

## THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF UZBEKISTAN: INSIGHTS FROM THE BOYSUN REGION

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the musical culture of Boysun, one of the ethnographic regions of the Surkhandarya Province in Uzbekistan. The musical traditions of Boysun are primarily reflected in local song styles, which are recognized for their uniqueness while also exhibiting similarities with the musical styles of other ethnocultural regions of Uzbekistan.*

**Keywords:** *ethnography, music, bakhshi tradition, folklore, ethnofolklore, heritage, culture.*

Boysun is located in the southern part of Uzbekistan and represents an ancient historical and cultural region that was historically part of the state of Bactria. By the mid-twentieth century, Boysun had emerged as one of the most significant districts of the Surkhandarya Region within the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Boysun is regarded as one of the oldest regions on Earth and as one of the earliest areas inhabited by ancient humans. The toponym “Boysun” is derived from ancient Turkic lexemes: “boy”, meaning “great”, “noble” or “eminent” and “sin” meaning “mountain” together conveying the meaning of “great mountain” or “large mountain”. Among ancient Turkic tribes, alongside the veneration of various natural phenomena, the cult of mountain worship was widespread, and mountains were considered sacred. According to local legends, affluent members of Turkic tribes have resided in this region since ancient times, and the name “Biysun” was interpreted as meaning “the settlement of the wealthy”.

In historical sources, the name “Boysun” is also attested in the form “Bosand.” The term “Bosand” is mentioned in Abu Ishaq al-Istakhri’s geographical treatise *Kitab al-Masalik wa al-Mamalik*. Some scholars associate this toponym with ancient Turkic and Sogdian linguistic elements. The name is documented in medieval Arabic and Persian geographical works, where it is frequently referenced in descriptions of locations within Movarounnahr (Transoxiana). In contemporary Uzbek usage, the term “Bosand” is understood exclusively as a historical toponym. In ancient times, extensive archaeological excavations were conducted in the region. As a result, numerous archaeological monuments were discovered, including skeletal remains of Neanderthals, more than 2,000 ancient household artifacts and in 1980 dinosaur

footprints found by archaeologists near the villages of Gumatak and Qo‘rg‘oncha. These findings are currently preserved in museums in the city of Tashkent.

Boysun served as a strategic location connecting Samarkand and Chaghaniyan and formed an integral part of the Great Silk Road. The renowned mountain pass known as the “Iron Gate” (Temir Darvoza) is located precisely within this territory. Historically, this region functioned as a cultural crossroads where Turkic and Iranian civilizations intersected, resulting in the synthesis and preservation of interconnected tangible and intangible ethno-folkloric and spiritual cultural values.<sup>29</sup>

The Boysun District has historically been a bilingual area, where Tajik and Uzbek have been the primary languages of communication. Geographically, Boysun District is located approximately 841 kilometers from the Fergana Region.

The geographical position of Boysun District has facilitated the preservation of the traditions of numerous ethnic groups. As a result, a rich cultural heritage has been maintained, including distinctive forms of folk music, unique oral traditions, epic poetry, traditional handicrafts, national costumes, and folk games.

One of the earliest song genres that developed in Boysun is labor songs. The origins of these labor songs are closely associated with traditional forms of economic activity, particularly pastoralism and agriculture. These include lullabies (Alla), seasonal and ritual songs such as Muborakbod, Yil boshi, Sumalak, Boychechak, Sust xotin and Choy momo; religious and ceremonial songs such as Ramazon; wedding-related songs including To‘y marosim, Yor-yor, Kelin salom, Muchal to‘yi, Arus baron, Salomnoma and Bayitxonlik (verbal poetic exchange); as well as labor-related songs such as Mayda, Oblo baraka, Shohmoyilar, Qo‘sh haydash, Xo‘sh-xo‘sh and Ho‘p mayda.

These forms of oral folk creativity, together with ancient customs, traditional dress culture, folkloric arts, and unique ethnographic features, continue to be actively studied by scholars today.<sup>30</sup>

The material and intangible cultural heritage of Boysun reflects diverse elements of the historical development of the cultures and arts of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran and to a certain extent, India. The traditional culture of this region has preserved the folklore, rituals and handicraft traditions of both sedentary and nomadic Turkic peoples. Their religious beliefs have historically been closely associated with Islam.

As evidence of this, the cultural environment of Boysun was first recognized by UNESCO in 2001 as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.” Ancient customs, oral folk traditions—including epic narratives such as “Alpomish”,

<sup>29</sup> <http://ich.uz/uz/ich-of-uzbekistan/elements-included/86-boysun>

<sup>30</sup> Рустамбек Абдуллаев. "Байсун традиционная музыкальная культура". Ташкент, 2006.

“Yodgor” and “Go‘ro‘g‘li”—as well as traditional handicrafts have been preserved in the region to the present day. In 2008, Boysun’s cultural heritage was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The cultural environment of the Boysun people is primarily structured around five key dimensions:

- Folklore and epic traditions
- The “Boysun Bahori” (Boysun Spring) Festival
- Traditional handicrafts
- Ethnic groups and ritual practices
- Harmony between natural and cultural heritage

Folklore and the Boysun Epic Tradition (Bakhshi School).

The Boysun epic tradition, known as the bakhshi school, has preserved ancient folkloric practices. In this region, folk epics such as “Alpomish”, “Go‘ro‘g‘li” and “Avazxon” continue to be performed in live oral form, maintaining their traditional narrative and musical structures.

In the sphere of traditional handicrafts, skills such as embroidery particularly the renowned Boysun skullcaps (do‘ppi) and suzani textiles—along with pottery and blacksmithing, have been transmitted from generation to generation.

Ethnic Groups and Ritual Practices.

Within the domain of ethnic groups and ritual culture, the ancient customs, folk games, and distinctive dress traditions of groups such as the Qo‘ng‘irot and Qatag‘on have been preserved with minimal change, reflecting a high degree of cultural continuity.

Harmony of Natural and Cultural Heritage.

In terms of the harmony between nature and culture, the mountains and fields of Boysun hold not only remarkable natural beauty but also significant historical value due to the presence of ancient rock carvings (petroglyphs), which testify to the region’s deep historical past.

Following the inclusion of Boysun on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the international folklore music festival known as “Boysun Bahori” (Boysun Spring) was inaugurated.<sup>31</sup> Various large-scale art festivals held annually promote social unity, solidarity, and cultural cohesion among the people. In particular, the traditional “Boysun Bahori” Festival, regularly organized in the Boysun District of the Surkhandarya Region, plays a significant role in transmitting national cultural values to future generations.

The “Boysun Bahori” (Boysun Spring) Festival has evolved into a large-scale folk celebration that brings together numerous admirers of the arts. The festival

<sup>31</sup> <https://uzhurriyat.uz/2017/05/19/boysun-bahori-da-qadim-ohanglar-jilosi/>

atmosphere resonates across the hills and valleys with traditional o‘lan and lapar songs, the plaintive melodies of the changqovuz (jaw harp), richly voiced performances of bakhshi epic recitations and dances performed in harmony with these musical expressions.

The “Boysun Bahori” Festival is expected to be held in April 2026 continuing its tradition of celebrating and promoting the region’s distinctive cultural heritage.

In conclusion, the people of Boysun have played a significant role in sustaining and developing folk music alongside various forms and genres of traditional culture. As a result, musical works inherited from the past rich in ideological content and expressive means have been preserved in diverse forms and continue to function as an integral component of the region’s cultural identity.

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