

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TERMA AND DOSTON IN THE SURKHANDARYA EPIC SCHOOL

Kadirova Saida Maksudovna

Assistant Teacher at the Ellikkal Branch of the  
Nukus State Pedagogical Institute named after Ajinyoz

E-mail: [kaadirovasaida14@gmail.com](mailto:kaadirovasaida14@gmail.com)

ORCID: 0009-0008-5493-6492

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the artistic, compositional, functional and performative relationship between terma and doston in the Surkhandarya epic school, one of the most distinctive regional traditions of Uzbek oral epic culture. The study proceeds from the premise that terma and doston should not be interpreted as mechanically isolated folklore genres, because in the living repertoire of the bakhshi they operate as two interdependent layers of one epic-performing system. Terma prepares the performer, gathers the attention of the audience, opens the moral and emotional field of the gathering, and frequently functions as a condensed poetic expression of the same worldview that later unfolds in the large-scale narrative structure of the doston. Doston, in turn, expands the thematic seed of terma into a full narrative universe with heroes, trials, conflicts, journeys, lyrical monologues and ethical resolution. UNESCO describes bakhshi art as the performance of epic stories with traditional musical accompaniment, and the state cultural policy of Uzbekistan emphasizes the scientific study, preservation and popularization of bakhshi art, dostons and folk termas [1; 2]. Within the Surkhandarya environment, especially the Boysun-Sherobod line of epic performance, the relation between terma and doston appears through introductory performance, repertoire memory, ethical commentary, musical transition, improvisational testing, social communication and intergenerational transmission through the ustoz-shogird tradition. The article argues that terma is not only a preliminary song before the doston, but also a semantic and structural key to the epic universe of the Surkhandarya bakhshi. It compresses moral codes, regional speech, melodic identity, poetic formulae and performer authority into a mobile form. Therefore, the artistic-compositional specificity of the Surkhandarya epic school cannot be fully understood without analyzing how terma enters, frames, supports and sometimes reinterprets doston performance.

**KEYWORDS:** Surkhandarya epic school; terma; doston; bakhshi; Uzbek folklore; oral epic; Boysun-Sherobod tradition; epic composition; performance; master-disciple tradition.

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## Introduction

The Surkhandarya epic school occupies a special place in the system of Uzbek oral creativity because it has preserved the ancient unity of word, melody, memory and performance with exceptional clarity. In this school the bakhshi is not merely a singer of inherited texts; he is simultaneously narrator, poet, musician, dramatist, commentator, custodian of collective memory and interpreter of local ethical consciousness. The Uzbek doston is traditionally understood as a large-scale oral epic narrative that presents heroic, romantic, historical or moral events through a combination of prose narration, poetic passages, musical formulae and dramatic characterization. Yet the performance of a doston rarely begins as an immediate entrance into the central plot. In many cases, especially in the Qashqadarya-Surkhandarya epic environment, the performer prepares the artistic space through *terma*, a compact lyrical or lyrical-epic poetic form performed with instrumental accompaniment and containing didactic, philosophical, autobiographical, social or introductory meaning. This functional position makes *terma* a crucial threshold between ordinary speech and epic narration. The listener does not simply receive a story; he or she is gradually moved into a different tempo of attention, where everyday time is replaced by epic time. The doston then becomes possible not only as a text but as an event. Scholarly discussions of *terma* emphasize that it prepares the bakhshi for the performance of epics and encourages the audience to listen to the coming doston, while also existing as an independent genre of the epic type with diverse themes and flexible formal structure [3]. This duality is the main reason why the relationship between *terma* and doston must be studied as an internal relation, not as a secondary or decorative attachment. If doston is the monumental narrative body of epic tradition, *terma* is its compressed breath, its threshold, its ethical preface and often its internal commentary. The Surkhandarya tradition, including the Boysun-Sherobod performance environment, offers particularly rich material for this inquiry because local bakhshis historically cultivated both long epic narratives and numerous *termas*, and their repertoire was formed through oral apprenticeship, regional dialect, seasonal gatherings, family ceremonies, public festivities and collective listening practices. Research on the Surxon bakhshi school connects the Boysun-Sherobod line with Sherobod, Boysun, Jarqo'rg'on and Denov districts of Surkhandarya, as well as adjacent cultural areas, and mentions performers such as Sherka baxshi, Abdunazar Poyonov and Shoberdi Boltayev as part of the living or remembered chain of this tradition [4]. The regionality of this tradition is important because folklore is not preserved only through texts; it is also preserved through accent, melodic color, audience expectation, local memory and performance etiquette. A *terma* performed in Surkhandarya may share general Uzbek epic features, but it also carries the acoustic and moral signature of its own school. The relevance of the topic is strengthened by the contemporary cultural policy of Uzbekistan. The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 304 of April 26, 2018, on measures for the further development and enhancement of bakhshi and doston art, establishes preservation, research, publication, education and

popularization as priority directions [2]. International recognition of bakhshi art as part of intangible cultural heritage also confirms that this tradition should be studied not only as literary history, but as a living performative practice transmitted by memory, voice and apprenticeship [1]. However, the inner relation between the short poetic form and the large epic narrative remains insufficiently explained in many general descriptions of Uzbek epic performance. Some works describe terma as an introductory song; others treat it as a separate lyrical genre. Both interpretations are valid, but neither fully explains how terma and doston operate inside one performance act. In the Surkhandarya epic school, terma is not simply placed before the doston in chronological order; it reorganizes the communicative situation, defines the performer's authority, introduces ethical orientation, activates melodic memory and prepares the narrative contract between bakhshi and audience. The present article addresses this problem by analyzing terma and doston as two mutually dependent levels of Surkhandarya epic composition. The central research question is: how does terma participate in the artistic-compositional construction, semantic orientation and performative realization of doston in the Surkhandarya epic school? The purpose of the article is to identify the main forms of interaction between these two genres and to prove that their relationship is structural, aesthetic and ideological rather than external or accidental. The tasks of the study are to clarify the genre nature of terma and doston within Uzbek oral epic culture; to examine the specific features of the Surkhandarya epic environment; to analyze the compositional functions of terma before and during the performance of doston; to determine how terma preserves the moral and philosophical code of the epic tradition; to show how the master-disciple system transmits both short and long epic forms as parts of one repertoire; and to evaluate the contemporary significance of this relationship for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The scientific novelty of the article lies in interpreting terma not as a marginal or merely auxiliary form, but as a compact epic mechanism that activates, frames and renews the doston tradition. The practical significance is connected with folklore studies, musicology, cultural heritage education, regional literary studies and the preparation of teaching materials on Uzbek oral creativity. From this perspective, the Surkhandarya epic school is not only an object of historical interest but also a living laboratory of genre interaction, where a small form carries the genetic code of a large epic system.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research was conducted on the basis of historical-comparative, structural-poetic, functional-semantic and performance-oriented methods, because the relationship between terma and doston cannot be explained only through textual description. A purely textual approach would reduce doston to a written narrative and terma to a short poem, whereas in the Surkhandarya tradition both forms live primarily through voice, melody, gesture, memory, audience reaction, ritual setting and improvisational choice. Therefore, the methodological basis of the article combines several levels of analysis. The first level is

genre analysis, through which terma is examined as a short lyrical or lyrical-epic form and doston as a large-scale epic narrative containing prose, verse, song, melody and dramatic episodes. This distinction is necessary but insufficient: it identifies external form, while the aim of the present study is to reveal internal function. The second level is compositional analysis, which identifies where and how terma appears in relation to the doston: before the narrative begins, between narrative blocks, at moments of emotional transition, as an ethical comment, or as an independent performance unit that nevertheless shares the same formulaic language with the epic repertoire. The third level is functional analysis, which considers terma as preparation, invocation, communication, repertoire announcement, moral instruction, audience testing and self-positioning of the bakhshi. The fourth level is regional analysis, which pays attention to the Surkhandarya school's local features: the strong role of the do'mbira, the specific vocal manner of the Sherobod line, the connection with seasonal gatherings, the importance of the Boysun-Sherobod tradition, and the continuity of the ustoz-shogird system. Descriptions of the Qashqadarya-Surkhandarya tradition note that epic evenings were often organized after autumn agricultural work and continued until early spring, and that the performance involved long collective listening events in family and neighborhood contexts [11]. This social setting is methodologically significant because terma performs its full function only in a live communicative environment: it prepares not only the performer's voice, but also the audience's patience, expectation and emotional participation. The fifth level is intertextual and formulaic analysis, which examines how motifs, images, proverbs, moral oppositions, heroic values and rhythmic patterns move from terma into doston and from doston back into terma. The article uses as theoretical support the classical ideas of oral-formulaic studies, according to which the epic performer is not a passive memorizer of a fixed written text but an active composer in performance [7]. This approach is especially relevant to Uzbek bakhshi art because the bakhshi retains inherited plots, traditional formulae and melodic patterns while adapting them to a particular audience and moment. The material basis of the analysis includes general Uzbek epic traditions such as Alpomish, Go'ro'g'li, Avaxon, Kuntug'mish, Rustamxon and Oshiq G'arib va Shohsanam, as well as the regional repertoire associated with Surkhandarya bakhshis. The article does not claim to present a full archive-based edition of particular recorded texts; rather, it builds a conceptual model of genre interaction grounded in published scholarship, state cultural documentation, international heritage descriptions and the internal logic of oral epic performance. Such a method is appropriate for an IMRAD-format folklore article because the research question is not simply what terma is or what doston is, but how one genre operates inside the artistic system of the other. To answer this, the study compares the scale, function, structure, performance position and semantic density of both forms. The validity of the analysis depends on three principles. First, the genre must be understood through performance, because in oral culture the same text changes its meaning when performed in different contexts. Second, the regional school must be treated as a living tradition, not as a museum

object. Third, the short form must be examined with the same seriousness as the long epic, because in oral cultures small forms often preserve the most stable values of collective memory. The methodological position of the article may therefore be defined as performance-centered structural folkloristics: the genres are analyzed not only as text types, but also as functions inside one living artistic act. This permits the study to identify terma as a compact poetic technology of epic activation. It warms the voice, introduces the moral universe, gathers the audience, announces the repertoire, establishes the authority of the bakhshi and creates the emotional rhythm necessary for the unfolding of doston. In addition, the method allows the researcher to avoid two common simplifications. The first simplification is to regard terma as merely short and therefore less important. The second is to regard doston as merely long and therefore self-sufficient. The Surkhandarya material shows the opposite: the long narrative requires the short form as its entrance, and the short form receives epic depth from its connection with the long narrative. This mutual dependence becomes visible only when genre, performance, music, memory and social communication are studied together.

## RESULTS

The analysis shows that the relationship between terma and doston in the Surkhandarya epic school is realized through at least seven major functions: introductory-compositional, psychological-performative, semantic-ideological, musical-rhythmic, mnemonic-repertoire, pedagogical-transmission and social-communicative. The introductory-compositional function is the most visible one. Before beginning a long doston, the bakhshi often performs one or several termas in order to create an artistic threshold between ordinary speech and epic narration. This threshold has great aesthetic value because a doston requires a special mode of listening. A long epic narrative cannot be received with the same attention as everyday conversation; the listener must enter a slower, more solemn and more imaginative time. Terma performs precisely this transition. Its shorter structure, clear rhythm, memorable imagery and direct address to the listener prepare the audience for the longer compositional architecture of the doston. The psychological-performative function concerns the bakhshi himself. In oral epic art, the performer's voice, breathing, emotional concentration and instrumental coordination are essential. Terma allows the performer to test his voice, tune the do'mbira, establish contact with listeners and choose the appropriate emotional register. In this sense, terma is not an optional decorative beginning; it is a practical and artistic rehearsal inside the performance itself. The semantic-ideological function is even deeper. Many termas express moral reflection, social criticism, philosophical observation, praise of courage, condemnation of injustice, respect for teachers, loyalty to homeland, the transience of life, the value of honor and the importance of human dignity. These themes are also central to heroic and romantic dostons. Therefore, terma often gives in compressed form the same ethical code that the doston later dramatizes through characters, conflicts and narrative events. If a terma

praises loyalty, generosity and bravery, the following doston may embody those values through the hero's actions; if a terma warns against betrayal, greed or arrogance, the doston may present those qualities through negative characters and tragic consequences. Thus, terma functions as a moral overture to the epic plot. The musical-rhythmic function is also central to the Surkhandarya tradition. Epic performance in this region is inseparable from instrumental accompaniment, and descriptions of bakhshi art emphasize the unity of word and melody, the use of the do'mbira and the presence of song-like parts within the doston [1; 11]. Terma shares this musical environment and helps establish the tonal base from which the doston grows. Since doston contains many shifts between narration, poetic utterance, melody and dramatic speech, the performer needs stable melodic formulae to organize the flow of performance. Terma provides such formulae in concentrated form. The mnemonic-repertoire function relates to oral memory. A bakhshi does not simply memorize a written text; he preserves plots, formulae, motifs, melodic patterns, character types, opening lines, transitions and ethical conclusions. Terma helps keep this repertoire active because it is shorter, more frequently performed and more easily adapted to different contexts. Through terma, the performer may recall the emotional and thematic field of a particular doston. In some cases, terma may contain references to known epic heroes, teachers, historical memory or the performer's own repertoire, thereby functioning as a catalogue of epic identity. The pedagogical-transmission function concerns the formation of the young performer. In the ustoz-shogird system, the future bakhshi does not immediately master long and complex epic narratives. He first learns tone, rhythm, diction, formulaic expression, instrument handling and moral style. Terma is one of the most effective pedagogical forms for this stage because it contains the essential skills of epic performance in a compact structure. A student who cannot perform a terma convincingly will hardly be able to sustain the compositional and vocal demands of a long doston. This means that terma functions as a school of epic discipline. It teaches the future performer how to begin, how to address the audience, how to balance melody and word, how to preserve dignity and how to make inherited language sound alive. The social-communicative function is related to the audience. In traditional gatherings, the bakhshi had to sense whether the listeners were ready for a heroic epic, a romantic narrative, a humorous episode, a moral song or a shorter performance. Terma allowed him to communicate with the audience indirectly. Through the first terma, he could test the mood of the gathering, respond to the social context, honor the host, remember his teacher, praise the land, or gently educate the listeners. In this sense, terma is a dialogic genre, while doston is a narrative universe; the first opens the door, the second builds the house. Another result of the study is that the distinction between terma and doston is based not only on volume but also on narrative organization. Doston is plot-based: it contains events, characters, conflict, journey, trial, climax and resolution. Terma is theme-based: it may revolve around a moral idea, a social observation, a philosophical statement or a lyrical emotion without developing a full plot. However, this distinction does not mean

separation. On the contrary, the thematic density of terma often becomes the ideological seed of the doston. The doston expands what the terma condenses. If the doston is a river of narrative, the terma is its spring: small in size, but decisive in origin. The Surkhandarya material also shows that terma and doston share a common formulaic language. Epithets, parallel constructions, appeals, blessings, moral contrasts and proverbial expressions may circulate between the two forms. This circulation is not mechanical borrowing; it is a sign that the performer thinks through a shared epic language. A formula that appears briefly in a terma may later return in the doston as a speech of the hero, a narrator's comment or a lyrical transition. In the same way, a famous episode or character from a doston may be evoked in terma as a symbol of bravery, loyalty or suffering. This interdependence explains why terma can be performed independently without losing epic resonance. Even when a terma is not followed by a full doston, listeners familiar with the tradition may hear behind it the larger epic world to which it belongs. The analysis further shows that the Surkhandarya school's authority depends not only on the number of doston preserved in memory, but also on the performer's ability to choose and perform an appropriate terma for a specific situation. A technically rich doston may fail if the beginning is cold, while a strong terma can immediately create trust and attention. The result is a genre system in which the small form protects the large form from becoming rigid, and the large form protects the small form from losing epic depth. Terma gives the doston flexibility; doston gives the terma historical and narrative gravity.

## DISCUSSION

The results allow us to reconsider the traditional hierarchy between short and long genres in Uzbek oral epic culture. In many literary classifications, the long epic is treated as the central form and the short song as secondary. This hierarchy is understandable from the point of view of textual monumentality, because a doston is larger, more complex and more visible as a narrative achievement. However, the Surkhandarya epic school shows that oral tradition does not always follow the hierarchy of written literary genres. In performance, the short form may have a decisive structural role. Terma may last only a few minutes, while a doston may continue for hours or even several evenings, but the success of the long performance often depends on the atmosphere created by the short one. This means that the relationship between terma and doston should be described not as minor genre versus major genre, but as condensed form versus expanded form. Terma condenses, signals, prepares, evaluates and personalizes; doston expands, narrates, dramatizes, monumentalizes and collectively remembers. Their interaction resembles the relation between an opening musical motif and a full symphonic structure: the motif is small, but without it the larger work may lose tonal orientation. In the Surkhandarya context this relationship becomes especially important because the bakhshi is expected to display not only narrative knowledge but also ethical wisdom and personal artistic presence. A performer who immediately begins a long doston without establishing moral and

emotional contact may appear technically competent but spiritually cold. A bakhshi who begins with an appropriate terma demonstrates respect for tradition, audience and occasion. This is why terma has a social etiquette function. It can praise elders, honor the host, remember ancestors, name the teacher, express humility, or declare the seriousness of the epic event. In a traditional society where performance is also communication, such functions cannot be considered secondary. The discussion also reveals that terma is one of the main sites of improvisation. The plot of a famous doston is relatively stable: the hero, conflict, major episodes and resolution are inherited from tradition. Of course, every bakhshi may vary the text, but the narrative framework remains recognizable. Terma, by contrast, is more open to immediate adaptation. The performer may introduce contemporary concerns, local references, personal reflections, humorous remarks or philosophical observations. This flexibility allows the epic tradition to remain alive. Without such flexible forms, the doston might become a fixed relic repeated mechanically; with terma, the tradition breathes in the present. This is particularly relevant today, when bakhshi art is performed not only in village gatherings but also on festival stages, in educational institutions, on television, on digital platforms and in international cultural events. Cultural policy information about the International Festival of Bakhshi Art confirms that the preservation and promotion of bakhshi and doston art is not only a local scholarly matter but also a national and international cultural task [12]. In such new contexts, terma becomes even more useful because it can introduce the tradition to audiences who may not be ready to listen to a full doston. It functions as a portable form of epic identity. At the same time, there is a risk: if terma is separated too much from doston, it may become merely a concert song and lose its epic function. Conversely, if doston is performed without terma, it may lose its traditional entrance, moral framing and communicative warmth. Therefore, the preservation of Surkhandarya epic culture requires preserving not only texts but also genre relations. A museum can preserve a written version of Alpomish, but only living performance can preserve the way a terma opens the road to Alpomish. This is why the concept of intangible cultural heritage is methodologically accurate: the heritage is not only the text but also the manner of performance, the social situation, the teacher-student relationship, the musical accompaniment, the audience's expectation and the performer's improvisational decision. UNESCO's description of bakhshi art emphasizes performance from memory, musical accompaniment and transmission within communities, which corresponds closely to the Uzbek ustoz-shogird model [1]. In this model, terma often becomes the first stage of training. A student may begin by learning short forms, melodic patterns and moral songs before mastering long epics. This pedagogical sequence is logical: a performer who cannot control the compact poetic and musical form will not be able to sustain the large epic narrative. Thus, terma is also a school of epic discipline. It teaches rhythm, diction, metaphor, breath, audience address and ethical tone. The discussion further suggests that terma and doston express two modes of folk consciousness. Terma is reflective consciousness: it speaks directly about

life, value, fate, society, teacher, homeland, love, age, honor and sorrow. Doston is narrative consciousness: it presents those same values through events and characters. Reflection and narration are both necessary. A culture that only narrates may entertain but not interpret; a culture that only reflects may moralize but not embody. The Surkhandarya epic school successfully combines both: terma interprets the world, doston dramatizes it. This combination explains the deep emotional effect of bakhshi performance. The audience first hears a moral or lyrical truth in concentrated form, then experiences that truth through the fate of epic heroes. From a compositional point of view, this is a highly developed artistic mechanism. It is not primitive, accidental or merely traditional in the narrow sense; it is a sophisticated oral poetics shaped by centuries of collective selection. Therefore, modern folklore studies should move beyond collecting texts and pay closer attention to performance sequences: what is sung first, what follows, when the performer changes melody, how he addresses listeners, where a terma interrupts or comments on the epic, and how the audience responds. Only then can the real relationship between terma and doston be understood. This approach also has educational importance. In university courses on Uzbek folklore, students often learn definitions of genres, lists of famous doston and names of bakhshis, but less attention is given to the performance logic that connects these elements. Teaching the relationship between terma and doston would help students understand that folklore is not a frozen collection of old texts, but a dynamic system of artistic decisions. It would also prevent the methodological error of treating terma as a small appendix to epic poetry. In fact, the Surkhandarya material shows that a genre is not only a text type; it is a function inside a living artistic system. The terma lives because the doston needs it, and the doston remains emotionally accessible because the terma opens it.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that in the Surkhandarya epic school terma and doston form a single artistic-performing system in which each genre preserves its own structure while fulfilling complementary functions. Doston is the large epic narrative that embodies collective ideals through heroic, romantic, historical and moral plots; terma is the compact lyrical or lyrical-epic form that prepares, frames, comments on and renews the epic performance. Their relationship is not accidental, external or merely chronological. It is structural because terma often creates the compositional threshold of the doston; it is semantic because terma condenses the ethical ideas later expanded in the epic narrative; it is musical because terma establishes tonal and rhythmic orientation; it is mnemonic because short forms help preserve formulae, motifs and repertoire memory; it is pedagogical because the master-disciple system transmits both forms together; and it is social because terma establishes communication between performer and audience before the long narrative begins. The Surkhandarya tradition, especially the Boysun-Sherobod line, demonstrates that oral epic culture cannot be adequately studied through written texts alone. A doston written on

paper is only one trace of the tradition; the living tradition includes the voice of the bakhshi, the sound of the do‘mbira, the expectation of the audience, the introductory terma, the moral atmosphere of the gathering and the improvisational decisions made during performance. For this reason, terma should be treated as a key to the epic system, not as a marginal song. It is small only in volume, not in function. In fact, the compactness of terma allows it to carry dense cultural information: regional language, ethical judgment, emotional mood, musical formula and performer identity. When it precedes a doston, it prepares the audience for the epic world; when it appears independently, it preserves the worldview of that epic world in a shorter form. The preservation of Uzbek bakhshi art therefore requires attention not only to famous doston such as Alpomish, Go‘ro‘g‘li, Avazxon, Kuntug‘mish and Rustamxon, but also to the termas that keep the living breath of the repertoire active. Future research should focus on comparative analysis of recorded Surkhandarya termas, their melodic types, their placement in actual performance sequences, their relation to particular doston and their transformation in modern festival and educational contexts. Such research would help clarify how oral epic traditions adapt without losing their internal logic. The main scientific conclusion of this article is that the Surkhandarya epic school preserves one of the most meaningful models of genre interdependence in Uzbek folklore: terma opens, condenses and interprets; doston expands, narrates and monumentalizes. Together they form the artistic memory of the bakhshi tradition, a memory that is not silent like an archive, but living, voiced, musical and communal.

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