Two Performances of the “Return of Alpamiș”: Current Performance-Practice in the Uzbek Oral Epic of the Sherabad School

Walter Feldman

The present study attempts to clarify the issues of text composition and poetic style within the Uzbek oral poetic genre known as the doston (dastan). It focuses on four short oral poetic texts: two recordings of two identical sections of the Alpamiș doston sung by a single bard (bäxși) in 1990 and in 1991. Due to the fact that researchers within Uzbekistan and other former Soviet republics of Central Asia have paid little attention to issues of “improvisation” and “memorization,” even such a modest attempt at multiple recording can help to state the relevant questions more clearly. A close analysis of the four texts demonstrates how the techniques of oral composition intersect with poetic style. This analysis is aided at times by interviews with and explanations from the bard. In addition, these interviews and observations of the bard and his immediate environment reveal aspects of the bäxși profession that he viewed as having significance.

Schools of Doston Singing in Southeastern Uzbekistan

Since the nineteenth century the entire mountainous area in the northeast of the Qashqadarya and the northwest of the Surkhandarya oblasts,1 as well as the plains to the south and southeast of these mountains, have been united in one epic tradition, today referred to as the “school” (maktab) of Sherabad. The earliest named figure in this school is Şernä Bäxși Beknäzäroğli (1855-1915), who lived near Sherabad. The professional lineages of the bards of Sherabad, Baysun, Denau, Shorchi, and Dehkanabad (formerly Teng-i Haram) are all interrelated (Qahharov 1985:20). The area beginning with Kitab and Shahrisabz, and continuing

---

1 Situated in the southeast of the country, with Tajikistan to the east, Turkmenistan to the southwest, and Afghanistan to the south.
westward to the plains of Qamashi and Qarshi, is considered to be another “school.”

The material presented here was collected during two short field trips to the Qashqadarya and Surkhandarya in May of 1990 and June of 1991. Prior to that I had worked with Tora Mirzaev in the Folklore Division of the Institute for Literature in Tashkent in the summers of 1988 and 1989; through him I had recorded Çari Şair, a representative of the Qarshi-Shahrisabz tradition of epic, who had acted as an informant for Karl Reichl in 1981.2 I was able to record and interview my principal informant from the Qashqadarya, Qahhar Räximov, again in October 1991 when he was invited to the United States by the Asia Society as part of a tour of Uzbek musicians.3

In this research I am indebted principally to two individuals—Qahhar Räximov and Abdumumin Qahharov. Qahhar Bäxši (b. 1958) is the eldest son of the late Qadir Räximov (1931-86), one of the greatest oral bards of twentieth-century Uzbekistan and the leading bard of the mountainous section of the eastern Qashqadarya region. The bards of this area consider themselves to be representatives of the bardic lineage of Sherabad, started by Şernä Bäxši and continued today by Şernä’s grandson Xuşväqt Märdänqulov.

The Räximovs are members of the Tillowmät lineage (urugh/uruuw) of the Qungrad tribe (el). At present the meaning of “tribe” in the Uzbek modern context is far from established.4 The Qungrads are the principal tribal group of the Qashqadarya and Surkhandarya regions, but their relationship to “Qungrads” elsewhere (e.g. in Khwarezm) and the period of their entry into southern Uzbekistan is unclear (Karmysheva 1976:211-22). By now they have accepted the macro-ethnicity of “Uzbek,” like all other Turkic-speakers in Uzbekistan who are not members of national minorities.

---


3 Unfortunately my field trips could not be extended at that time because of the extreme sensitivity of the Qashqadarya and Surkhandarya regions, which are relatively close to both Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Termez, the southernmost town in the Surkhandarya region, is closed to foreigners. The continued instability in Afghanistan and the civil war in Tajikistan renders the conditions for extensive fieldwork in the near future rather questionable. I regard the material collected so far as sufficient only to answer certain questions; other broader topics, such as the professional life of the bäxšis and current performance practices in different performance situations, must be left to future research in more stable times.

4 For recent anthropological perspectives on the topic of tribes in the Middle East, see Khoury and Kostiner 1990.
with official status in the Soviet system, such as Turkmens, Karakalpaks, Kirghiz, Kazakhs (cf. Roy 1991). The Qungrads have adopted a fully settled life, mixing stockbreeding with dry agriculture at least since the early nineteenth century. The Räximovs live in the Chalga village in the Khoja Makhmud settlement area, situated in the mountains above Teng-i Haram and now called Dehkanab. Qahhar works as a school-teacher and farmer. Qahhar’s younger brothers perform some of the bäxşi repertoire, and he is actively instructing new students as well as several older students of his late father.

Abdumumin Qahharov (Qahhoröv) is a teacher in the Pedagogical Institute of Qarshi, specializing in Uzbek literature and folklore. While he has published little, he is the leading authority on the epic tradition of Sherabad, which is by far the most active tradition in Uzbekistan today. He had worked with Qadir Şair since the 1960s and published one of his doston texts (Zarif 1984).

The Motif-Line and Text Generation

One of the most important techniques of the Uzbek oral doston is a species of refrain for each poetic speech that is continually transformed in the course of the oral performance. The Uzbeks themselves have no term for this phenomenon, which I had termed the “motif-line” (1983), and which was later termed the “key line” by Reichl (1992:202): “The repeated lines function as the semantic focus of the passage: A ‘Give advice!,’ B (and C) ‘We have to pay tax, should we give it?’ Often these key-lines are taken up in the following speech. . . .” In my earlier work I described the phenomenon in these terms (1980:126): “Because it was repeated frequently, the motif-line was subject to transformation, both by rephrasing in a different linguistic form, and by decomposition into component phrases. The decomposed phrase could then be combined with other phrases.” Furthermore, “the reformation of the motif-lines and the creation of totally new ones naturally influenced the other lines in the speech, which were obliged to conform to the rhetorical development of these lines. . . . The bard could transform the entire surface appearance of a line, leaving only a word, [or] a verbal form . . . to convey a meaning similar or complementary to other versions of the motif-line. It would be futile to isolate one variant as the primary motif-line” (1983:15).

My own survey of the published texts and my fieldwork from 1988 to 1991 lead me to the conclusion that the Uzbek oral doston shows little sign of the kind of textual “conservatism,” either in the form of “text-
orientation” or even the looser “memorization,” that is so evident in the Karakalpak and Kazakh traditions (Reichl 1992:267). The following analysis of two performances of the same episode by the same bard separated by a gap of over one year will illustrate the use of the motif-line technique within the form of text generation that seems to be typical of the Uzbek bards of the Sherabad School, and probably of other regional schools as well.

The Macrolevel of Flexibility in Performance: the Tale

All my informants in the Qashqadarya region defined the bäxși profession as comprising three areas of competence—tale, verse, and music. To the bäxsis of Khoja Makhmud what distinguishes their verbal art is first of all its flexibility. Without it they feel the tradition would die. Ismail Bäxși Räcäblov, the son of Qadir Şair’s teacher Räcäb Şair, stressed this point in his first meeting with me (7/4/91). Ismail Bäxși described to me a conversation with one of the leading Tashkent folklorists, who had been insisting that the Uzbek doston had disappeared with the death of Fazil Şair Yoldašoglı (Coldašuwlı) of Bulunghur in 1955 and the others of his generation, and that in any case it could not survive in the social conditions of modern socialist Uzbekistan. I myself had heard both of these opinions from the same individual. First of all, Ismail had replied, Qadir Şair was as talented as any bäxși who had lived in Uzbekistan in any era of which we have any knowledge. Second, he had said, “You think that the doston is a stone that sinks after being thrown in the water; it is not—it is a reed that floats to the surface.” According to him, the folklorists in Tashkent had done very little research in this southern mountain region, even though it was only here that the Uzbek doston was alive after the 1950s. As a result, they persist in describing the Uzbek oral epic as dead or dying. In fact, the 1960s were a richly creative period in southern Uzbekistan, during which many new dostons and termäs (topical poems) were performed.

In the Uzbek doston, mutable and immutable features exist both on the macrolevel of the narrative and on the microlevel of line construction. The macrolevel of this flexibility is the variability of the narrative. A bäxși could expand or contract his tale according to the demands of his audience. This type of variability seems broadly similar to what Lord and Parry had found in the western Balkans. Qahhar Bäxși and his student Cawlı had emphasized this point to me in an amusing way. On the floor of the guest...
they arranged four tea cups. They said, “These are the major parts of a
doston. You can tell it like this,” and they pointed their fingers from the cup
on the right to the one on the left, “or like this,” and they made the most
elaborate and devious routes from the tea cup on the right, circling and
recircling all of the tea cups before finally reaching the tea cup on the left. I
asked them who liked to hear the dostons in the latter fashion. They replied
that the best weddings were now among Uzbeks in Tajikistan. There, they
said, they could never get away in less than ten to twelve hours for a single
doston. The biggest problem, they said, was that nowadays weddings were
never more than one day. A doston could no longer be stretched out over
several days, as in the past. Most often in fact, they did not perform whole
dostons, but only selections. Nevertheless, as they repeated on several
occasions, a true bäxşi had to know the stories of many dostons in all their
details. They criticized certain performers as not being true bäxşis because
they did not know a single complete doston. In addition, a bard will often
know more than one variant for each episode in a doston, especially if it is a
widely known epic. The remainder of this article will focus on the treatment
of two episodes of the Alpamiş epic.

“Alpamiş” is one of the most ancient of Turkic oral epics and is still
widely known in Uzbekistan. I interviewed Qahhar to determine the stable
features of the Alpamiş epic, which is known throughout Uzbekistan in the
Qungrad version.6 Qahhar stressed that everyone in these parts, most of
whom are Qungrads, knows the story of Alpamiş. For a Qungrad not to be
familiar with “Alpamiş” is considered a disgrace. However, he said, in the
present day it is usually impossible to perform the entire doston. If he were
to begin it at the beginning, he would never reach the end by the end of the
wedding or other celebration (toy). Therefore, he and other bäxşis begin in
the middle, with the return of Alpamiş from the Qalmyqs.

For almost two hours he told me the main features of the story, those
that every bäxşi had to mention in his performance. However, in
performance, a bäxşi might not have the time to perform each section with
its own melody and new poetic text. In that case he could tell a section
briefly in prose, and then go on to sing the next section. Although the bard
could not rearrange the order of the sections, he could substitute one
abridged variant of a section for a more elaborate one. When time is very
short, a bäxşi will present only selected scenes from the epic. On a later
occasion Qahhar explained that at present a full performance of “Alpamiş”
might take three nights; a short performance might run five to six hours (oral
communication 10/91).

In “Alpamiş,” the hero returns from his captivity in the Qalmyq land. As he approaches his home, he meets several members of his household who have all been put to service by the slave Ultan. He encounters these people, such as his servant Qultay, his father Baybori, and his sister Qaldırğaç, in the desert. The hero reveals his identity only to the servant Qultay. In addition, several animals discover him—his dog, the mother of his horse Bayçıbar, and the she-camel who had been raised with him. All of these animals die at the recognition. In order to avoid the same fate befalling his human kin, he disguises himself from both father and sister. However, both almost recognize him, and the interplay between them and Alpamiş creates highly pathetic scenes that are much appreciated in southern Uzbekistan today.7

Immediately following these scenes Alpamiş comes upon the “wedding” celebration where his bride Barçın is about to be married off to the slave Ultan, while his son Cadigar (Literary Uzbek Yodigor) is made to serve the guests at the wedding. This is another pathetic scene, which Qahhar frequently performs. The previous May, at a birthday celebration in the town of Dehkanabad, Qahhar had sung a version of Alpamiş’s meeting with his son Cadigar. Later that day, Qahhar sang parts of “Alpamiş” for me and his friends in his own house. Here the meeting with Cadigar was told according to a different and somewhat more elaborate version, which will be described below. While the version sung may vary, somehow Alpamiş must meet his son Cadigar—the return of Alpamiş would not be complete without this scene.

The following day I asked Qahhar to sing for me the same sections that he had sung for me last year. We decided he would do all of the return portion from the meeting with Qultay and the shepherds to the meeting with Cadigar. Qahhar’s student Cawlı heard this recipe and went out for a stroll. An hour and a half later he returned and asked, “Did you kill off the mare or the she-camel?” We replied, “The mare.” This was the bäxşi code to indicate the encounters with the old mare and with Qaldırğaç (who is minding the she-camel), respectively. Much to my surprise, however, the episode with Qaldırğaç was told very quickly in prose. The previous year I had heard Çari Şair base a forty-minute performance entirely on Alpamiş’s sister recognizing the horse-blanket that she had woven for Bayçıbar. In this episode she repeatedly asks the unknown traveler to turn his horse’s head so that she can better view the blanket. All this was now told by Qahhar in a few quick prose sentences. Evidently in the Sherabad tradition

---

7 Both Qahhar and Çari Şair (of the Kitab-Qarshi tradition) use these scenes as separate mini-performances.
this episode was not considered to be one of the essential ones within the Alpamiš doston.

The Microlevel of Flexibility in Performance: the Line

The microlevel of flexibility relates to the creation of poetic lines. Qahhar Bäxşi articulated the issue as follows (6/5/90):

Q.R.: Another aspect of it [i.e., the bäxşi profession] is that we don’t perform from memory, rather we create it (toqu aytämiz). . . . Our tradition (änänä) is like this. We don’t memorize. For example, one cannot just take a book and memorize from start to finish. One can read it five or six times, learn it, memorize the names of the heroes, fix it in the memory, and then one creates it (toqilädi).

W.F.: Do you create the rhymes first and then the lines?
Q.R.: No, at the same time. For example I sing one couplet and then I think about the next, and so on.

Qahhar’s mention of the “book” points up the fact that today the use of a book as a source for a tale is not considered contrary to the tradition. For example, Qahhar himself has created a doston out of the printed version of Aysulu as told in prose by Ergaş Şair to Hodi Zarifov (Özbek Xalq Icodi 1984). Uzbek folklorists have documented the use of books as sources for epic tales in previous generations as well, although in most cases the bäxşi had to get access to the book through a professional reader, a qissäxân (Mirzaev 1979:13-17). Unlike the situation described earlier for the text-oriented bards of Iran or Azerbaijan, neither today nor in the past did the “book” serve as a source of legitimacy. Rather, legitimacy was a function of the chain (silsilä) of epic teachers within a school. In the case of Aysulu, an old part of the epic repertoire was reentering the oral tradition via a published version.

The Two Performances

I visited the town of Dehkanabad and Chalga village in May of 1990. On May 4 I attended a birthday toy held to celebrate the sixty-third year of a prominent member of the Dehkanabad community. There I heard Qahhar Raximov perform selections from the second half of the Alpamiš doston, which I call the “Return of Alpamiš,” including the meetings between
Alpamiş and his father Baybori, his sister Qaldirğaç and his son Cadigar (Yodigor). Later that evening I drove with Otanazar Matyaqubov, head of Oriental Music at the Tashkent State Conservatory, and Qahhar up to his village of Chalga in the Khoja Makhmud district, seventeen kilometers from the town. He invited several friends to his home. There he performed a more continuous version of this episode of “Alpamiş,” including a much elongated version of the meeting with Cadigar.

In July of 1991 I spent a week in Chalga village. One of my goals was to observe how Qahhar would sing the same versions of the episodes of the epic that he had sung the previous year. I wanted to observe the relationship of both the poetic texts and the musical settings in these two performances. I asked Qahhar Bäxşi to sing for me a continuous section of the “Return of Alpamiş” that would include all of the episodes he had sung last year, using the versions that he had used then. On July 3 he sang the “Return of Alpamiş” in two sections of two hours and one hour, respectively. The following day we transcribed the texts and he furnished a detailed commentary on all the expressions that he had employed. We were able to compare two performances of the same version of the meetings with Baybori and with Cadigar. We could not compare the meeting with Qaldirğaç because he went through this episode only in prose in the 1991 performance. We also had to leave out the earlier performance of the meeting with Cadigar from the afternoon of May 11, 1990, because it turned out he had employed an alternative version of that episode, a version that was not really comparable with the other two performances (of that same evening and of July 1991). Performance A of the Baybori episode is 16 lines; B is 28 lines. Performance A of Cadigar is 19 lines; B is 25 lines. Performance B is thus somewhat longer than A.

Baybori

When Alpamiş returns from his captivity among the Qalmyqs, he disguises himself in the clothing of his servant Qultay. However, he continues to ride his own horse, Bayçibar. The disparity between his humble clothing and his magnificent and somehow familiar mount creates confusion in the minds of the members of his family whom he encounters on his way. In the desert Alpamiş meets his father, Baybori, who is now blind. Baybori recognizes the sound of Bayçibar’s hoofbeats, but Alpamiş, who fears that his father’s heart may burst if he learns his true identity, denies his relationship to his father. At this Baybori becomes angry and accuses Alpamiş of heartlessness and failure to perform his duty as a son.
Performance A: May 11, 1990

1. Xuday keçäsín da balam xataňd
   Ara çöldä haydama da bataňd
   Bir paslığa qara deymän aydahar
   Taylab ketäsän ma bu gun ataňdı

   My child, may God forgive your sin
   Don’t drive the one who prays for you into the desert of Ara
   I bid you [stop and] look for a moment, o mighty dragon
   This day will you throw out your own father?

2. Cigitliktä abad edi guzarım
   Qayğa barsam bustan edi bazarım
   Öz ataňdı tašladını mı aydahar
   Egăsiz bop qalar boldı mı mazarım

   In my youth my paths were well founded
   Wherever I went, my bazaar was a garden
   Have you thrown away your own father, o mighty dragon
   Will my tomb be utterly abandoned?

---

8 The Latin orthography of these texts is based on the Qipchak-Uzbek dialect spoken in the Qashqadarya and Surkhandarya regions. The principal difference from the Turkish-based Latinization adopted recently for Literary Uzbek lies in the vocalic system. Qipchak-Uzbek retains a form of Turkic vowel harmony, and the Turkic a has not been transformed into the Tajik o (“aw”). Therefore Qipchap has the front-back opposition ää/a where Literary Uzbek writes a/o. The Qipchak vowel o is much the same as the Turkish o (Lit. Uzbek ö) . For the sake of consistency with my other writings, I retain the Literary Uzbek spelling doston for the Qipchap dastan. I retain the more common Anglicized orthography for place-names, e.g. Surkhandarya instead of Surxandaryo, Tashkent instead of Tockent, and so forth. With personal names I have employed the Uzbek orthography for consonants, but have used the standard vocalic system only for Uzbek figures who were not native to the Qipchak-speaking regions; thus Hodi Zarif (the literary scholar) but Qahhar (not Qahhor) Raximov. Were these latter figures to appear in an Uzbek text, their names would appear in the standard form, since their local dialect has no official status in the Uzbek Republic.
3. **Şahhığimda balând edi subitîm**  
   Qayîza barsam nurli edi bu betim  
   Öz atañdı tanmadiñ aydahar  
   Egâızî bop qalar mı tabutîm

When I was king majestic was my appearance  
Wherever I went, full of light was this face of mine  
**You did not recognize your own father, o mighty dragon**  
**Will my casket be utterly abandoned?**

4. **Temirlârdân edi naylay tuyägîm**  
   Pârzând üçun bu yağım  
   Öz atañdı taşladiñ mı aydahar  
   Kimlärgä qalar ekän bu süyäkim

My nails had been of iron  
This wealth of mine was for my child’s sake  
**Have you thrown out your own father, o mighty dragon**  
**To whom will I leave these bones of mine?**

Performance B: July 3, 1991

1. **Kozlärimdân agarci da cala-ya**  
   Xudayım da cetim ekän nala-ya  
   Pârzând bolsan kelip başam silä-ya  
   Boyanûdan âylânûvin aydahar-a  
   Öz atañdı tanmadiñ mı bala-ya

From my eyes tears flow  
To God I wail like an orphan  
If you are my child, come and stroke my head  
**How dear to me is your stature, o mighty dragon**  
**O my child, did you not recognize your own father?**

2. **Tawdan așsañ Baysun degän qîr deydi**  
   Astañdaqî attu Bayçibarday şir deydi  
   Mehnâtimir di bilsan balam bir deydi  
   Öz atañdı tanmadiñ boyîna  
   Arqañdan cilaşandir Bayboridey çor deydi
If you ascend the mountain, you will reach the peak called Baysun, they say
The horse under you is the lion called Baycibar, they say
Were you to know my woes, you would have added yet another, they say
**You did not recognize your own father, my handsome lad?**
Behind you weeps the wretch called Baybori, they say.

3.  
Märt cigitlär ʒəzada köñli xuʃlay mu
Küygän adam bilgin läbin tiʃläy mu
Oğurlar hær elätti læşläy mu
Bu gün adam bop qaldıñ mu Alpamiʃ
Kättä bolgan pärzänd atasın taʃlay mu

Isn’t the heart of a brave warrior glad in battle?
Doesn’t the grief-laden man bite his lip?
Don’t bandits strip clean the miserable folk?
Didn’t you suddenly become a man today, Alpamiş?
**Does a son who has come of age throw away his father?**

4.  
Amaldarlar bilgin ketti xana-ya
Aştı mikän calğınçoʃda guna-ya
Cetti cilab colina zor tepä-ya
Boyanından aylänin colawçi-ya
Kärigändä keräk emäş mi ata minän ana-ya

The ministers have abandoned the khan
Hasn’t sin increased in this deceitful world?
I have waited sadly for you for seven years
**Traveler, how dear to me is your stature**
When they grow old, isn’t there a need for father and mother?

5.  
Açılmışanda tazä gullär sola mu
Namärð adam oylaɭanu bola mu
Tawuʃūndan üyänųyin colawçi
Pärzänd degän balam sendäy bola mu

When they bloom, will fresh roses fade?
Will the plans of the coward ever come to pass?
**Traveler, how dear to me is your voice**
Does a real son behave to his father as you have done?

6.  
Cañılmagın balam cürgän colıñdan
Stray not, my child, from the road you are traveling
For a thousand years may strength not leave your loins
I bid you tarry a moment, o traveler
Alpamiş, how dear to me is your tongue!

Performance A then shifts into a narrative tirade in eight-syllable verse, beginning:

cürek bawrını bozulup
barğan cayları qazılıp
qarañ Alpanıñ közidän
cağlar baradı tızilip
cüregi vayran boladi
atañ ketti da qazılıp
zarlaqananu bildirip
bedaw atını celdirip
cürek qayğuğa toldirip. . .

his heart and liver broken
the path where goes all rutted
look at Alpamiş, from his eyes
tears flow continuously.
his heart is desolate
woe! he left all broken up
he made known his misery
he trotted his bedouin steed
his heart filled with grief. . .

Performance B also closes with eight-syllable narrative verse. However, in this instance the passage is arranged in four-line strophes:

Hay nazidän nazidän
Alpamiş degân sözidän
Cetä almaydı da Bayborı
Cölablär qaldı izidän
Asman ayas hava kök
Belgü baylap tirdan qq
Här bir adam elidä
Daim bolsun da [dostlar] bek

Oh its style, its style
The words Alpamiş had said
Bayborı could not comprehend
He remained behind him, weeping.
The sky was clear the air blue
He tied the quiver to his waist
In each land of men
There should always be a beg, my friends.

Analysis

The episode of the meeting of Alpamiş with his father Bayborı is one of the essential sections in the doston, and cannot under any circumstances be omitted. It appears in every recorded version of “Alpamiş” (Mirzaev 1968), and Qahhar Bäxşi affirms that it is one of the necessary episodes of
the “Return of Alpamiş.” Furthermore, audiences frequently ask for it to be performed separately, even without the rest of the doston. To Qahhar Bäxşi, these two speeches by Bayborı are “the same” in that they occur in the same place in the story and fulfill the same function. They both present the words of the father to his son. Performance A (1990) is set in a four-line strophe, while performance B (1991) is in a five-line strophe. Both employ eleven-syllable lines, but this is a standard feature of virtually all speeches in the Uzbek doston. Furthermore, they were sung to different melodies. Performance A uses the standard epic melody (namä) termed garipnamä while B is sung to turkmennamä.

Both performance A and B use two motif-lines. This doubled motif-line in A divides the quatrain into two sections, which now have their own separate semantic organization (as indicated by the bold face versus normal font). In A we see virtually a “motif-couplet,” which always appears in the second half of the strophe. In the first line of this couplet the key words are aydahar (“dragon”) and the verbs taşladıñ (“you threw away”) or tanmadıñ (“you did not recognize”). This first motif-line may be paraphrased as “Did you abandon/fail to recognize your own father?” The first strophe is irregular in that taylab (literary täśláb, “throwing away”) appears in the second line of the couplet rather than the first. In strophes 2 and 4 this line would have appeared as line 3 rather than 4, preceding the word aydahar. In strophes 2, 3, and 4, the third line begins with the words öz atañdı (“your father”) and ends with aydahar.9 The verb may be taşladıñ or tanmadıñ.

The second motif-line may be paraphrased as “Will my bones/casket be abandoned?” In each strophe the fourth line presents the results of the heartless action of the son, Alpamiş—the tomb (mazar), the casket (tabut), or the bones (siyäk) of the father will be abandoned. Syntactically these lines are closely parallel. In strophe 2 and 3 the second motif-line begins with egäsiz bop (“without owner”) and ends with the possessive suffix -im. Strophe 4 substitutes kimlärgä (“to whom”) for egäsiz.

The opening couplets of strophes 2, 3, and 4 have their own semantic structure. They are so closely related that they almost form a second series of “motif-lines.” In these lines Bayborı laments his lost youth and present

---

9 The use of the word aydahar (Persian azhdaha, “dragon”) requires a gloss. In other published dostons, aydahar appears in the usual Persian-Islamic context as a negative, monstrous figure. Yet when I questioned him, Qahhar insisted that in his tradition aydahar has positive value as a metaphor for a brave, valiant warrior. Hence the translation “mighty dragon.”
weakness. The major constant syntactic feature is the first-person possessive suffix at the end of each line—my path, my bazaar, my appearance, my face, my nails, my wealth. These are always preceded by the simple verb *edi*, “it was.” Thus the pattern goes as follows: “in my youth” my a, b, c, d was x, y, z. In line 2 (strophes 2 and 3) we see the repetition of the phrase *qayğa barsam* (“wherever I may go”).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[XXXX]</th>
<th>XX</th>
<th><em>edi</em></th>
<th>XX-<em>ım</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Cigitlikta</em></td>
<td><em>abad</em></td>
<td><em>edi</em></td>
<td><em>guzarım</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Qayğa barsam</em></td>
<td><em>bustan</em></td>
<td><em>edi</em></td>
<td><em>bazarım</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Şahlığımda</em></td>
<td><em>baländ</em></td>
<td><em>edi</em></td>
<td><em>subitim</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Qayğa barsam</em></td>
<td><em>nurli</em></td>
<td><em>edi</em></td>
<td><em>bu betim</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“In my youth my paths were well founded
Wherever I went, my bazaar was a garden”

“When I was king majestic was my appearance
Wherever I went, full of light was this face of mine”

In strophes 2, 3, and 4 no explicit connection is ever created to link the first and the second halves of the strophes. It is this juxtaposition of two distinct themes that creates the poignancy of these strophes. In the first theme Bayborı laments his helpless and humiliating old age, and in the second he castigates his son for adding a further insult to the injuries he is already suffering.

The opening strophe is structured rather differently from the succeeding three. The first half asks God to forgive his son’s transgression, with whom Bayborı then pleads directly. The fourth line is closely related to the third line of all the other strophes. The third line, however, is echoed nowhere in the entire speech, apart from the closing word *aydahar*, which is then taken up in each successive third line. However, if we jump ahead and look at the closing strophe of performance B of fourteen months later, we see a variant of this line in the third position within the final strophe (6):

A) *Bir pastılğa qara deymän aydahar*
“I bid you [stop and] look for a moment, o mighty dragon”

B) *Bir pastılğa toxta deymän cola встреч*
“I bid you tarry a moment, o traveler”
There can be no question of the bäxši remembering the performance of fourteen months earlier. Rather it would seem that the lines were created according to a formulaic pattern: Bir pasılğa XX deymän XXX.

In performance B Qahhar Bäxši has created a very different text from performance A. Formally he is using a five-line strophe, constructed AAABA. In his musical performance the fourth, B-line is emphasized by a long melisma after the closing syllable. Nevertheless, this privileged position of the fourth or B-line does not always coincide with the motif-line, which is located in the fifth line in all but the second strophe. In this motif-line we can see something of the first motif-line of performance A, namely the formula öz atañdı (“your own father”) and the verb tanımadiń (“you did not recognize”).

A, strophe 3:
Öz atañdı tanımadiń aydahar
“You did not recognize your own father, o mighty dragon”

B, strophe 2:
Öz atañdı tanımadiń boyñana
“You did not recognize your own father, my handsome lad”

Qahhar Bäxši chose a different formal structure for strophes 5 and 6, which are quatrains. He maintained the turkmennamä melody, however, with the melismatic ending after the B-line, which now is line 3, rather than 4. In strophes nos. 3, 4, and 5 he changed the motif-line. Previously, the motif-line had been a variant of the motif-lines that he had used in performance A. Now he breaks this syntactic pattern and leaves out the key words, except for a single appearance of tašla- in strophe 3. His new motif-line is structurally looser. It conveys an idea (probably heard in homes throughout the world) that might be paraphrased as “now that you are grown up, do you think you can abandon your parents?” He has no single syntactic formula for this statement. In both strophes it appears with a new structure. However, the semantic relationship with the earlier motif-lines (“Didn’t you recognize/ Did you throw out your own father?”) is clear.

The remaining lines do not reflect the subject of the lament of Bayborı in performance A. The five-line strophes (1-4) are not structured like the quatrains of A, which were bifurcated into a couplet plus a doubled motif-line. Most of the lines in B seem paratactic, but they often reveal an indirect relationship with the motif-line. For example, in strophe 3, lines 1, 2, and 3 contrast the conquering hero with the wretched victim of bandits.
The implication may be that although Alpamiš seems to be a hero, his heroism is like that of a bandit—it is cruel and does not respect legitimate social relationships and boundaries. He has become a brave young warrior, but he announces this fact by abandoning his aged father. Likewise, in strophe 4 the ministers abandoning their khan refer once again to Alpamiš abandoning his father. True parataxis appears only in the quatrains that end the segment. In strophes 5 and 6 the opening couplets are formulas, as are the lines using the word aylanayin (lit. “let me circumambulate”), units that are formulaic for such good wishes.

The narrative verses that close the speech of Bayborı contain no common features in performances A and B. In A this section is tiradic, in B strophic. A speaks only about Alpamiš; B begins by describing Bayborı, turning to Alpamiš in the second strophe. The final two lines, “In every land of men/ there should always be a beg, my friends,” is an indirect reference to Alpamiš as the legitimate ruler of the Qungrads. Narrative verse does not employ the motif-line technique, so this is not a unifying factor. Furthermore, no single word or even any syntactic structure links the two performances.

We can conclude that these two performed texts are as a whole dissimilar except for the motif-line of B that is closely related to the first motif-line of A. The single word aydahar, so prominent in the motif-line of A, is echoed only in the first strophe of performance B. This early appearance of aydahar suggests that there must have been earlier performances in which this word also had played a part in the motif-line. Obviously, the relationships between these performance-generated oral texts are almost infinite. In this minimal sample of two texts, the density of correspondence is different in the motif-lines and in the remainder of the texts. It is possible to find very close relationships in the motif-lines, suggesting both words and syntactic patterns previously employed, whereas the other lines of these two texts are mainly dissimilar. The bäxşi also demonstrates difference by creating a text in a new strophic format, set to a melody that differs from the musical underpinning of the earlier text.

**Cadigar**

Alpamiš’s first meeting with his son Cadigar (Yodigor) is told variously in the Uzbek epic traditions. In its variant appearances it is one of the basic episodes of the “Return of Alpamiš.” On the evening of May 11, 1990, and on July 3, 1991, Qahhar Raximov told it according to the standard version of his tradition. In this version Alpamiš appears at the
wedding of Uultan and Barçın, disguised in the clothing of the servant Qultay. He sees a young boy, apparently an orphan serving the guests. Although he does not know that this is his son Cadigar (whom he has never seen), he pities the boy’s forlorn and hungry appearance, and, taking a piece of the best cut of meat (from the upper thigh), he gives it to the young man. However, when the cook spies Cadigar feasting on the lamb’s thigh, he becomes angry and strikes him in the face. Cadigar is hurt and confused by the seemingly kindly behavior of the stranger that has nevertheless caused him pain and embarrassment. The speech of Cadigar is a feature of the Sherabad tradition, as it had been performed by Qadir Şair, and both performance A from 1990 and performance B from 1991 reflect the same episode.10

Performance A: May 11, 1990

1. **Muna çöldä körinädi bay adamnñ karvani**  
   Sağır bolsa adamzad kop boladı armanı  
   Tuyalärgä taylar mikän karmamı  
   **Bul gäpimä qulaq salğın babacan**  
   Şul boldı mä bir Xudanñ parmani

   In this desert a rich man’s caravan appears  
   If he is orphaned, many of a man’s desires are unfulfilled  
   Do they throw rich grass to the camels?  
   **Give ear to my speech**  
   Is this the decree of God?

2. **Cürek bağrın xanásidän tilindi**  
   Sağırlışım naylay şu bugundä bilindi  
   **Ne sâbâbdän cilik berdiñ babacan**  
   Aq tenedä qızıl qanlar körindi

   My heart is torn from its home  
   My orphanhood today is made known

---

10 On the afternoon of May 11, 1990, Qahhar had performed the meeting of Alpamış and Cadigar as an isolated scene at the birthday celebration in Dehkanabad. There he had employed another version, in which there is no leg of meat, and therefore no striking of Cadigar by the cook. The following comparison does not include this performance, which was based upon a different version of the tale.
Why did you give me the thigh bone?
Red blood appeared on my white flesh

3.  

\[ \text{Oylay bersâm temir tegdi tenemä} \\
\text{Aq otawda cilab qaldt enäm-ä} \\
\text{Caman qursın caşiş gäpgä konämä} \\
\text{Bir paslığa qara deymän babacan} \\
\text{Çini bilän boşaydı mu xanäm-a} \]

[If I think of it] iron touched my flesh
My mother weeps bitterly in the white yurt
Let there be no evil, will one listen to good talk?
I bid you stop and look for a moment
Truly, will my house be destroyed?

4.  

\[ \text{Baländ tawlar başı boladı qiya} \\
\text{Ata bolsa adamğa berär saya} \\
\text{Sağırğa bir keñ ekän dâ dunya} \\
\text{Ne sâbâbdân cilik berdiñ babacan} \\
\text{Bu sağırını cilattip kopeymâdîmi guna} \]

The tops of the tall mountains are peaks
A father gives shade to a human being
The world is wide (i.e., without shelter) to the orphan
Why did you give me the thigh bone?
Were his sins so great that you caused this orphan to weep?

Performance B: July 3, 1991

1.  

\[ \text{Tawlar xonik bolar baba lalâsiz} \\
\text{Şähär vayran bolar baba qalasız} \\
\text{Adam garip bolmas biliñ nalâsiz} \\
\text{Cilik bermây axir boğun babacan} \\
\text{Ne sâbâbdân urdurduñ aytqun balâsiz} \]

Without a tulip the mountains are ugly
Without a fortress the city is ruined
Without a groan a man is not mournful
Give no more thigh bone to me,
Tell me, why did you cause me to be beaten, o childless one?
2.  
Açilmayın baba gullär solğan ma  
Ya bolmasa bu paymanın tolğan ma  
Kocädägi adamlar hâm uradı  
Ya çini bilän babacan meniñ atam ölgän ma

If they do not bloom, will the flowers fade?  
Is this destiny fulfilled?  
Men in the street strike me as well  
Tell me truly, is my father dead?

3.  
Bedawiñdi maydan maydan celirdiñ  
Cilik berip duşmanünü güldirdiñ  
Cüregimdä tawça alam qaldirdiñ  
Cilik bemäy axir borçun babacan  
Atacanıñ coqlınum bildirdiñ

You galloped your bedouin steed around the square  
By giving the thigh bone you caused your foe to laugh  
In my heart you left a pain great as a mountain  
Give no more thigh bone to me,  
You let it be known that I have no father

4.  
Garip cilasä gäpgä qulaq salmyma  
On beş bolsa asmanda ay tolmayma  
Niyät qilsanı baham bir kun bolmayma  
Cilik berip qızıl qanğa boyadıñ  
Kăşâl ketgän atacanum kelmaymä

If he weeps, will they not give ear to the wretched stranger?  
If it is fifteen days old, is the moon in the sky not full?  
If you have the proper intention, will it not come to pass?  
By giving me the thigh bone you bathed me in red blood  
Will he not come home, my father who has gone to Kashal?

5.  
Mingän atññ baba seniñ kökmimdì  
Qulğan içiñ yalğançi xaq müdî  
Bir awladiñ aytğın baba bek müdî  
Ne sâbâbdän cilattıñ da sağirdì  
Ya bolmasa babacan seniñ balañ coq müdî
Are you riding a gray horse?
Was your deed false or true?
Tell me, was this son of yours a beg?
Why did you cause the orphan to weep?
Is it because you have no child?

Analysis

The theme of Cadigar’s speech in both performances is a meditation on orphanhood. Qahhar Bāxşi presents what he considers the essence of the life of an orphan in the last strophe of performance A. When I questioned him about the meaning of the world being “wide” (keñ) for a [fatherless] orphan (sağır), he explained that an orphan sees much more of the world than a normal child. The orphan must be aware of everyone’s actions and how these might bear upon him—information with which a child within a family would not concern himself. The orphan cannot allow himself to misbehave, because he has no one to protect him from just or unjust punishment (cf. B2: “men in the street strike me as well”). In the ecological context of the Khoja Makhmud district, the peaks of the “tall mountains” in A4 are bare and treeless, and it is the father who “gives shade,” shelter from the heat of the sun. All his life Cadigar has lived as a fatherless orphan, yet he is not certain that his father has died. The generous deed of the disguised Alpamış seems “fatherly,” yet its results prove bitter. Cadigar interprets this development as a cruel plot on the part of the stranger. Unlike his grandfather Bayborı, or his aunt Qaldirğaç, he is not certain that he has seen Alpamış. Therefore the ambiguity of this episode is greater than in parallel episodes in the “Return” cycle. This ambiguity is what creates the pathos of this scene.

There is, however, a difference in emphasis between these two performances. Performance A speaks almost exclusively about orphanhood (sağırluq). The word sağır or sağırluq appears in three out of four strophes, including an early appearance in strophe 1. It is the motif-line, speaking of the meaty thigh bone (cilik), that links this general lament to the specific situation of the episode. Performance B is exclusively concerned with the episode itself.

The nature of this difference is not dissimilar to what we have seen in the two versions of the speech of Bayborı. Both Cadigar and Bayborı address two different aspects of the same predicament. In particular, Bayborı’s speech in A could have developed in a very different direction, and become a lament over his lost youth, as Cadigar’s in A is a lament on
orphanhood. It is probably not accidental that the performance A versions of both episodes are more “philosophical,” more general, and less concerned with the specific situation than those of performance B. It is possible that B, as an elicited performance, was more narrowly directed toward the episode, perhaps because this is what Qahhar thought was required. The performance A versions, on the other hand, were not elicited (by me). They represent two different performance situations on the same day, both having larger audiences (25 people in the afternoon, 10 in the evening).

Formally, the two performances employ alternating four- and five-line strophes with eleven-syllable lines. In A the succession is 5, 4, 5, 5, while in B it is 5, 4, 5, 5, 5. Melodically, performance A was sung to turkmennamä, while performance B used a melody of the garipnamä family. A alternates between two different motif-lines while B uses two motif-lines in succession in each strophe. However, one of the motif-lines of A is almost identical to the first motif-line of B. The most obvious formal difference between the two performances is the constant insertion of the two-syllable word babam or baba (“old man”) in performance B. In strophe 1, line 3 biliñ (“know”) is substituted for baba. These two-syllable words (not indicated in the translation) are part of the eleven-syllable structure, although they contribute little to the meaning.

The key-word of the motif-lines of both performances is cilik, “meaty thigh bone.” Here, this part of the sheep’s anatomy symbolizes much of what a father can do for a son. In the context of Cadigar’s degraded existence, cilik is something that he cannot hope to have, and perhaps has never tasted. Cilik appears in two of the four strophes of performance A and in four lines within the five strophes of B. As we have seen, this greater concentration on the core of the episode is characteristic of performance B.

Cilik also appears as the keyword of the motif-line of a third performance, recorded in October 1991 in New York. The Cadigar speech in this performance had five five-line strophes. In three of these the word cilik appeared in the following contexts:

1. Ne sebebdañ cilik berdiñ boyuñdan
   “Why did you give the thigh-bone, o dear stature?”
2. Negä cilik berdiñ babacan
   “Why did you give the thigh-bone, dear old man?”
3. Ne sebebdañ cilik berdiñ babacan
   “Why did you give the thigh-bone, dear old man?”
This motif-line appeared in identical or very similar form three times over a period of over eighteen months, a regularity that suggests that it is a somewhat stable feature of this sub-tradition. The later performance of the Cadigar episode contained only one overt echo of one of these two earlier performances. Compare the very last line of the last strophe—

*Käšälgä ketgän atacanın enäcan aytgin kelmäymä*

“Tell me dear mother, will he not come home, my father who has
gone to Kashal?”

— with the fifth line of strophe 4 in performance B:

*Käšäl ketgän atacanın kelmäymä*

“Will he not come home, my father who has gone to Kashal?”

These are identical lines, except that in the former Qahhar adds the parenthetical “tell me, dear mother” (*enäcan aytgin*), which breaks the syllable count of the line. Thus we observe another obvious link between the performances of May 1990 and October 1991.

The syllabic structure of the motif-line in A is (1-3-2-2-3):

\[
[X \quad XXX \quad XX \quad XX \quad XXX]
\]

*Bul gapimä qulaq salgin babacan*

*Në sâbäbdan cilik berdiñ babacan (2x)*

*Bir pasılgä qara deymän babacan*

“Give ear to my speech”

“Why did you give me the thigh bone?”

“I bid you stop and look for a moment”

In performance B the syllabic structure becomes (2-2-2-2-3):

\[
[XX \quad XX \quad XX \quad XX \quad XXX]
\]

*Cilik bermäy axir boğun babacan (2x)*

*Cilik berip duştmaniñi güldirdiñ*

*Cilik berip qızıl qangä boyadiñ*

“Give no more thigh bone to me”

“By giving the thigh bone you caused your foe to laugh”

“By giving me the thigh bone you bathed me in red blood”
Cilik has two syllables. The root of the verb bermaq (ber-, “to give”) is a single syllable. When combined with either the participle -ip or the negative participle -mäy, it forms a two-syllable word. The three-syllable slot at the end of the line, which is not as variable as the other slots, can be filled either with an apostrophe or with a finite verb. In Uzbek, both a two-syllable verbal root plus the second person past suffix and a monosyllabic verbal root plus a causative suffix plus the second person past suffix will result in a trisyllabic word (e.g. güldirdiñ or boядиñ). These patterns will generate seven out of the eleven syllables needed for the stich, and they will insure its opening and closing. The remaining four syllables in the middle of the stich can be generated from a wide variety of patterns. In the three examples above, each of these four-syllable segments represents a different part of speech.

In strophes B1 and B5 the bard repeats the basic structure of the second motif-line of performance A, beginning with the phrase ne säбäbdän. In B1 he mistakes the syllable count:

\[
\text{[X XXX XXX XX XXX]} \quad (1-3-2-3=12)
\]

\[
\text{Ne säбäbdän urdurduñ ayтqин balä siz}
\]

“Tell me, why did you cause me to be beaten, o childless one?”

In strophe 5 the syllable count is correct, but the breakup is not elegant:

\[
\text{[X XXX XXX X XXX]} \quad (1-3-3-1-3=11)
\]

\[
\text{Ne säбäbdän cilattин da saqirdu}
\]

“Why did you cause the orphan to weep?”

The ineptitude in handling this type of line probably indicates that he has not used it for some time, perhaps not since performance A fourteen months before.

The motif-line of performance A, strophe 3 repeats a structure familiar to us from the Baybori episode:

\[
\text{Bir pasила qara deymän babacan,}
\]

“I bid you stop and look for a moment”

to which may be compared:
“I bid you [stop and] look for a moment, o mighty dragon”
“I bid you tarry a moment, o traveler”

Here the three-syllable babacan fills the place taken elsewhere by aydahar (“dragon”) and colawçi (“traveler”). The first strophe employs a similar syllabic and syntactic structure for its motif-line:

\[ X \ XXX \ XX \ XX \ XXX \]

\[ Bul \ gapimä \ qulaq \ salgin \ babacan \]

“This to my speech ear do give dear old man”

This line has no reference to cilik or sağır, but appears to be an “all-purpose” motif-line that calls attention to what will follow.

This type of syllabic patterning and syntactic parallelism resembles essential techniques of folk verse in many Turkic languages (Zhirmunsky 1965; Reichl 1992:178). It is also not distant conceptually from the type of patterning that forms the basis for South Slavic epic (Lord 1960:45-58). What is significant here is that it has a specific function in the creation of a particular kind of line, which in turn has a specific function in the doston. From this limited sample it would appear that some motif-lines are varied and restructured until only a single word or a syntactic pattern remains, while in other cases the line may be preserved through several performances virtually intact. Such a stable line may even form the nucleus around which the entire speech is built.

In the sample adduced here, these motif-lines could represent one line out of a four-line strophe, one line out of five, or two lines out of five, or even two lines out of four. However, not every motif-line is equally formulaic. As noted above, there is a structural difference between the “classical” formulicity of the type of bul gapimä qulaq salgin babacan or the pattern bir pasılğa XX deymän XXX, on the one hand, and the motif-lines of performance B of Baybori on the other:

\[ Kättä bolğan pärzänd atasın taşlay mı \]

“Does a son who has come of age throw away his father?”

\[ Kärigändä keräk emäš mi ata minän ana-ya \]

“When they grow old, isn’t there a need for father and mother?”
Both the syntax and the syllabic structures of these three lines are extremely divergent. They cannot be considered formulaic in the usual sense of generation through syntactic manipulation and lexical substitution. The very fact that the bard has elided the first syllable of *atası* and gone over the syllabic limit in the second line may stem from his struggle to avoid the syntactic patterns used elsewhere in this motif-line or in the speech in general.

Performance A of the Bayborı speech is created as four-line strophes that give the impression of having come from two distinct speeches or perhaps themes. The two motif-lines always occupy the second half of the strophe and are clearly related to Bayborı’s lament. They seem like “classic” motif-lines that can be manipulated and reformulated with minimal change of meaning. We know that the first motif-line, beginning with the formula *öz atañdi* ("your own father") was in fact manipulated to serve as the motif-line of performance B. The opening half of each strophe is also composed of lines that are so formulaic—and seem so appropriate to express another theme (namely the lament for lost youth)—that some of them may have functioned as motif-lines in another episode. In strophe 3, in addition to the formulaic opening *qayğa barsam* ("wherever I would go"), the remaining words *nurli edi bu betim* ("this face of mine was luminous") echo a formula found in other epics of the Sherabad tradition: *sargaymasın nurlı cüz* ("may the luminous face fade not"). Thus, this particular speech appears to contain the highest density of formulas of the three examined here.

**Conclusion**

Qahhar Bäxši constructs his *doston* text in an essentially performance-generative manner, with no evidence of a previously learned text. Despite the common Turkic heritage of syntactic parallelism and syllabic patterning, his technique is quite remote from the documented practices of Karakalpak or Kazakh *zhraus* in neighboring areas of Central Asia. This is admittedly a very small sample, but it coincides well with what is known about the Uzbek epic tradition as a whole (see Reichl 1992, Feldman 1983). A much larger sample, especially from the same region, would very likely unearth many other verbal resemblances with other versions. Nevertheless, the type
of rearrangement of essentially text-oriented material that predominates in the Karakalpak and Kazakh epic, not to mention the direct text-reproduction of the Turkmen or other Oghuzic traditions, does not seem to be present here.

The Uzbek epic texts show a much smaller degree of text-reproduction than any of the other Central Asian Turkic oral epics. Within a particular performance, the motif-line represents formulicity of a different order from the bulk of the text. This series of variants of one or two lines is usually created through syntactic manipulation and lexical substitution in a much more restricted way than is the rest of the text. Whatever their relationship to earlier performances might be, in a particular performance the motif-lines are rather close conceptually to the formulaic lines studied by Albert Lord in the South Slavic epic. In the short examples analyzed here, there are instances of a motif-line corresponding to a line-pattern recorded in an earlier performance by the same bard. In other cases we have no way of knowing whether a given line-pattern had been employed earlier. However, the structural resemblances to the Balkan epic line should not disguise an important difference in the Uzbek material. As I have noted earlier, in the Uzbek doston the “constant reformation of the syllabic lines allowed little retention of fixed elements. This fact contrasts with the situation in Yugoslavia where an isosyllabic format did permit the continuous use of many inherited and regionally stable formulas and epithets.”

Considering Reichl’s convincing conclusions on the creation of the Karakalpak and Kazakh zhır and his suggestions about the Kirghiz Manas, the Uzbek doston would appear to be the only form of oral epic in Turkic Central Asia that practices significant performance-generation, without “text-orientation” or “memorization.” At the current state of our knowledge it is difficult to determine whether the Uzbek practice represents the continuation of the more ancient tradition, so that it was these other Turkic groups who abandoned “creative” performance-generation for epics (they still practice it for competitive poetic genres), or whether it was the Uzbeks alone who applied the performance-generation techniques long used in competitive poetic genres and adapted them to epic. In any case it is

11 Reichl’s fieldwork in Uzbekistan is less extensive, but his material, along with the evidence of published texts, leads him to conclude that “in the southern Uzbek tradition comparable love-romances such as Kuntuğmic vary far more radically from variant to variant” (1992:268).

significant and hopeful to learn that, despite the negative pronouncements of the academic folklore establishment in Tashkent, one region of the country is still producing a generation of oral bards who show every sign of bringing the Uzbek oral *doston* into the twenty-first century.\footnote{13 I would like to thank Susan Slyomovics (MIT) and Judit Frigyesi (Princeton University) for their thoughtful readings of an earlier draft of this article.}

*University of Pennsylvania*

### References

Feldman 1980  

Feldman 1983  

Feldman 1994  

Foley 1988  

Heissig 1987  

Karmysheva 1976  


Mirzaev 1979 _______. *Xalq Baxşilarniñ Epik Repertuari [The Repertoire of the Popular Bards]*. Tashkent: Fän.


Zarif 1988


Zarifov and Zhirmunsky


Zhirmunsky 1960


Zhirmunsky 1965


Zhirmunsky 1966


Zhirmunsky 1969