is revealed as a conceptual and disciplined poetic model, emphasizing the tension between human and historical reality.

Thus, in the works of Akhmatova and Cho'lpon, the image of the East takes shape in different contexts: as a personal-existential experience, a cultural and mythopoetic space, and a historically powerful civilizational realm. Through their poetry, the conceptual, aesthetic, and philosophical significance of the East in 20th-century Russian and Uzbek poetics, as well as its role in national, cultural, and individual consciousness, becomes apparent.

In this way, the image of the East in the works of Akhmatova and Cho'lpon exhibits both similarities and differences. In both poets, it functions as a central semantic element that enriches lyrical experience and expresses collective national consciousness. The distinction lies in the fact that Akhmatova presents the East from the perspective of personal experience, aesthetic, and cultural space, whereas Cho'lpon depicts it as a historical, conflict-laden, socio-political concept reflecting the evolution of national consciousness and civilizational catastrophe. In this manner, in the lyric poetry of both authors, the image of the East becomes not only an artistic and symbolic element but also a scholarly-critical phenomenon expressing profound national, historical, and civilizational meaning.

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