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**ЭТНОЛОГИЯ,
АНТРОПОЛОГИЯ**

**ETHNOLOGY,
ANTHROPOLOGY**

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THE ROLE OF ASHIGH ART IN THE LIFE OF THE KARABAKH POPULATION

Abstract: This article explores the role of ashigh art—one of the leading branches of Azerbaijan’s rich spiritual culture, shared by other Turkic peoples—in the life and culture of the Karabakh population. The article, which is examined from an ethnological perspective, highlights the various names that ashighs have borne throughout history (such as *gam*, *shaman*, *varsag*, *ozan*), emphasizing their common roots and shared traditions. The article, written concisely, provides information on important ashighs like Ashig Gurbani (15th–16th centuries), Abdalgulabli Samed (late 17th century), Abdalgulabli Valeh (18th century), Ashig Abbasgulu (19th century), Ashig Gurban (19th century), Ashig Shemshir (1893–1980), and Sari Ashig.

Additionally, the article mentions a number of influential ashighs who lived and worked in Karabakh, such as Ashig Islam, Ashig Ismail, Ashig Abulfaz, Ashig Firidun, Ashig Bahman, Ashig Sabir, Ashig Hidayat, Ashig Telman, Ashig Imran, Ashig Mashadi Novruz, Ashig Mirza (Agh Ashig), Ashig Eyvaz, Ashig Aziz, and Ashig Qardashkhan. It is also noteworthy that Karabakh’s ashigh tradition was not limited to male performers; female ashighs, including Ashig Peri, Ashig Zahra, Ashig Gulzar, Ashig Shafige, and Ashig Selbi, also played and sang in the region.

The article further delves into the saz—its craftsmanship and manufacturing techniques—ashigh melodies, and the distinctive clothing worn by ashighs.

Keywords: Karabakh, male and female ashighs, ashigh melodies, saz, sazband

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Қарабақ халқының өміріндегі ашуғ өнерінің рөлі

Аңдатпа: Бұл мақала Әзербайжанның бай рухани мәдениетінің жетекші салаларының бірі болып табылатын және басқа да түркі халықтарына ортақ ашуғ өнерінің Қарабақ халқының өмірі мен мәдениетіндегі рөлін зерттеуге арналған. Этнологиялық тұрғыдан қарастырылған мақалада ашуғтардың тарих бойы әртүрлі атаулармен (гам, шаман, варсаг, озан) белгілі болғаны көрсетіліп, олардың ортақ тамыры мен дәстүрлік сабақтастығы айқындалады.

Қысқаша мазмұндалған еңбекте XV–XVI ғасырларда өмір сүрген Ашуғ Гурбани, XVII ғасырдың соңындағы Абдалгүлаблы Самед, XVIII ғасырдағы Абдалгүлаблы Валех, XIX ғасырдағы Ашуғ Аббасгүлу мен Ашуғ Гурбан, 1893–1980 жылдары өмір сүрген Ашуғ Шемшир, сондай-ақ Сары Ашуғ сияқты белгілі ашуғтар туралы мәліметтер беріледі.

Сонымен қатар мақалада Қарабақ өңірінде өмір сүріп, шығармашылықпен айналысқан Ашуғ Ислам, Ашуғ Исмаил, Ашуғ Абульфаз, Ашуғ Фиридун, Ашуғ Бахман, Ашуғ Сабир, Ашуғ Хидаят, Ашуғ Телман, Ашуғ Имран, Ашуғ Машади Новруз, Ашуғ Мирза (Ақ Ашуғ), Ашуғ Әйваз, Ашуғ Азиз және Ашуғ Кардашхан сияқты танымал ашуғтар аталады. Қарабақтың ашуғ дәстүрі тек ер адам-

дармен шектелмегені де ерекше атап өтіледі; өңірде Ашуғ Пери, Ашуғ Захра, Ашуғ Гүлзар, Ашуғ Шафиге және Ашуғ Селби сияқты әйел ашуғтар да өнер көрсетіп, ән орындаған.

Мақалада сондай-ақ саз аспабы, оның жасалу шеберлігі мен дайындау технологиясы, ашуғ әуендері және ашуғтардың өзіндік киім үлгілері жан-жақты қарастырылады.

Түйін сөздер: Қарабак, ер және әйел ашуғтар, ашуғ әуендері, саз, сазбанд.

Сілтеме үшін: Алиев Асад, Аманова Бахар Қарабак халқының өміріндегі ашуғ өнерінің рөлі // Қазақ тарих электронды ғылыми журналы. 2026. Т. 189. No 1. 12-22 бб. (Ағылшын тілінде). DOI: 10.62183/2026-1-2.

Introduction

The art of the ashigh, which is one of the leading branches of Azerbaijan's and other Turkic peoples' rich culture, reflects a profound worldview and the intricacies of collective spiritual values. Having passed through deep layers of time, this art form carries with it the essence of centuries of tradition. At its core, as scholars have noted, are the figures of the *sayalar*, *qams*, *shamans*, *varsags*, and *ozans*. Research in one direction indicates that these figures share a common root and, in terms of their foundational purpose and essence, are not far removed from one another (Allahmanlı, 2011: p. 3). Literary sources state that shamans and gams spread the will of the Sky Turk among the Oghuz tribes through their songs and tales. As a result, their songs and stories were considered sacred because they were believed to be manifestations of deities, with the shamans and gams enjoying respect and influence as possessors of this divine manifestation (Namazov, 1980: p. 11-12).

Professor M.Allahmanlı writes that there is no significant difference in essence between the *varsag*, *bagshi*, *shaman*, *qam*, *ozan*, and *ashigh*. These terms, characteristic of the shared Turkic worldview, are products of Turkish thought and have emerged through its cultural filter. The distinction in naming—whether a *shaman*, *gam*, *varsag*, *ozan*, or *ashigh*—marks a stage in the development of Turkic peoples, where one term gradually replaced another as these roles adapted over time in relation to the people's increasing independence (Allahmanlı, 2011: p. 51). As can be seen, although these bearers of the art have historically been known by various names, they all originated from the same root and have served the same purpose. It should also be noted that, as emphasized in the sources, the *ozan-ashigh* art and its foundational sources played a significant historical and aesthetic role in the formation and development of Turkic spiritual culture, which is based on the mythological worldview system of ancient times and the primitive cognitive and imaginative capacities. This role continued through

various stages of civilization and was preserved, carrying forward into the future (“Ozan-Ashig Encyclopedia,” 2019: p. 8).

The term *ashigh*, as a title, is known from approximately the 11th-12th centuries (Namazov, 1980: p. 30). Ashighs were the sages, guides, and elders of the people, and their role served as a confirmation of our national identity and the enduring light of our artistic thought. Because of these qualities, they were referred to as “dede” (father) within the community. The Russian scholar P. Vostrikov writes that the *ozan-ashigh* was so highly esteemed and loved that people trusted them more than the literate individuals of the community (Vostrikov, 1912: p. 19).

The *ashigh* is an artist who serves the people, enriching and advancing our folklore culture. Generally, if ashighs possess deep memory and a unique style of expression, their art becomes a unity that combines several aspects. It is a synthesis that integrates, harmonizes, and intertwines various crafts, passing them on to the people. This historical syncretism stretches back to ancient times. As researchers have noted, in this multifaceted, branched art form, music, performance, dance, and poetry complement each other, demonstrating its integrity. For this reason, the *ashigh* art is as noble as it is complex, difficult, and requires an extraordinary level of mastery, sensitivity, and skill (Bünyadov, 1993: p. 100).

The observation of the great thinker H. Zardabi regarding ashighs is also of interest. In his 1906 article “Folk Songs”, he presented his observations about ashighs as follows: “Look at our ashighs when they sing at weddings and the people listening to them. At that moment, the listeners are so absorbed that, metaphorically, one could slaughter a Turkish ox and they would not notice. After the wedding is over and the ashighs have gone home, for the next five to ten days, the children roam the streets day and night, singing the rhymes they heard from the ashighs, correcting each other's mistakes” (Zardabi, 1960: p. 240).

Information provided by the elders of Karabakh regarding ashighs is also helpful in this regard. Ac-

cording to them, during long, tiring, and cold winter evenings, ashigh gatherings were organized at the initiative of affluent individuals and lovers of saz and poetry. Epic nights were held, and music was listened to. The works of the people's writer Ə. Valiyev, who was deeply familiar with every corner of Karabakh, the customs, traditions, lifestyle, and daily life of the population, also provide valuable insights on this subject: "On Fridays, Mammadkhan would join the villagers and go to the Malakan market, where he would see and learn much. During the long winter nights, in the rare ashigh gatherings, names like Abdalqulablı, Shusha Fortress, and the city of Baku would frequently be mentioned... In Abdalqulablı, an ashigh named Valeh went all the way to Derbent after a bride named Zarnigar" (Vəliyev, 1976: p. 228). "In the autumn and winter nights, at ashigh gatherings, the old man would eagerly listen to the love adventures of Tahir and Zuhra, Valeh and Zarnigar, Haydar and Shushanbar, then return home after dawn" (Vəliyev, 1981: p. 218), or "... during the autumn season, the sound of the zurna would complement the saz, and the epic tales sung by the ashighs would last until midnight. There were so many who played well between the graceful bride and the groom! Each one had their own style, their own tune..." (Vəliyev, 1976: p. 411).

In addition to the aforementioned, our own observations, as well as information gathered from elderly individuals, show that in Karabakh, during folk celebrations, feasts, and various cultural events, ashighs were also invited to gatherings where *khananasdas* (traditional singers) performed. The people showed the same love and affection for both representatives of these art forms. During events and gatherings, when the *khanandas* paused their music, the voice, melody, and playing of the ashighs would uplift the spirit and soothe the soul. This is also corroborated by works of various authors: "Sounds came from the houses. Everywhere, people were playing, singing, and dancing. When the tar and the *gaval* fell silent, the saz would speak. The ashigh would praise a woman named Mushkunaz" (Vəliyev, 1981: p. 246). A similar depiction appears in a literary source describing a banquet held in Shusha in 1911: "... The Shusha merchant... held a banquet in one of the picturesque areas of the city, in the 'Buzkhana Courtyard.' Around 150 people were invited to this gathering... At the banquet, the famous *khananda* Islam Abdullayev, the tar player, the *kamancha* player Mirza, the *khananda* Qaragöz Zulfugar, and the *ashighs* Abbasqulu and Nacafgulu with their ensembles also participated" (Şuşinski, 1991: p. 36-37).

The respect for ashighs, who were regarded as the advisors, elders, sages, and guides of the people, was so esteemed that being related to an ashigh was considered a sign of good fortune. This is reflected in a popular saying or song that exists in the culture:

QIZIM, qIZIM, qIZ ana,
QIZIM geyib bƏZƏNƏ.
Ozan axca qazana,
QIZIMI verim ozana.

In the example of folk creativity presented above, the respect and esteem given to the *ozan/ashigh*, along with the fact that they were supported in earning a living, is emphasized. Furthermore, the phrase "I will give my daughter to the ozan" highlights an important aspect of our family and household traditions—the issue of marriage—suggesting a desire to establish kinship ties with the ashigh.

As previously mentioned, the ashigh art was very dear to the people of Karabakh. This is also confirmed by researchers of the ashigh tradition. According to them, Karabakh, with its historical fate resembling that of the ashigh environments in Derbent and Nakhchivan, has long been recognized as a region rich in artistic qualities of saz and poetry. The fact that the name *ashigh* has even become a toponym in Karabakh (for example, there is a village called *Ashigli* in Beylagan) points to the significant role the ashigh art played in the region's history. The folklorist scholar M. Gasımlı writes that the artistic life of this environment was particularly vibrant and dynamic between the 16th and 18th centuries. The prominent masters of saz and poetry, such as Ashigh Gurbani (15th-16th centuries), Lele (17th century), Abdalqulablı Valeh (18th century), and Abbasgulu, were active during this historical period. The presence of such masters in this era was no coincidence. Though not directly connected to Karabakh geographically, the prominent saz and poetry master of the 17th century, Sarı Ashigh, is also considered part of the Karabakh and Qaradagh ashigh environments. In addition, many powerful performing ashighs from this period brought fame to the Karabakh tradition. Ashigh Valeh, in the 18th century, proudly spoke of the expertise of the saz and poetry performers who came before him, not arrogantly, but as a worthy successor to their legacy (Qasımlı, 2003: p. 215).

Taking all of this into account, we will now provide brief information about some of the ashighs of Karabakh. It should also be noted that the information about the Karabakh ashighs discussed here is

taken from the *Ozan-Ashig Encyclopedia* published in 2019 and 2020, in its 1st and 2nd volumes (Editors of the Encyclopedia: Məhərrəm Qasımlı, Mahmud Allahmanlı, İradə Köçərli, and Kamilə Dadaşzadə).

The method of the research consists of the systematic and comparative analysis of existing materials, as well as the evaluation of the issue from an ethnological perspective. Additionally, chronological order, observation, description, objective interpretation of the studied issue, and a critical approach to the presented ideas are emphasized, which are considered essential in ethnology. At the same time, the literature materials obtained on the subject were reviewed, and the same, identical and different organizations of Karabakh ashigs in terms of their playing and singing characteristics with other ashigs were created. The article provides the writings of some authors analyzed regarding the art of ashig, and their attitude towards them is expressed.

Discussion

The article holds a mirror to the life and creativity of Karabakh ashugs and provides information on them in accordance with chronological rules: Ashugh Gurbani, one of the prominent ashighs of the 15th-16th centuries, was a contemporary of Shah Ismail Khatai. Ashigh Gurbani was born in the village of Dirili in the Jabrayil region. The poet, whose real name was *Gurban*, was known as “Dirili Gurbani” before meeting Shah Ismail Khatai, but after entering the courtly environment, he adopted the pen name *Gurbani*, in line with the tradition of the time (Vahid, 2011).

There are many legends and tales about Gurbani, who is particularly close to the spirit of the people. His works, still referenced today, have been passed down through generations. There is also the *Gurbani* epic, which continues to be shared orally. According to the sayings of master ashighs, “Gurbani dedicated seven saz melodies to Shah Ismail Khatai, namely ‘Shah Khatai’, ‘Shahseveni’, ‘Shahsarayi’, ‘Bash divani’, ‘Heydari’, ‘Ibrahimi’, and ‘Sultani’” (Vahid, 2011).

Abdalgulablı Samad was born in the late 17th century in the village of Abdallı in the Agdam region. As a master craftsman of the Karabakh ashigh environment, Samad played an important role in the formation of the Karabakh ashigh tradition alongside poet Mahammad, Ashigh Gullu, and Ashigh Cunun. It is no coincidence that the famous Abdalgulablı Ashigh Valeh was one of his students. In fact, Ashigh Samad gave the pen name “Valeh”

to Ashugh Valeh. Due to his deep affection for his teacher, Ashigh Valeh often remembered Ashigh Samad in his poems, saying, “Master Samad was a mountain in the art.” It is known that Ashigh Samad passed away in the mid-18th century.

Abdalgulablı Valeh, son of Mahammad, was born in 1722 in the village of Gulablı in the Agdam region. As one of the most prominent figures of 18th-century Azerbaijani ashigh literature, Ashigh Valeh identifies himself in his poems: “Valeh is my pen name, Safi is my real name.” Initially receiving religious education from Molla Mahmud in his village and later from Molla Safar in Shusha, Valeh provides interesting information about himself in his *Vucudname*. He notes, for example, that at the age of eight, he chose darkness, at nine he distinguished between good and bad, and at ten, he selected the holy Guran. He also mentions at the age of fifteen, his heart became filled with love. His *Vucudname* and *Cahanname* demonstrate the high level he reached as an artist.

From the *Ozan-Ashig Encyclopedia*, we learn that Valeh’s passion for ashigh art led him to Abdallı Ashigh Samad. His deep mastery of the art not only brought him fame in Karabakh but also made him widely known beyond the region. His poems written for Molla Panah Vagif, A. Janizade, Ashigh Ganbar, Ashigh Feyruz, Ashigh Suleyman, and others attest to this.

It should also be noted that in the Karabakh environment, the art of ashighism was nurtured on deep spiritual roots. Valeh’s connection to the **Tarigat** (Sufi tradition) is reflected in:

Adıma pay gəlir qadir mövladan,
Bu torpaqda aşıqlar binası var,-

The poetic lines of Ashigh Valeh also reflect his deep connection to spiritual values. The verse “*Adıma pay gəlir qadir mövladan*” (“My name brings honor from the noble lineage”) indicates that Ashigh Valeh viewed himself as a devotee of art, a true follower of divine inspiration.

Poems by Ashigh Valeh, written down at various times in manuscripts and records, have been preserved in various collections. M.Mustahid-zade, M.M.Navvab, and H.Ə. Gayibov have included his works in their collections. The *Valeh and Zarnigar* epic, which reflects his life and artistic environment, also delves into several aspects of his poetic journey. Researchers such as S.Mumtaz, H.Alizada, S.Rustam, M.Rahim, P.Afandiyev, F.Mehdi, M.Hekimov, M.Gasimli, and others have conducted

studies on his life and works. M. Allahmanlı wrote a dissertation titled *The Creative Work of Ashigh Valeh* and published a monograph on the topic *The Artistic World of Ashigh Valeh*.

Interestingly, the grandson of Ashigh Valeh, Gurban Pirimov, a prominent musician in the Karabakh music scene, first played the saz before transitioning to tar playing. It is also said that the great mugham master Seyid Shushinski began his creative journey as an ashigh. As for the *Arazbari* ashigh melody, it was first performed in the *zarb-mugham* format by Seyid Shushinski.

Ashigh Valeh passed away in the village where he was born in 1822.

Ashigh Abbasqulu was born in 1850 in the village of Gulablı, Aghdam region. He was a descendant of Ashigh Valeh. Although he had no formal education, Abbasqulu studied under the famous Ashigh Najafgulu in Karabakh. Known for his delicate and high-pitched voice, Abbasqulu was also capable of improvising poetry. He met Ashigh Alasgar, and worked for some time in the ensemble of tar player Sadıgjan. He also performed in concerts in Tbilisi and participated in gatherings at the palace of Khurshudbanu Natavan and in the *Majlis-uns* meetings. Abbasqulu passed away in 1932 in his birthplace.

Aghdabanlı Gurban, born in 1859 in the village of Aghdaban in the Kalbajar region, hailed from the Miskin Abdal (16th century) lineage. Due to his religious education, he was also known as Molla Gurban. Deeply versed in the world of saz and poetry, Gurban gathered contemporary ashighs and poets from Kalbajar around him, forming a literary assembly. During his lifetime and after his passing, this assembly became famous as the “Gurban Spring.”

Aghdabanlı Gurban was a close friend of the great master Ashigh Alasgar and his brother Nowras Iman. He sent his son Shemshir to Goycha to receive art lessons from Dede Alasgar. Ashigh Shemshir, who received the blessings of Ashigh Alasgar and Aghdabanlı Gurban, became one of the most prominent figures of 20th-century Azerbaijani ashigh art.

Literature records that one of Gurban’s greatest contributions was the creation of the *Gurban Spring* assembly, a gathering of ashighs and folk poets. One of the most active members of this gathering was Ashigh Alasgar, a proud figure in ashigh art. Musicians and poets from nearby regions frequently gathered at the *Gurban Spring* assembly to exchange verses, compete, and listen to written works sung by *Gurban*, memorizing them (Təhmasib, 2005: p. 112).

Aghdabanlı Gurban passed away in 1934 in the village where he was born.

Ashigh Shemshir Gurban oğlu was born in 1893 in the village of Demirchi in the Kalbajar region. Drawing spiritual strength from the Miskin Abdal lineage to which he belonged, he had the unique opportunity to see and learn from living classical figures like Ashigh Alasgar, Huseyn Bozarqanlı, Nowras Iman, and Aghdabanlı Gurban. He drank from the fountain of their artistry and was spiritually elevated by their blessings. By continuing the path laid by his predecessors with dignity, Ashigh Shemshir became a prominent figure in the realm of saz and poetry, distinguished by his high-level performance skills and rich creative output.

Shemshir received deep spiritual and artistic education in his family, where he was taught the essence of poetry and song. He mastered the secrets and wisdom of the saz through his father’s friend, Ashigh Alasgar from Goycha. People who had seen and heard Ashigh Alasgar himself often remarked that Ashigh Shemshir’s style of singing and playing reminded them of the great master. This was confirmed by Ashigh Alasgar’s son, Ashigh Talıb.

Ashigh Shemshir’s extraordinary performance abilities, along with his rich poetic creativity and unique vocal style, made him well-known far beyond Kalbajar, earning him admiration and respect across distant regions. His fame eventually reached the great poet Samed Vurgun, who met with Ashigh Shemshir at the spring of Istisu in August 1955. Samed Vurgun was so impressed by Ashigh Shemshir that he dedicated a poem to him.

Aşıq Şəmşir, Dəlidağdan keçəndə,
Kəklikli daşlardan xəbər al məni.
Ceyran bulağından qızlar içəndə
Saz tutub, söz qoşub yada sal məni.

In response, Shemshir wrote the following:
Qoşqarla yanaşı duran adın var,
Bizim el tanıyır uca dağ səni.
Yanır yolumuzda sənət çırağın,
Bilirik şeirdə bir mayaq səni.

Poets like Osman Sarıvelli, Huseyn Arif, Nari-man Hesən-zadə, Zelimkhan Yagub, Mammad Aslan, Huseyn Kurdoğlu, Adil Jamil, Muzaffar Shukur, and others have written poems about Ashigh Shemshir.

One of the famous poets of the Karabakh region and other parts of Azerbaijan, who was widely known as an ashig-poet, is Sarı Ashig. There is

interesting information available in our literary sources regarding him. It is mentioned that certain mystics from the Anatolian provinces, which were under the control of the Ottoman Empire, migrated due to certain circumstances. Among these groups were bayati poets like Sarica Nabi, Mir Agha Balim, Hacı Qaraman, and Gara Pirim.

The four-person group arrived in Karabakh and reached a small settlement in the place of the present-day Cicimli village of Lachin. An old woman in the village offered them bread and ayran as hospitality. Agha Balim thanked the old woman and told her: “May you live long.”

The group stayed with the old woman for a few days. Eventually, Hacı Qaraman and Gara Pirim left the group and headed down the Hekeri river. Hacı Qaraman reached the village of Ahmadli in present-day Jabrayil district and stayed there, marrying a girl named Yeter. They had two sons, Mahammad and Mustafa. Later, Hacı Qaraman left the village and settled with his family at the foot of a nearby mountain. When he died, he was buried there. His son, Mahammad Chelebi, later built a mosque, madrasa, and a bathhouse at the site, and the date 1088 was inscribed on the mosque’s door, marking about thirty to forty years after the group’s arrival in Karabakh.

Gara Pirim, on the other hand, arrived in Aghdam and settled in a certain area. The village of Gara Pirim was named after him, and his grave is also located there. The date when the mausoleum was built is also written on it.

Mir Hamza Efendi, known by the pseudonym Nigari, was the sixth child of Agha Balim. As for Sarica Nabi, he was referred to as “Sarica” because he wore a yellow robe. He later left Agha Balim and settled in a small village on the left bank of the Hekeri River, where he was hosted by a widow. The widow had a daughter named Yaxshi, and Sarica Nabi fell in love with her deeply. He stayed with them and took care of their livestock.

Sarica Nabi’s companions, Agha Balim and Hacı Qaraman, invited him to join them, saying: “Why do you stay in the narrow valley of Hekeri? Come to our wide world.” However, Sarica Nabi expressed his satisfaction with his current life, responding:

Aşiqəm ha kərim,
Çağıraram ha kərim,
Sizə sizinki dünya
Mənə mənim Həkərim.

Sarica Nəbi, content with his life, expressed his love through his highly valuable and meaning-

ful bayatis (traditional Azerbaijani folk poetry). He celebrated his feelings with these deep and heartfelt verses:

Qarşıda aran yaxşı,
Yaylaqdan aran yaxşı,
Bəxtəvər başına, Aşiq
Yar ilə aran yaxşı.

From then on, Sarica Nabi began to be known as “Ashig” (or Sari Ashig). The fact that his beloved Yaxshi was forcibly taken away by Yaman darkened his days. Especially Yaxshi’s death deeply shook the Ashig.

Qarşımda yaxşı dağlar,
Gözməyə yaxşı dağlar,
Hər kəsin bir dağı var
Aşiqi Yaxşı dağlar.

In the information provided about Sari Ashig, we later read the following: “It is questionable whether Ashig played the saz. Because no sign of this has been found in the family background and stories related to his companions, Agha Balim and Hacı Qaraman. The depiction of a saz on his grave almost certainly stems from his ‘Ashig’ pen name” (Bəhcət, 2006: p. 12-20).

As can be seen from the above, Sari Ashig was not an aşiq in the traditional sense of the word. He gained the title of ‘Ashig’ simply because, after falling deeply in love with Yaxşı and becoming captivated by her love, he became a mad lover, a fool for her.

Moving on, alongside the names we have mentioned, Ashig Islam, Ashig Ismayıl, Ashig Abulfat, Ashig Firudin, Ashig Bahman, Ashig Sabir, Ashig Hidayat, Ashig Telman, Ashig Imran, Ashig Meshadi Novruz, Ashig Mirza (Agh Ashig), Ashig Eyvaz, Ashig Aziz, Ashig Gardashkhan, and others were prominent aşiq figures in Karabakh-Kalbajar, known for performing at wedding and engagement ceremonies, enchanting listeners with their melodious voices. The creation of the various Karabakh melodies such as “Karabakh Dubeyti,” “Karabakh Keremisi,” “Karabakh Lengeri,” “Karabakh Qaytaghsi,” “Karabakh Gozellemesi,” “Karabakh Shikestesı,” “Karabakh Kesmesi,” and “Arazbarı” melodies in Karabakh was by no means accidental. It was the creative aşiqs who could showcase such artistry and create various saz melodies. As noted earlier, such creative ashigs were numerous in Karabakh, and while they lived and worked in this region, they were also well-known in surrounding areas.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the graves of two of the Karabakh aşiq masters, Gurbani and Lele, have been sanctified and turned into pilgrimage sites, revered by the local population. One grave is in Dirili village of Jabrayil district, while the other is in Ahmedalılar village of Fuzuli district. His grave is known as the “grave of the righteous aşiq” and is visited like a shrine or pilgrimage site.

When speaking of ashigs, it is also necessary to mention their distinct costumes. Their attire primarily consisted of a hat, shirt, calf-length trousers, belt with a clasp, and long-boots. It is also worth noting that their trousers were tight below the knee, and the upper part of their boots was narrow. As is known, ashigs stood during their performances, sometimes for 2-3 days telling epic tales.

From our observations and experiments, it becomes clear that standing for long periods weakens the body, causing the legs to swell and veins to protrude. It seems that the narrowness of their trousers and the tightness of their boots at the top were designed to prevent such issues (the veins from protruding). As for the belt with a clasp, it prevented back pain from arising when the aşiq stood for long periods.

Next, we discussed male aşıqs, but another aspect of the subject is Karabakh’s female aşıqs. Research shows that there were indeed female aşıqs in this region as well. For example, Ashig Peri, Ashig Zehra, Ashig Gulzar, Ashig Shefige, Ashig Selbi, and others belong to this group. Here, we will provide brief information about Ashig Peri, an exceptionally gifted and spontaneous poet.

Literary materials indicate that Ashig Peri was born in 1811 in Maralyan village, Jabrayil, and passed away in Shusha in 1847 at the age of 35. She completed her primary education in her birthplace and moved to Shusha around 1830. Her fame quickly spread, and she started to attract the attention of her contemporaries in the world of ashigs (Bəşəri, 2021: p. 4-5). Firidun bey Kocherli also provides interesting information about this divinely gifted saz-poet. He writes that Ashig Peri was one of the most beloved and revered women among her contemporaries. After moving to Shusha, her respect and prestige grew, and people from all walks of life would write beautiful poems in her honor and describe her with love.

One of the poets who praised her beauty was Asad bey Vezirov, who wrote the following poem:

O gündən ki, didarını görmüşəm,
Həsrətindən cismü can, Pəri!

Dolanıb başına səri-zülfündə
Könül mürği tutub aşıyan, Pəri!

İştiaqın çəkər neçə kimsənə,
Amma heç birisi bənzəmən mənə.
Canü dildən mübtəlayam mən sənə,
İnanmırsan, eylə imtahan, Pəri!

Arizindir günəş, camalındır ay,
Heç nəzənin ola bilməz sənə tay!
Qəmzən qatil, kirpiyin ox, qaşın yay,
Qamətindir sərv-i-xuraman Pəri!

Nə qədər var idi canda ixtiyar,
Bir xətirə səndən dolandım kənar,
Axır gizlin dərdim qıldım aşıkar,
Qoy bilsə də, bilsin Mirzəcan, Pəri!

Gəl gör fəraqında mən nətəvanam,
Əfsürdəxatirəm, şikəstəcanam,
Əsəd deyər sənə bəndə fərmanam,
Sənsən mənə sultan, Pəri, xan, Pəri!
(Köçərli, 2005: p. 310-311).

Ashig Peri, born in the Karabakh region, was not only a prominent folk poet but also a pioneer of female bards in Azerbaijan. In addition to being a trailblazer for women in Azerbaijani folk music, she became a distinguished representative of Azerbaijani womanhood. The language of Ashig Peri’s poetry is fluent, smooth, and pleasant. Her verses emphasize the values of humanity, purity, honesty, and spiritual beauty. Ashig Peri’s works are imbued with calls to live a virtuous life, promoting inner beauty and moral integrity. Renowned for her beauty, exceptional artistic talent, and quick wit, Ashig Peri frequently engaged in poetic duels with prominent figures of the time, such as Mirza Hasan bey Mirza, Karbalayi Abdulla Canizade, Jafarqulu khan Neva, and Mohammad bey Ashiq, to name a few. In each of these encounters, she emerged victorious. Her poignant and emotional poetry, often infused with melancholy, deeply touches the hearts of her audience and evokes strong emotions. In this regard, we find it appropriate to present her poem “Baxtım” as an exemplary work.

Nə müddətdir bu qəflətdən
Oyanmırsan, qara baxtım.
Çəkdirdiyin əziyyətdən
Usanmırsan, qara baxtım.
Atmısan ümmani-qəmə,
Gör nə etmişən aləmə,

Məni dərdə salıb yenə,
Dayanmırsan, qara baxtım.
Axıtdın sel tək qanıma,
Üzmüsən cavan canımı,
Almısan adü-sanımı,
Utanmırsan, qara baxtım?
Yaşayıram zəhmət ilə,
Çətinliklə, zillət ilə,
Sən Pəriyə hörmət ilə
Dolanmırsan, qara baxtım
(Bəşəri, 2021: p. 19).

As soon as Ashig Peri arrived in Shusha, she quickly earned great respect among the prominent and well-known poets of Karabakh and was counted among the esteemed figures in all poetic and literary gatherings. Due to her profound thoughts, fluent delivery, and quick-witted responses, she was highly regarded among her contemporaries.

Elabbas Muznib, Literary scholar

Ashig Peri wrote primarily in the simple language of the people, mainly in the style of folk poetry. Rather than being considered just a poet, Ashig Peri is a people's bard. In her dialogues, she draws attention as a skilled and courageous woman of her time.

Salman Mumtaz, Literary Scholar

Each of Ashig Peri's poems immediately resonated within the literary community, leading to the creation of several new poems and dialogues. The celebration of free love, an optimistic spirit, a simple style, and other such qualities are among the key characteristics of Ashig Peri's creative work.

Fuad Gasınzade, Philosopher

Ashig Peri was at the center of attention among the educated and scholarly literary figures of her time. She received numerous written letters, both in verse and prose, from all directions. In return, the poetess inspired those who respected her by expressing profound emotions of truth, justice, respect for humanity, pure love, and sincere friendship through her harmonious poetry.

Ashig Peri was not only externally beautiful but also internally rich in character, possessing a broad worldview and a deep sense of spirituality. Her beauty was praised in many qoshmas (couplets) and gəraylis (metrical verses).

Firidun bey Kocherli, Literary Scholar

Ashig Peri was a poet with an unprecedented beauty, whose spontaneous responses in her verses and her ability to engage in successful poetic exchanges with talented poets garnered attention. She is the creator and founder of the women's ashik tradition.

A. Berje German Orientalist (Bəşəri, 2021: p. 7-9)

It is worth mentioning that in honor of the "Queen of Hearts" and the beloved figure, Ashig Peri, the "Ashig Peri Assembly" was founded on September 22, 1984, at the Union of Writers of Azerbaijan. This initiative was led by the People's Poet and Chairman of the Union of Ashigs, Huseyn Arif, and Narinc Xatun. Over the years, Narinc Xatun and Gulare Azaflı have taken leadership roles in the assembly. The current head of the "Ashig Peri Assembly" is Parvane Zangezurlu. Furthermore, in 2014, the writer-journalist Elisahib Eroglu's 200-page book titled "Ashig Peri: Her Life, Environment, and Art" was published by the "Sharg-Qerb" Publishing House.

When discussing Ashigs, it is impossible to ignore the saz and its melodies. Therefore, we will provide information here on the saz, its manufacturing techniques, and the saz melodies:

The saz is one of our stringed musical instruments. According to researchers, the history of stringed instruments resembling the kopuz dates back to the second millennium BCE in the Eastern world. In the Belu temple of Nippur, which belonged to the Sumerians, an instrument resembling the kopuz is depicted on a clay fragment, approximately four thousand years old. Another artifact, dating back about three thousand years, features a similar instrument on a Hittite monument. Comparative analysis reveals that tribal communities living in the territory of Azerbaijan used stringed musical instruments resembling the kopuz (Bünyadov, 1993: p. 182).

It should be noted that a significant number of tasnifs (a type of folk song) and folk melodies spread from Karabakh to various regions have their origins in the saz tunes. The magnificent musical piece known as the "Karabakh Shikesti" itself is a relic of the ashig-saz style, which once held a prominent position in this region. According to researchers, "Karabakh Shikesti" was developed on the same melodic framework as the "Choban Bayati" saz tune. Currently, the "Karabakhghi" melody, which is played in the ashig environment of Urmia, shares the same musical style as the "Karabakh Shikesti".

The "Karabakh Shikesti" /Karadagh-Tabriz ashig tradition/ and "Shirvan Shikasti" /Shirvan ashig tradition/ compositions, which have retained their existence in many ashig environments, show a melodic similarity to the "Karabakh Shikesti," indicating that all three *shikestis* are rooted in the *saz* tradition (Qasımlı, 2003: p. 220-221).

The exact number of *saz* tunes is unknown, but it is estimated that there are up to two hundred of them. Throughout history, *saz* tunes have carried with them emotions of joy, sorrow, longing, as well as feelings of heroism. These *saz* melodies vary in terms of content, essence, sound, and their impact. For instance, *saz* tunes such as “Divani,” “Jalili,” “Saritel,” “Dilqami,” “Keremi,” “Mansiri,” “Dubeyti,” “Borchalı qay-tarmasi,” “İrevan chukhuru,” “Orta saritel,” “Goycha gulu,” “Misri,” “Yurd yeri,” “Ovshari,” “Qahramani,” “Qaribi,” “Zarinci,” “Qarachi,” and others fall into this category. The names of these *saz* melodies indicate that some of them reflect the names of those who first created the tunes (Dilqami, Keremi, Jalili, Mansiri, Qahramani, Qaribi). As noted by researchers, the *saz* tunes “Saritel” and “Zarinci” were likely named after the girls or women to whom they were dedicated (Əliyev, 1995: p. 43).

As emphasized earlier, each *saz* tune carries its own unique meaning, tempo, and evokes either a sense of sorrow or joy. This is exemplified by the following poem, dedicated to the performance of the *Dilqami* tune:

Hansı dağdı zirvəsini qar alan,
Hansı düzdü çiçəkləri saralan,
Kimdi gedib özgəsinə yar olan,
Könüllərin sitəmini bir də çal!
Aşıq dostum, “Dilqəmi”ni bir də çal!

Gözlər dolub, kirpiklərə nəm düşüb,
Ortalığa həsrət çöküb, qəm düşüb,
Yaxşı yerdə əlimizə çəm düşüb,
Yəhya bəyin ələmini bir də çal!
Aşıq dostum, “Dilqəmi”ni bir də çal!

Yaz kövrələr, payız ağlar, qış mələr,
Bu həsrətə dağ inildər, daş mələr,
Gözsüz qaldı qaynar gözlü çeşmələr,
Nakam eşqin ələmini bir də çal!
Aşıq dostum, “Dilqəmi”ni bir də çal!

Bundan artıq haray olmaz, ün olmaz,
Bundan artıq ömür olmaz, gün olmaz,
İnsafsızda insaf olmaz, din olmaz,
El dərini, el qəmini bir də çal!
Aşıq dostum, “Dilqəmi”ni bir də çal!

Gözü nurdan, dizi heydən ayrılıb,
Bəxti yatıb, günü göydən ayrılıb,
Dostu xanım Yəhya bəydən ayrılıb,
Fələk kəsib kərəmini bir də çal!
Aşıq dostum, “Dilqəmi”ni bir də çal
(Yaqub, 1997: p. 110-111).

When discussing the *saz* and *saz* melodies, it is also important to address the technology of its construction. Observations show that the *saz-bənd* (the instrument maker) selects appropriate trees, usually mulberry or walnut, and cuts them down to make the *saz*. He then dries the wood under suitable weather conditions. Afterward, he divides the wood into parts and carves it into the desired shape.

Incidentally, there is also information suggesting that the *saz* can be made from date palm wood. For example, referring to the poem of Ashiq Gurbani (15th–16th century), it can be inferred that his *saz* was made of date palm wood. In his poem “Ağacdandır” (“It Is from the Tree”), Ashiq Gurbani metaphorically links both the *saz* and the cradle where our mothers once lulled their babies with a sweet lullaby to the idea that the foundation of Prophet Musa (Moses) may have been from date palm wood as well:

Sazım, gəl mənimlə danış,
Sənin əslin ağacdandır.
Ağac dedim, bikiş oldun,
Xurmadakı ağacdandır.

Çağırın gəlsin aşiqi,
Aləmə salsın işığı,
Həsən-Hüseynin beşiyi-
O da ki var, ağacdandır.

Ey Qurbani, batma yasa,
Uzun sözün eylə qısa,
Musanın əlində əsa,-
O da ki var, ağacdandır
(Qurbani, 2006: p. 45-46).

It is well known that the body of the *saz* is crucial, and the creation of the body begins with preparing the ribs and the sides. First, the ribs and the sides are flattened and immersed in water boiling over a fire. Afterward, both parts are placed in a metal mold to dry. After several days of drying, the parts are removed from the mold and assembled together. In the assembly process, wooden pegs and strings are used.

Following the aforementioned process, the *sazbənd* (instrument maker) attaches the neck, which he has already prepared, to the body of the instrument. The upper face of the *saz* is then glued to the body after being dried at the proper temperature. Subsequently, strings are laid across the chest of the *saz*, with one end tied to the chest’s bridge and the other passed through the neck’s bridge and strung for the performers to tune. After all these prepara-

tions, the *saz* is fully assembled and ready for use, with its strap in place.

The *saz*s vary from one another. For instance, the “jura saz” has five strings, the “tavar saz” has nine strings, and the “ana saz” has more than eleven strings. The strings are divided into three categories: *zil* (treble), *bem* (medium), and *dem* (bass). The melodies of *aşiq* songs are typically performed on the *zil* strings.

It should be noted that the frets of the *saz* play a unique role in its sound production. Without the frets, the *saz* would not produce sound, nor could the frets exist without the *saz*. As stated in the *ozan-ashig* encyclopedia, the sounds of the *saz* are generated through the frets, which determine the tonal basis of the instrument. In traditional *ashig* terminology, the main frets are called: *bash* (head), *orta* (middle), *shah* (royal), *ayag divani* (foot), *bayati*, *kök* (root), and *beçə* (baby).

In addition to these main frets, there are also supplementary frets called “yarımpərdə” (or “lal”, “gül”, “kor” frets). Generally, experts have categorized the frets of the *saz* as follows:

- 0 – açıq sim
- 1 – yarımpərdə
- 2 – baş pərdə (baş divani, baş müxəmməs pərdəsi)
- 3 – orta pərdə (ürfani, təcnis pərdəsi)
- 4 – yarımpərdə
- 5 – şah pərdə
- 6 – yarımpərdə
- 7 – ayaq divani pərdəsi
- 8 – çoban-bayati pərdəsi
- 9 – yarımpərdə
- 10 – kök pərdə
- 11 – yarımpərdə
- 12 – beçə pərdə
- 13 – yarımpərdə
- 14 – baş pərdənin zili
- 15 – orta pərdənin zili
- 16 – yarımpərdə
- 17 – şah pərdənin zili
- 18 – yarımpərdə
- 19 – ayaq divani pərdənin zili – son pərdə.

Experts in the field also emphasize that one of the key factors ensuring the richness of the harmonic language in Ashig music is the performance of traditional melodies in different roots. It is not coincidental that the traditional roots of the *saz* are described as follows: “Royal fret root,” “Middle fret root,” “Head fret root,” “Foot *divani* root,” “Bayati root,” and “Open root” (History of Azerbaijani Music (From Ancient Times to the 20th Century), 2012: p. 68-69).

In playing the *saz*, a plectrum (or *təzənə*) is used, which is traditionally made from the shell of a cherry.

A lot has been written and said about the *saz* and its sacredness. Many writers have never tired of glorifying the *saz*, and, on the contrary, have enjoyed doing so. One such example is the poem “Is this the *saz*?” by our folk poet Z.Yaqub, which expresses this sentiment:

Bu sazımı, ovsundumu,
Telə bax Allah, telə bax!
Pərdə üstə dalğalanan
Tülə bax Allah, tülə bax!

Bir dəlisov atdı yenə,
Haqqa çataçatdı yenə,
Yeri göyə qatdı yenə,
Zilə bax Allah, zilə bax!

Uçan dağım, dərəm oldu,
Yanan bəndim, bərəm oldu,
Məhmud döndü Kərəm oldu,
Külə bax Allah, külə bax!

Nəfsi təzə, nəğməsi tər,
Xan Əslinin düyməsi zər.
Açılıbdı gümüş kəmər,
Belə bax Allah, belə bax!

Ürəyimi qan eləyən,
Bağrımı şan-şan eləyən,
Məni Zəlimxan eləyən
Elə bax Allah, elə bax
(Yaqub, 1997: p. 104-105)!

As mentioned above, Azerbaijani Ashig art, which carries universal ideas, was included in UNESCO’s Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, based on the final decision of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee, at the 4th session of the Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, from September 28 to October 2, 2009.

The results of the research

The ethnological research conducted on the basis of existing materials shows that, the results of the research indicate that the outstanding artists who lived and worked in the region we studied, such as Ashig Gurbani (15th-16th century), Abdalqulablı Samed

(17th century), Abdalgulablı Valeh (18th century), Ashig Abbasgulu (19th century), Aghdabanlı Gurban (19th century), Ashig Shemshir (20th century), and the famous bayati master Sarı Ashig, played a significant role in the everyday life of the people of Karabakh. They contributed to the formation of traditions related to Ashig culture, the regulation of behavioral norms, family relationships, the enrichment of worldviews, the diversification of the saz-word-art world, and the transmission of cultural values from generation to generation.

The research also shows that, The discussion's outcome shows that in the daily life of the people of Karabakh, not only singers and mugham masters, but also both male and female Ashigs played a central role. The performances of both male and female Ashigs were part of public celebrations, such as weddings, engagement ceremonies, holidays, and family events, soothing the souls of the listeners. From the discussion, it also became evident that Ashig art in Karabakh did not develop any less than mugham singing. The presence of Ashigs with rich singing and playing abilities in the current regions of Kalbajar and Lachin further clarifies this point. That is, as in previous centuries, Karabakh remains

a cradle of poetry-art, saz-word, and mugham in the modern era, and the diversified music culture in this region continues to play an indispensable role in the daily lives and lifestyles of the population.

Conclusion

Our historical and ethnographic research reveals that, in addition to being known as a cradle of mugham, the Ashig art in Karabakh was also widely spread and became renowned. In the past, notable figures such as Ashig Gurbani (15th-16th centuries), Abdalgulablı Samed (17th century), Abdalgulablı Valeh (18th century), Ashig Abbasgulu, Aghdabanlı Gurban, Ashig Shemsir, as well as the famous bayati master Sarı Ashig, and female Ashigs such as Ashig Peri, Ashig Zəhra, Ashig Gulzar, Ashig Shefige, Ashig Selbi, and others, contributed to the development of this art. Their work, their creativity, their mastery of the saz and their poetic compositions, as well as their recitals of bayatis, became a source of spiritual nourishment for the people, enriching their inner worlds. The traditions left by such great masters of saz-word and bayati poets continue to be upheld by the people of Karabakh to this day.

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