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THE POETIC HERITAGE AND LITERARY IMAGE OF SARI ASHIQ

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INTRODUCTION

The creative heritage of outstanding representatives of national literature constitutes an essential part of a people's cultural memory and one of the principal sources for understanding its spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic history. Literary and folkloric works preserve not only artistic values but also historical experience, ethical ideals, collective perceptions, social attitudes, and culturally determined forms of understanding the world. This function becomes particularly significant in oral traditions, where the continuity of cultural memory depends not only on written fixation but also on performance, memorization, repetition, interpretation, and transmission from one generation to another. The study of oral literature therefore requires consideration of both the verbal text and the cultural environment in which it has existed [59, pp. 3–15].

Oral folk literature occupies a distinctive position within the cultural heritage of Azerbaijan. Its various genres have preserved important elements of national historical experience, traditional worldview, social relations, ethical norms, emotional culture, and aesthetic thought. Folk songs, *bayati*, legends, tales, proverbs, epics, and ashug poetry developed over centuries through the interaction of collective tradition and individual artistic creativity. For this reason, their scholarly study cannot be limited to the analysis of an isolated written text. It also involves questions concerning oral transmission, performance, audience, textual variation, authorship, attribution, and the gradual transformation of individual artistic works into elements of collective cultural memory.

The understanding of folklore as a culturally situated form of communication is particularly important in this context. Dan Ben-Amos argued that folklore should be considered in relation to the social and cultural circumstances in which it functions rather than merely as a static body of traditional texts [59, pp. 3–15]. Richard Bauman likewise emphasized the performative character of verbal art and directed attention to the relationship between the performer, the audience, artistic competence, and the communicative situation [58]. These approaches are especially relevant to ashug

culture because the ashug tradition historically combines verbal creativity, musical performance, oral transmission, and direct communication with listeners.

Azerbaijani ashug poetry is one of the most distinctive phenomena of Turkic literary and artistic culture. Over the centuries, ashug art has performed aesthetic, educational, cognitive, ethical, historical, and cultural functions. It has preserved inherited poetic forms and collective values while also providing broad possibilities for individual artistic expression. The ashug is not simply a performer of traditional material. In the historical cultural environment, he may act simultaneously as poet, musician, narrator, interpreter, and transmitter of tradition. The personality of the ashug therefore occupies an intermediate position between individual authorship and collective oral culture.

Anna C. Oldfield's study of Azerbaijani ashiq tradition is particularly important in this respect. Her work considers the origins of ashiq arts as well as their existence in performance and demonstrates the close relationship among poetic composition, musical expression, performance practice, and cultural transmission [70, pp. 19–37]. This relationship makes it necessary to approach Azerbaijani ashug poetry both as literary creativity and as part of a broader performative tradition.

The unity of *saz* and *söz* is fundamental to the historical understanding of ashug art. The poetic word acquires an additional dimension through performance, while music and poetic expression form an integrated artistic system. The authority of an ashug depends not only on knowledge of an inherited repertoire but also on the ability to use established genres, images, rhythms, and formulas creatively. Traditionality in this context does not exclude individuality. On the contrary, the artistic importance of a major ashug is revealed in the way inherited poetic resources are transformed through individual imagination, language, emotional experience, and artistic mastery.

The international cultural significance of Azerbaijani ashug art was officially confirmed in 2009, when the Art of Azerbaijani Ashiq was included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This recognition drew renewed attention to the preservation, study, and transmission of the ashug tradition and emphasized its role as a living element of Azerbaijani cultural heritage.

At the same time, the recognition of the tradition as intangible cultural heritage makes the study of its individual representatives particularly important, since their creative legacies reveal the mechanisms through which inherited forms acquire individual artistic expression.

The oral nature of the ashug tradition creates specific methodological problems. A poetic text that circulated orally for decades or centuries cannot always be studied according to the same principles as a work preserved in an author's manuscript or in an edition prepared during the author's lifetime. An orally transmitted work passes through acts of memorization, performance, repetition, interpretation, and sometimes adaptation before it reaches a collector or editor. Consequently, the written version available to the modern researcher may represent one stage in a considerably longer textual history.

Ruth Finnegan's comparative research on oral poetry provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding this process. Her work treats composition, style, performance, transmission, publication, the position of poets, and the relationship between poet and audience as interconnected aspects of oral poetic culture [62, pp. 52–213]. In particular, her discussion of transmission and publication demonstrates that oral preservation is not simply an incomplete form of written preservation. It represents a distinctive mode of existence in which poetic texts circulate through memory, performance, and social interaction [62, pp. 134–169].

This principle is directly relevant to the study of Azerbaijani ashug poetry. A work transmitted orally may preserve stable thematic, structural, and stylistic features while simultaneously developing lexical or verbal variants. Variation should therefore not automatically be interpreted as corruption of an original text. It can also reflect the normal historical life of poetry within an oral environment.

Albert B. Lord's classical study *The Singer of Tales* offers another important comparative perspective. Lord examines the processes of training and performance, the role of formulas, recurrent themes, the relationship between individual songs and the broader tradition, and the transition between oral and written forms [68, pp. 13–140]. His analysis of performance and training [68, pp. 13–29], formulaic expression [68,

pp. 30–67], thematic structures [68, pp. 68–98], and the interaction of writing and oral tradition [68, pp. 124–140] demonstrates that an oral work may retain recognizable artistic identity without necessarily possessing a single permanently fixed verbal form.

Although Lord's principal material belongs to South Slavic heroic traditions and differs in genre from Azerbaijani *bayati*, the methodological distinction between oral and written forms of poetic existence is important for the present study. It enables the researcher to understand why different versions of the same poem may coexist and why the reconstruction of a single immutable "original" can sometimes be problematic in relation to orally transmitted poetry.

Karl Reichl's research expands this comparative framework through extensive analysis of Turkic oral traditions. His study examines the singer as shaman, minstrel, and poet, the circumstances of performance, genres and story patterns, formulaic diction, composition in performance, memory, rhetoric, style, narrative technique, and the transformation of oral traditions across different historical and geographical environments [72, pp. 57–354]. Particularly relevant are his discussions of the singer [72, pp. 57–92], performance [72, pp. 93–118], formulaic diction [72, pp. 171–218], composition and memory [72, pp. 219–270], and the transformation of oral tradition in time and space [72, pp. 317–354].

The importance of Reichl's work for the study of Azerbaijani ashug poetry lies not in the direct identification of lyric ashug forms with heroic epic but in the broader mechanisms of oral tradition that his research reveals. Singer, memory, inherited poetic language, performance, variation, and individual artistic competence interact in different Turkic oral cultures. These categories provide a useful comparative basis for investigating the processes through which the works of an individual ashug may survive in collective memory.

The figure of the traditional poet-performer is also central to İlhan Başgöz's study *Hikâye: Turkish Folk Romance as Performance Art*. Başgöz considers the *aşık*, the structure and artistic organization of traditional narratives, the process of performance, and the audience [55, pp. 71–213]. His discussion of the *aşık* [55, pp. 71–115], performance [55, pp. 153–200], and the audience [55, pp. 201–213] demonstrates that

traditional verbal art exists through the interaction of several elements rather than through the text alone.

The comparative significance of this approach is considerable for Azerbaijani material. The ashug works within a system of inherited poetic and musical conventions, but his personality and individual ability remain essential. Performance is not simply reproduction. It represents a creative act in which traditional material is actualized in a particular social environment. The ashug's artistic authority is thus based on both knowledge of tradition and capacity for individual expression.

John Miles Foley further emphasized that oral poetry must be interpreted according to the cultural system in which it produces meaning. In *How to Read an Oral Poem*, he directs attention beyond the written transcription toward the traditional context, performance, audience, music, occasion, and culturally recognizable signs through which the oral work communicates [65]. This perspective is particularly useful when studying ashug poetry because the modern reader frequently encounters only the verbal record of a work that originally belonged to a richer performative environment.

A written *bayati* permits detailed analysis of vocabulary, rhyme, imagery, metaphor, syntax, and semantic structure. Nevertheless, the written form does not automatically reproduce every dimension of its former oral existence. The distinction between text and performance must therefore remain methodologically visible even when the primary purpose of research is literary analysis.

The problem becomes especially important when the heritage of a historical poet was transmitted orally for a considerable period before systematic collection and publication. In such circumstances, the corpus available to modern scholarship reflects not only the original act of poetic composition but also later processes of memorization, performance, transmission, recording, selection, editing, and publication. The textual history of a work becomes inseparable from the history of its cultural reception.

Lauri Honko's concept of textualization is fundamental for the analysis of this process. Honko demonstrates that the transformation of oral performance into a written scholarly text involves several stages and raises questions concerning recording, transcription, editing, translation, contextual information, and the relationship between

performed and published forms [66, pp. 3–54]. A published text therefore represents an important documented form of oral heritage, but it should not automatically be regarded as a transparent reproduction of a single immutable original.

This observation has direct significance for the study of Sary Ashyg. A substantial part of his poetic heritage circulated orally for centuries before becoming the subject of systematic collection and publication. The surviving corpus consequently contains numerous textual variants, and individual poems may appear in different verbal forms. Some works attributed to the poet have entered the broader folklore repertoire, while questions of authorship and attribution remain open in particular cases. These circumstances make textual criticism one of the essential components of research into Sary Ashyg's poetry. The monograph itself identifies oral transmission, textual variation, and the intertwining of historical and folkloric material as central problems of his heritage.

Among the outstanding representatives of seventeenth-century Azerbaijani folk poetry, Sary Ashyg occupies a distinctive position. He is remembered above all as a master of *bayati* and as a poet whose lyrical works display remarkable semantic concentration, emotional depth, expressive imagery, and sophisticated use of traditional poetic resources. His name has remained in Azerbaijani cultural memory not only through the poems attributed to him but also through legends, narratives, geographical associations, and the folk epic *Yakhshi and Ashyg*.

The particular scholarly importance of Sary Ashyg lies in the fact that his historical personality, poetic heritage, and folkloric image have developed in close interaction. Modern research encounters at least three interconnected but analytically distinct forms of Sary Ashyg: the historical individual who lived in a particular period and cultural environment; the poetic author whose works circulated under his name; and the literary or folkloric character created and transformed through collective memory. A comprehensive study must consider all three dimensions without treating them as identical.

The reconstruction of Sary Ashyg's historical biography is complicated by the scarcity of direct documentary evidence. As the material examined in this monograph

demonstrates, even seventeenth-century manuscript evidence containing his *bayati* does not provide sufficient biographical information to resolve all questions concerning his life. Azerbaijani scholarship has consequently had to work with a combination of manuscript evidence, later written sources, oral traditions, legends, local memories, and interpretations proposed by different generations of researchers.

This situation makes the distinction between historical biography and folkloric biography especially important. Oral tradition preserves the past according to principles that differ from those of documentary historiography. A narrative associated with a poet may contain traces of actual historical circumstances but can also incorporate recurrent motifs, symbolic episodes, culturally expected patterns, and later interpretations. Such narratives should therefore neither be accepted uncritically as factual evidence nor rejected simply because they contain folkloric elements.

Başgöz's examination of the dream motif in Turkish folk stories provides a useful comparative example. His study demonstrates how the biography of an *aşık* can become organized around conventional motifs associated with artistic calling, initiation, love, and poetic identity [56, pp. 1–18]. The relevance of this material to Sary Ashyg lies not in establishing direct borrowing but in showing that the remembered biography of a poet-performer may gradually acquire forms characteristic of the traditional narrative system.

The folklorization of a historical poet is itself an important cultural phenomenon. When a poet acquires a lasting position in collective memory, stories concerning his life can become part of the interpretation of his works. Poetry influences biography, and biography in turn influences the later understanding of poetry. In the case of Sary Ashyg, this process is particularly visible in narratives connected with love, separation, Yakhshi, geographical space, and the poet's emotional world.

The *Yakhshi and Ashyg* narrative occupies a central position in this process. It preserves the name and image of the poet in an extended narrative form and connects his personality with themes that are also important in his lyric poetry. Love, fidelity, separation, suffering, obstacles, memory, and longing become elements not only of

individual *bayati* but also of the narrative through which collective tradition reconstructs the poet's life.

The epic should therefore be analysed on at least two levels. On the historical level, individual persons, places, and events may be compared with available documentary and biographical evidence. On the folkloric and literary level, the work must be examined as an artistic narrative possessing its own structure, motifs, character system, and conventions. The historical and folkloric levels are interconnected, but they cannot be treated as equivalent.

The interaction between biography and traditional narrative also raises a broader question concerning cultural memory. Oral culture does not preserve the past in the same manner as an archive. It selects, concentrates, transforms, and symbolically interprets experience. Certain details may disappear, while others acquire exceptional significance because they correspond to culturally meaningful themes. The folkloric image of Sary Ashyg is therefore important not merely because it may preserve information about the poet's life but because it reveals the values through which later generations interpreted him.

The geographical dimension of this memory is also significant. Places associated with Sary Ashyg, including areas connected with his life, love narratives, grave, and later commemoration, became part of the cultural landscape surrounding his name. Local traditions can reinforce a poet's presence in collective memory by giving oral narratives material and geographical reference points. At the same time, such material must be approached critically, since local memory is itself subject to transformation.

Textual variation constitutes another central problem in Sary Ashyg studies. A poetic work circulating orally can acquire different verbal forms without completely losing its recognizable semantic identity. Individual words may change, lines may be replaced, images may shift, or a poem may be adapted according to local usage and the memory of the performer. The presence of variants is therefore both a difficulty for textual reconstruction and valuable evidence concerning the life of the poem within tradition.

Finnegan's discussion of oral transmission is especially relevant here. She emphasizes the mobility of orally circulated material and the importance of memorization, reproduction, performance, and changing social contexts in the preservation of poetry [62, pp. 134–169]. Reichl likewise connects oral composition with memory and discusses the mechanisms through which traditional poetic structures are preserved and re-created [72, pp. 219–270].

Consequently, variation in Sary Ashyg's *bayati* should not automatically be evaluated as an error. Some variants may indeed result from inaccurate recollection or later editorial intervention; others may reflect legitimate stages in the oral history of the work. The researcher's task is to compare versions, identify stable and variable components, and evaluate each case according to its textual and historical evidence.

Honko's concept of textualization further complicates this issue because the process does not end when a poem reaches the collector. The act of recording itself fixes only one performance or remembered form. Transcription converts oral speech into writing, while editing can introduce orthographic, lexical, or stylistic normalization [66, pp. 3–54]. Therefore, differences among printed collections may arise from several historical stages: oral variation, circumstances of recording, editorial decisions, or later republication.

For the study of Sary Ashyg, the history of collecting and publishing his poetry is consequently not a secondary bibliographical issue. It forms part of the textual history of his work. Each collection represents a particular stage in the scholarly preservation of the poet's heritage and provides evidence concerning which texts and variants were known at a certain time.

The monograph gives special attention to this history because the first researchers and collectors played a decisive role in preserving material that might otherwise have been lost. At the same time, the comparison of different publications demonstrates that the corpus cannot always be treated as a completely stable body of texts. The distinction among attribution, collection, publication, and later scholarly interpretation therefore remains essential.

The issue of authorship is closely connected with oral transmission. Written literary traditions often provide manuscripts, authorized editions, or biographical documentation that can support attribution. Oral poetry may lack such evidence. Nevertheless, oral tradition is not necessarily anonymous. Finnegan's discussion of poets and their social positions demonstrates that oral societies can recognize and preserve the names and reputations of individual poets [62, pp. 170–213].

Sary Ashyg represents a particularly significant example. His poetry has become deeply integrated into the folklore tradition, yet his name has retained a strong authorial identity. This coexistence of individual authorship and collective transmission is one of the defining characteristics of his heritage.

At the same time, the prestige of a renowned poet can complicate attribution. A memorable anonymous *bayati* may later become associated with a famous name, while an individually composed text can circulate anonymously after entering the common folklore repertoire. Consequently, neither attribution nor anonymity should be accepted without considering the history of the source.

The identification of Sary Ashyg's individual poetic style therefore requires a combination of textual, stylistic, and comparative analysis. Recurring images, characteristic lexical choices, thematic structures, semantic contrasts, patterns of wordplay, and specific forms of emotional expression may support an understanding of individual style. However, none of these features should be considered in isolation from the traditional genre system.

The genre of *bayati* occupies the central place in Sary Ashyg's poetic heritage. Its brevity is one of its most obvious external characteristics, but brevity should not be equated with artistic simplicity. The restricted verbal form demands a high degree of semantic concentration. Within a few lines, the poet must create an emotionally and aesthetically complete expression. As a result, each lexical unit, image, phonetic correspondence, repetition, contrast, or ambiguity can acquire particular artistic importance.

The semantic density of *bayati* allows a limited verbal structure to contain several interconnected levels of meaning. An image can refer simultaneously to an object of

the natural world, an emotional state, a conventional poetic association, and an implied personal situation. The reader or listener therefore often participates in reconstructing meaning from poetic implication rather than from explicit narration.

This characteristic of the genre is particularly important in Sary Ashyg's poetry. Love constitutes one of the central thematic fields of his lyrical world, but it is rarely limited to simple declaration. Love is connected with separation, longing, faithfulness, memory, hope, suffering, beauty, destiny, distance, and the desire for union. These emotional states are frequently expressed through compact images rather than extended narrative description.

Nature occupies a significant place within this imagery. Flowers, birds, mountains, roads, water, distance, and other elements of the surrounding world can become vehicles for lyrical emotion. Their artistic role depends not simply on their presence but on the semantic relationships created among them. External landscape frequently functions as an equivalent or extension of the internal emotional state.

The analysis of imagery therefore requires differentiation between collective poetic convention and individual artistic realization. Many images belong to the common language of folk poetry and cannot be regarded as Sary Ashyg's personal invention. Nevertheless, an individual poet can distinguish himself through the combination, arrangement, semantic development, and emotional use of traditional images.

This relationship between inherited form and individual creativity constitutes one of the principal theoretical problems of the monograph. Traditionality does not imply artistic uniformity. A common genre provides formal and expressive resources, but poets use those resources differently. Individual artistic identity can emerge through thematic concentration, lexical preference, metaphorical associations, semantic oppositions, sound organization, and distinctive forms of poetic thought.

Finnegan's discussion of style and performance is useful in this respect. She considers repetition, structure, diction, prosodic organization, and performance as elements that participate in the artistic character of oral poetry [62, pp. 88–133]. Lord's treatment of formula and theme [68, pp. 30–98] and Reichl's discussion of formulaic

diction [72, pp. 171–218] further demonstrate that recurrent or traditional structures do not necessarily exclude artistic individuality.

This is an important methodological point for analysing *bayati*. Traditional rhyme schemes, recurrent images, and familiar verbal structures provide cultural continuity and facilitate memorization. Their presence does not automatically indicate lack of originality. The relevant question is how the poet organizes them and what semantic or emotional effect is achieved.

The short structure of *bayati* also gives special importance to sound and wordplay. Phonetic similarity, rhyme, semantic ambiguity, repetition, and lexical parallelism can produce meaning as well as musicality. A word selected for its sound relationship with another may simultaneously introduce an additional semantic association. This complexity is particularly relevant to Sary Ashyg's *jinas bayati*, where verbal artistry depends upon the interaction of sound and meaning.

Because a short poem can be altered significantly by the substitution of a single word, textual variation acquires particular importance in the study of *bayati*. A lexical difference between two recorded versions may change the metaphorical structure or emotional emphasis of the text. Therefore, stylistic analysis should be based, wherever possible, on comparison of available variants.

The broader Oghuz and Turkic oral tradition provides useful historical context for understanding these mechanisms. *The Book of Dede Korkut* occupies an important position in this respect as a major monument of Oghuz oral narrative culture. The English edition prepared by Faruk Sümer, Ahmet E. Uysal, and Warren S. Walker presents material associated with a tradition in which narration, poetic performance, memory, and the figure of the bard are closely interconnected [75].

The relevance of *Dede Korkut* to the present study is comparative rather than genealogical. No direct textual dependence between *Dede Korkut* and Sary Ashyg is implied. Rather, the monument demonstrates the historical depth of oral-poetic mechanisms within the broader Oghuz cultural environment and provides important evidence for the interaction between oral tradition and later written fixation.

Michael E. Meeker also considers *Dede Korkut* as an early record of oral Turkic narratives and discusses the historical and cultural environment associated with their circulation [69, pp. 395–417]. The material is relevant to the Azerbaijani context because it demonstrates the broader regional circulation of Oghuz narrative traditions and the cultural continuity within which later forms of oral and minstrel creativity developed.

These comparative sources allow Sary Ashyg's poetry to be placed within a wider history of Turkic oral creativity without losing sight of its specifically Azerbaijani character. Azerbaijani ashug poetry possesses its own linguistic, genre, historical, and cultural development. International comparative scholarship is therefore used in the present monograph as a theoretical framework rather than as a substitute for Azerbaijani sources.

The necessity of maintaining this balance is particularly important in a monographic study devoted to an individual poet. General theories of oral literature can explain the mechanisms of performance, transmission, memory, variation, and textualization, but they cannot independently establish the biography or corpus of Sary Ashyg. Such questions must remain grounded in Azerbaijani historical sources, manuscripts, collections, folklore records, and the scholarship devoted directly to his heritage.

Research on Sary Ashyg has developed gradually. Azerbaijani scholars have collected and published his poetry, investigated questions concerning his origin and biography, studied the formal and artistic characteristics of his *bayati*, examined legends associated with his name, and analysed the *Yakhshi and Ashyg* narrative. This scholarship created the essential foundation for the present research.

At the same time, the history of Sary Ashyg studies demonstrates the persistence of unresolved problems. The available sources do not always provide identical information. Different scholars have proposed different interpretations of his historical identity, geographical origins, artistic status, and individual episodes of his biography. The monograph itself records disagreements concerning whether Sary Ashyg should

be understood as a professional saz-playing ashug in the conventional sense or primarily as a folk poet known under the title “Ashyg.” konul m

Such disagreements are not incidental. They demonstrate the consequences of the fragmented and heterogeneous source base. When historical evidence is limited, later researchers are forced to compare manuscript evidence, poetic texts, oral narratives, local memory, and scholarly hypotheses. A critical distinction must therefore be maintained between established facts, probable interpretations, and assumptions.

The same caution applies to chronological questions. The existence of a text in a dated manuscript can provide important evidence that the poem or its attribution was known by a certain period, but it does not automatically resolve every aspect of the poet's biography. Conversely, a later oral narrative may preserve old cultural memory while remaining difficult to date precisely.

Source criticism is consequently essential to the methodology of the present monograph. Each category of evidence must be evaluated according to its own nature. A manuscript, a later scholarly publication, an orally collected legend, and a folk epic do not possess the same type of evidentiary authority. Nevertheless, each can contribute to the broader reconstruction when used appropriately.

The history of scholarship also demonstrates that Sary Ashyg's heritage has attracted attention beyond Azerbaijan, particularly in research on Azerbaijani and Turkic ashug poetry. The expansion of comparative folklore and oral-literature studies creates new possibilities for reconsidering earlier Azerbaijani material in dialogue with international methodological approaches.

The relevance of the present research is determined by this combination of historical importance and unresolved scholarly questions. First, Sary Ashyg occupies a prominent position in the history of Azerbaijani folk and ashug poetry. Second, his poetic heritage survives through a complex combination of oral transmission and later written fixation. Third, his biography has undergone extensive folklorization. Fourth, the relationship between his historical identity, poetic corpus, and literary image has not always been examined as a single interconnected problem.

Contemporary research on oral poetry makes such an integrated approach particularly productive. Bauman's performance theory [58], Ben-Amos's contextual understanding of folklore [59, pp. 3–15], Finnegan's analysis of oral composition and transmission [62, pp. 52–213], Foley's study of oral poetic meaning [65], Honko's concept of textualization [66, pp. 3–54], Lord's oral-formulaic approach [68, pp. 13–140], and Reichl's comparative investigation of Turkic oral traditions [72, pp. 57–354] provide theoretical instruments through which questions already present in Azerbaijani Sary Ashyg scholarship can be reconsidered.

These approaches are particularly useful for distinguishing among several processes that are sometimes treated together: original poetic creation, oral circulation, textual variation, collection, publication, folklorization of biography, and later literary reception. Separating these processes analytically makes it possible to understand their interaction more clearly.

The present monograph is therefore devoted to a comprehensive study of Sary Ashyg's poetic heritage and the formation of his literary and folkloric image. Its central research problem arises from the fact that the poet is known through different categories of material: historical references, poetic texts, manuscript evidence, published collections, scholarly interpretations, legends, local memories, and the epic *Yakhshi and Ashyg*. These sources overlap, but they are not identical in origin or function.

The object of the research is Sary Ashyg's poetic heritage and the historical, literary, and folkloric materials connected with his name.

The subject of the research is the formation, artistic characteristics, oral transmission, textual preservation, and scholarly interpretation of Sary Ashyg's poetic heritage, together with the processes through which his historical personality acquired a literary and folkloric image in Azerbaijani cultural memory.

The main aim of the monograph is to provide a comprehensive analysis of Sary Ashyg's poetic heritage and literary image by combining historical-literary, folkloric, textual, stylistic, and comparative approaches and to determine more precisely his place in the development of Azerbaijani ashug poetry.

To achieve this aim, the study pursues the following objectives: to examine the principal historical and literary sources concerning Sary Ashyg; to systematize major scholarly views on his origin, biography, and historical identity; to reconstruct the principal stages in the collection, recording, and publication of his poetic heritage; to examine the relationship between oral transmission and textual variation; to consider problems of authorship and attribution; to analyse the structural and genre characteristics of Sary Ashyg's *bayati*; to identify the main themes, motifs, images, symbols, linguistic features, and stylistic devices of his poetry; to determine the relationship between traditional poetic conventions and individual artistic expression; to analyse folk legends and narratives associated with the poet; to examine *Yakhshi and Ashyg* as an important form of folkloric preservation and reinterpretation of his personality; and to determine Sary Ashyg's contribution to the development of Azerbaijani literary and folklore traditions.

The methodological framework of the research is based on historical-literary, historical-comparative, comparative-typological, textual, structural-semantic, stylistic, and folkloric methods. Their integrated application corresponds to the heterogeneous nature of the material under investigation.

The historical-literary method is used to examine Sary Ashyg within the literary and cultural environment of his period and to trace the subsequent scholarly reception of his heritage. The historical-comparative method is applied when evaluating competing biographical interpretations and comparing information preserved in different sources. Comparative-typological analysis is used to examine recurrent motifs and traditional structures in relation to the broader ashug and Turkic oral traditions.

Textual analysis is particularly important because a considerable part of the poetic corpus reached modern scholarship through oral transmission. It is used to compare variants, identify stable and variable elements, and consider questions of attribution. Structural-semantic and stylistic methods are applied to the genre organization of *bayati*, their thematic structure, imagery, symbolism, lexical choices, and expressive devices.

The methodology also incorporates selected approaches developed in international oral-literature scholarship. Performance-centred analysis draws attention to the relationship between performer, audience, and context [58; 55, pp. 153–213]. Studies of oral transmission clarify the processes of composition, memorization, circulation, and publication [62, pp. 52–169]. Oral-formulaic research provides a comparative framework for understanding stability and variation in traditional poetic structures [68, pp. 30–140]. Honko's work on textualization emphasizes the methodological distinction between performed and recorded texts [66, pp. 3–54], while Reichl's study provides comparative evidence concerning singer-poets, memory, performance, and transformation in Turkic oral traditions [72, pp. 57–354].

The use of these international theoretical approaches does not replace Azerbaijani scholarship. The primary foundation of the monograph remains the corpus of Sary Ashyg's poetry, Azerbaijani manuscript and published materials, folklore records, historical evidence, and scholarly studies devoted directly to the poet and the national ashug tradition. International research is employed to clarify theoretical questions that arise from the Azerbaijani material.

The source base of the study consists of published collections of Sary Ashyg's poetry, manuscript and historical evidence, folklore records, legends associated with the poet, the *Yakhshi and Ashyg* epic tradition, works of Azerbaijani literary historians and folklorists, and comparative research on oral poetry and Turkic traditions. Particular importance is attached to the history of collecting and publishing Sary Ashyg's works, since this history provides evidence concerning the stages through which his poetic heritage reached modern scholarship.

The scientific novelty of the monograph lies in the integrated study of Sary Ashyg's historical personality, poetic heritage, and literary-folkloric image as interconnected but distinct phenomena. Existing scholarship has made substantial contributions to the investigation of particular aspects of his life and creativity. The present research seeks to systematize these approaches and examine their interrelations within a single conceptual framework.

An additional element of novelty is the treatment of textual variation as a meaningful feature of oral transmission rather than merely as an obstacle to establishing a correct text. Variant readings are considered in relation to oral circulation, memory, local tradition, recording, and editing [62, pp. 134–169; 66, pp. 3–54; 72, pp. 219–270]. This perspective makes it possible to examine the history of the corpus itself as part of Sary Ashyg's literary reception.

The study also distinguishes systematically between the poet's historical biography and the folkloric biography created around his name. Legends and *Yakhshi and Ashyg* are therefore not treated simply as imperfect historical documents. They are examined as independent forms of cultural memory that reveal how Sary Ashyg's personality and poetic reputation were interpreted by later generations.

The theoretical significance of the research is connected with broader problems of individual authorship and collective tradition, oral and written forms of literary existence, textual variation, attribution, performance, genre, folklorization, and cultural memory. Sary Ashyg's heritage offers valuable material for investigating how an individual poetic identity can remain recognizable while works circulate through collective oral tradition.

The study also contributes to the theoretical understanding of the boundary between folk poetry and individually authored literature. Sary Ashyg's works demonstrate that this boundary is not always absolute. A poem may possess an identified author and at the same time become part of folklore through long oral circulation.

The practical significance of the monograph lies in the possibility of using its findings in further research on Azerbaijani literary history, folklore, ashug art, oral poetry, and cultural heritage. The results may also be employed in university courses on Azerbaijani literature, folklore studies, oral folk literature, literary theory, and specialized courses devoted to ashug poetry.

The analysis of variants and the systematization of earlier scholarship may be useful for future textual studies and editions of Sary Ashyg's works. More broadly, the methodological approach applied here can also assist in the investigation of other

Azerbaijani poets whose creative heritage has been preserved partly or predominantly through oral transmission.

The study has additional significance for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The preservation of oral culture should not be understood solely as the publication of verbal texts. It also involves documentation of the mechanisms through which those texts were created, performed, remembered, transmitted, collected, and interpreted. Ashug heritage is particularly valuable in this respect because it demonstrates the inseparable relationship between word, music, performer, audience, and cultural memory.

Sary Ashyg's enduring place in Azerbaijani culture demonstrates the ability of oral tradition to preserve an individual artistic personality across several centuries. His poetry survived not only because it was eventually collected in written form but because generations continued to remember, repeat, reinterpret, and attribute value to it. Written publication represents an important stage in this history, but not its beginning.

At the same time, the survival of narratives concerning the poet demonstrates that collective memory preserves more than texts. It preserves images of the author. Sary Ashyg became both a poet remembered through his *bayati* and a cultural character remembered through stories about love, suffering, place, identity, and poetic talent.

For this reason, the distinction between Sary Ashyg as a historical individual, Sary Ashyg as a poetic author, and Sary Ashyg as a literary and folkloric character forms one of the conceptual foundations of the present monograph. These three dimensions should neither be completely separated nor uncritically merged.

Historical evidence establishes what can responsibly be stated concerning the poet's life. Textual and stylistic analysis reveals the artistic organization of the works attributed to him. Variant comparison makes it possible to trace aspects of oral transmission. Folklore analysis reveals how later generations interpreted and transformed his personality in cultural memory.

The monograph is organized according to this research logic. The first chapter examines the folklorized life of Sary Ashyg and the general landscape of his poetic

heritage. It discusses the principal sources used to identify his historical personality, competing scholarly positions concerning his biography, and the history of collecting and publishing his works. Particular attention is paid to the reliability and evidentiary status of different types of material.

The second chapter is devoted to the poetic heritage of Sary Ashyg. It analyses the genre and structural characteristics of *bayati*, the principal themes and motifs of his poetry, his artistic imagery and symbolism, linguistic and stylistic features, and the relationship between inherited folk-poetic conventions and individual artistic expression. Textual variants are considered where they influence interpretation or questions of attribution.

The third chapter examines the literary and folkloric image of Sary Ashyg. Legends and narratives associated with his name are analysed together with *Yakhshi and Ashyg* in order to determine the mechanisms through which the historical poet was transformed into a character of collective memory. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between biographical narrative, poetic motifs, and the later cultural reception of the poet.

The monograph consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and appendices. Its structure reflects the logic of the research: from the examination of historical identity and source evidence, through analysis of the poetic corpus, to investigation of the formation of Sary Ashyg's literary and folkloric image.

By bringing these dimensions together, the present study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Sary Ashyg's place in Azerbaijani literary history. His heritage demonstrates that the historical life of poetry cannot always be reconstructed solely from written texts. In oral tradition, the poet, performer, audience, memory, textual variant, collector, editor, and cultural community all participate in the preservation and interpretation of literary heritage.

Sary Ashyg's poetic legacy is therefore significant not only because of the artistic qualities of his *bayati* but also because of the exceptional history of their cultural existence. The preservation of his poetry through oral circulation, the presence of textual variants, the persistence of his name as an individual author, and the

development of legends around his personality make his heritage particularly valuable for the study of the relationship between individual creativity and collective tradition.

The artistic individuality of Sary Ashyg developed within a traditional poetic system rather than outside it. His significance lies in his ability to use inherited forms with a high degree of semantic concentration, emotional intensity, verbal economy, and imaginative richness. At the same time, the survival of his works demonstrates that individual poetic creativity can become deeply integrated into collective memory without completely losing its authorial identity.

The study of Sary Ashyg consequently contributes to a broader understanding of Azerbaijani ashug poetry as a dynamic cultural phenomenon. Ashug tradition should not be viewed merely as a fixed corpus inherited from the past. It is a historical system of poetic creation, performance, transmission, reinterpretation, and memory. The works of its major representatives reveal how tradition is preserved precisely through continuing acts of artistic renewal.

Within this framework, Sary Ashyg occupies a particularly important position. His poetic heritage stands at the intersection of authorship and folklore, lyric expression and cultural memory, historical personality and literary image. The examination of these intersections constitutes the central scholarly perspective of the present monograph and provides the basis for the analysis undertaken in the following chapters.

THE FOLKLORIZED LIFE OF SARY ASHYG AND THE LANDSCAPE OF HIS POETIC HERITAGE

1.Sources Identifying the Historical Identity of Sary Ashyg and the Experience of Collecting and Publishing His Poetic Heritage

Although Sary Ashyg is recognized as one of the most outstanding representatives of medieval Azerbaijani ashug poetry, his life and literary legacy remain among the least thoroughly investigated subjects in Azerbaijani folklore studies. One of the principal reasons for this is that the extraordinary popularity and wide circulation of folk *bayati* have often overshadowed the exceptional artistic mastery displayed in Sary Ashyg's own *bayati*. Another important factor is undoubtedly the scarcity of reliable historical sources and documentary evidence concerning the master's life and creative activity. A further reason lies in the gradual folklorization of Sary Ashyg's historical identity, as his biography became increasingly intertwined with legends and oral narratives over time. Consequently, written historical sources do not clearly establish the period in which he lived. Even the surviving manuscript materials provide only an approximate chronological framework.

Professor M. Gasimli addresses these issues in his influential article *Sary Ashyg: The Astonishing Monument of Our Bayati*, which clarifies many aspects of the problem. He writes:

"The life of Sary Ashyg, one of the master poets of the seventeenth century, cannot be clearly reconstructed from the numerous and highly varied legends that emerged during his lifetime and after his death. Although his *bayati* are found in seventeenth-century *cüng* manuscripts, these examples do not provide concrete historical information." [33, p. 495]

To support this conclusion, the scholar cites a *bayati* preserved in the *cüng* compiled by Husamaddin Toqati in 1677:

Aşıq Yaxşıya məndən,
Dürrün yaxşı Yəməndən.
Salam-dua, təmənna
Apar Yaxşıya məndən. [33, p. 495]

Translation:

Carry my greetings to Yakhshi;
The finest pearl comes from Yemen.
Take my salutations and heartfelt wishes,
And deliver them to my beloved Yakhshi.

Indeed, although the examples attributed to Sary Ashyg in the *cüng* manuscripts do not provide substantial biographical information about their author, they nevertheless confirm that the poet lived and created primarily during, or possibly even before, the seventeenth century.

The earliest written source containing information about Sary Ashyg's life, birthplace, and the historical region in which he settled is *Tazkirayi-Qaradaghi*, compiled by the distinguished nineteenth-century biographer H. Qaradaghi. Preserved as manuscript No. 7602 in the Institute of Manuscripts named after Muhammad Fuzuli of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, this work contains the earliest known written account concerning Sary Ashyg. Although it is still impossible to determine whether Qaradaghi obtained this information from an earlier written source or from oral folk tradition, his testimony possesses exceptional value as the earliest documentary evidence identifying the historical personality of the master poet. Qaradaghi writes:

"Sary Ashyg was from the Qaradagh region. Long ago he came and settled in the village of Gulaburt, situated on the banks of the Hakari River in the Zangazur district of Qaradagh..." [54, pp. 7–10].

Within Azerbaijani folklore scholarship there is relatively broad agreement concerning Gulaburt as the place where the ashyg eventually settled. However, considerable disagreement remains regarding his actual birthplace. These debates originated largely from the views expressed by the folklorist Bahlul Behjat in his articles *Sary Ashyg* [5] (*Literature Newspaper*, 29 February 1936, p. 3) and *The Biography and Literary Activity of the Bayati Poet Known by the Pen Name "Ashyg"* [6] (24 March 1936, p. 3).

Being both a historian and a source scholar, and himself a native of the Zangazur region, Bahlul Behjat had access to a substantial body of oral traditions and folklore materials concerning Sary Ashyg. For this reason, he considered his conclusions to be historically more reliable than previous interpretations. Criticizing the views of Ismayil Hikmat and Salman Mumtaz, Behjat wrote:

"It is also necessary to discuss how fictitious and unfounded the biographies written about this bayati poet have been until now. Very few people have written about the poet. One of them, Ismayil Hikmat, attempted to identify him as Ashyg Garib, although anyone familiar with both Ashyg Garib and the bayati poet Ashyg would immediately recognize the absurdity of such an attempt.

More than anyone else, Salman Mumtaz created confusion regarding the identity of the bayati poet. He portrayed a well-known master in different ways, assigning him different names on different occasions. In his 1922 booklet devoted to *bayati*, Salman Mumtaz even referred to the poet as 'Ashyg Abdulla,' providing him with a detailed biography and attempting to prove that he had come from Qaradagh." [7, p. 26]

An important contribution to the study of Sary Ashyg's biography was made through Bahlul Behjat's manuscript prepared during the 1920s and 1930s. Unfortunately, it remained unpublished until 2006, when it was transliterated and issued by Associate Professor R. Khalilov at the Folklore Institute of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. In *The Bayati of Sary Ashyg*, Behjat sought to clarify the poet's biography by relying on historical evidence and oral tradition. According to his interpretation, Sary Ashyg originally came from the Karaman Province of present-day Türkiye and migrated to Zangazur together with followers of Sufi brotherhoods who were persecuted after the Karamanid State had been destroyed by the Ottoman Empire [7, pp. 12–13].

However, the views advanced by Bahlul Behjat in the above-mentioned studies were subsequently challenged by a number of folklorists and collectors. Among them was Huseyn Kurdoglu, compiler, editor, and author of the introduction to *Sary Ashyg: Selected Bayati* (Baku: Sabah, 1993). While discussing the historical identity and

geographical origins of the master ashyg, Kurdoglu symbolically addresses the poet himself:

"We have no reason to distrust Qaradaghi, although there are those who view his account with skepticism. They cite your famous *bayati*:

Aşıq Qaramanlıdır,
Xalın qaramanlıdır.
Yaxşının tənəsindən,
*Yenə qar amanlıdır***.**

Translation:

Ashyg is from Karamanli;
Your beauty mark belongs to Karaman.
Because of Yakhshi's reproach,
Once again, my grief has become unbearable.

They use these lines to argue that you belonged to the Karamanli tribe. Even if this were true, it would be a source of pride for us, for the Karamanli were among the brave and illustrious Oghuz-Turkic tribes whose music, poetry, and sword have long been the pride of the Turkic world. Nevertheless, historical research confirms that Qaradaghi's account is correct. The ancient settlement known as 'Qaradaghli,' located near Gulabird and not far from the village of Bulovluk, indicates that at some point a community or tribe migrated from Qaradagh to Zangazur and eventually merged with the local population, settling there permanently." [45, p. 19]

Poet Ilham Gahraman expressed even stronger criticism of Behjat's position. In the introduction to *Sary Ashyg: The Book of Flowers*, he wrote:

"As can be seen, the criticism that Bahlul Behjat directed at Salman Mumtaz—'More than anyone else, Salman Mumtaz created complete confusion concerning the bayati poet'—could just as appropriately be applied to Behjat himself." [44, p. 8]

Nevertheless, Gahraman's criticism lacks sufficient scholarly substantiation. Bahlul Behjat was an accomplished historian and folklorist with profound knowledge of the historical sources relating to Zangazur and its rich cultural heritage.

Consequently, dismissing his scholarly conclusions without equally convincing documentary evidence cannot be regarded as methodologically justified.

An equally interesting interpretation was proposed by the distinguished collector and folklorist A. Akhundov. Unlike Behjat, Akhundov understood *Karamanli* not as a reference to the historical province in present-day Türkiye but rather as the name of a village situated near Gulaburt. He writes:

"Qaradaghi's account is essentially correct. However, the ashyg came to Gulaburt not from the Qaradagh region but from Karamanli. He lived both in Karamanli and in Gulaburt. Since ancient times there have been close ties between these two villages. The poet himself points to his Karamanli origin in his *bayati*:

Aşıq Qaramanlıdı,
Xalın qara manlıdı.
Yaxşının tənəsindən
Genə qar amanlıdı.

Translation:

Ashyg is from Karamanli;
Your beauty mark is dark as Karaman.
Because of Yakhshi's reproach,
Once again, my sorrow has become overwhelming." [46, pp. 3–4]

These and many similar interpretations demonstrate that the debate concerning Sary Ashyg's birthplace originated primarily from the conflicting positions of Salman Mumtaz and Bahlul Behjat. Subsequent researchers and collectors have generally aligned themselves with one or the other viewpoint, while a number of folklorists have adopted a more cautious position, refraining from expressing a definitive opinion because of the limited historical evidence available.

In our opinion, the currently available evidence is insufficient either to refute Salman Mumtaz's hypothesis or to reject the conclusions reached by Bahlul Behjat. Both scholars were experienced collectors and distinguished folklorists who defended their positions with considerable conviction. Under these circumstances, it appears

more productive to focus on the points where their views intersect rather than on their disagreements. A careful historical analysis of all available facts suggests that the group, clan, or tribal community to which Sary Ashyg belonged may first have migrated from the Karaman region to Qaradagh under the influence of certain historical events and political persecution, and only later moved from Qaradagh to Zangazur. It is therefore entirely plausible that the migrants gave their new settlements the names of their former places of residence, such as Karamanli and Qaradaghli, thereby preserving the memory of their earlier homeland.

Another controversial issue concerning Sary Ashyg's biography relates to his actual personal name. As early as 1964, M. Ibrahimov observed:

"The fact that many questions concerning our ashyg poetry remain unresolved is clearly demonstrated by the incomplete information available about the life and works of Sary Ashyg. Neither his birthplace nor the year of his birth, the date of his death, or even his real name has yet been established with certainty." [12, p. 172]

In both popular oral tradition and scholarly publications devoted to Sary Ashyg, his real name appears in various forms, including Garib, Gurbanali, Abdulla, Abdulali, Nabi, and others [33, p. 495]. The existence of so many different names reflects, on the one hand, the fact that his tragic love story and dramatic fate had already become the subject of numerous legends during his lifetime. On the other hand, it clearly indicates that the word Sary ("Yellow" or "Fair") functioned not as his personal name but as a poetic epithet or pen name. Had Sary been his actual given name, he would have been known, following the established tradition of ashyg nomenclature (such as Ashyg Gurbani, Ashyg Abbas, Ashyg Valeh, or Ashyg Ali), as Ashyg Sary rather than Sary Ashyg.

Among the various names proposed by different scholars, Bahlul Behjat's interpretation appears the most convincing. The prominent folklorist writes:

"We shall certainly provide the biography of Sarija Nabi, who used the pen name 'Ashyg,' with all the necessary documentary evidence. Such documents could only be obtained from the families of his companions, Agha Balim and Haji Garaman." [7, p. 20]

Thus, Behjat's conclusions, supported by documentary and historical evidence, deserve serious consideration.

Additional support for this interpretation may also be found in the following *bayati*:

Gör fələk nə budadı,
Unutma nə bu dadı.
İsmimi sorar olsan
Aşığın Nəbidadı adı (Nəbidi adı). [45, p. 38]

Translation:

See what fate has done;
Forget not the bitterness it has brought.
Should you ask my name,
Know that the Ashyg's name is Nabi (Nabidi).

To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the poet's pen name, it is necessary to examine, in chronological order, the principal studies devoted to Sary Ashyg and the scholarly debates concerning his name.

As noted above, the earliest written information about Sary Ashyg is found in Hasanali Agha Khan Qaradaghi's *Tazkirayi-Qaradaghi*, compiled at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is no coincidence that this source continues to be regarded as highly authoritative in modern scholarship:

"Azerbaijani literary studies owe a great debt to Qaradaghi for preserving information about his fellow countryman, Sary Ashyg, who originated from Qaradagh and later settled in the village of Gulabird in Zangazur, as well as for recording his *bayati* and *qoshma*. The earliest information about Sary Ashyg was provided by Qaradaghi in the nineteenth century." [40]

Significantly, the essay devoted to the poet in Qaradaghi's work bears the title *"The Life Journey of Ashyg Gurbanali, Also Known as Sary Ashyg and the Divine Ashyg"* (*Aşıq Qurbanəli və ya Sarı Aşıq və haqq aşığı deyilən şəxsin seyri-süluku*) [186]. The title itself demonstrates that different names and appellations associated with the poet were already circulating in the nineteenth century.

One of the most influential scholars in the study of Sary Ashyg's literary heritage was Salman Mumtaz. In his book *Ashyg Abdulla*, published in 1927, he addressed the problem of the poet's identity as follows:

"Ashyg Abdulla, who lived until the beginning of the eleventh century of the Hijri calendar, was an exceptionally sincere and refined folk poet. Since he had come from the other side of the Araz River and was fair-haired, he became widely known as Sary Ashyg ('Fair Ashyg'). He was also called Garib Ashyg ('The Stranger Ashyg'), because in many of his *bayati* he referred to his own exile and loneliness." [17, p. 164]

This publication contained more than 430 *bayati* attributed to the poet. An interesting observation appears in its introduction, where Salman Mumtaz records a popular oral tradition:

"According to what has been related, Abdulla's original pen name was Misli. After falling in love with Yakhshi, he changed his pen name to Ashyg." [17, p. 165]

In 1935 Salman Mumtaz published another collection entitled *Sary Ashyg and His Bayati*, in which he referred to the poet exclusively as Sary Ashyg. Thus, according to Mumtaz, the names Ashyg Abdulla, Misli, Sary Ashyg, and Ashyg all designated one and the same master of *bayati* poetry.

The publication of this volume provoked considerable discussion within the literary and academic circles of the period. One of the first scholars to respond was Bahlul Behjat, who devoted many years to the study of Sary Ashyg's heritage. In the articles published successively in the newspaper *Literature* in 1936, Behjat expressed a predominantly critical attitude toward Mumtaz's publications.

The folklorist G. Umudov later explained the reasons for this controversy:

"After the publication of *Sary Ashyg* in 1935, the discrepancy between its title and that of the earlier edition, together with the researcher's views on the etymology of the word *bayati* and on the poet's identity expressed in the introduction to *Ashyg Abdulla*, became the subject of scholarly debate." [48, p. 92]

Behjat began his criticism by questioning the publication of essentially the same collection under different titles:

"The book published by Salman Mumtaz under the title *Sary Ashyg* is, in fact, a new edition of the book *Ashyg Abdulla*, which he published in 1927. The author has not explained why the book was reissued under a different title. Readers will naturally assume that Ashyg Abdulla and Sary Ashyg are two different individuals. The introduction, which says almost nothing about the poet's творчество, should at least have clarified this issue and acknowledged that presenting the poet earlier as 'Ashyg Abdulla' had been a serious mistake." [6]

It is evident that Behjat objected primarily to Salman Mumtaz's identification of Sary Ashyg with Ashyg Abdulla, considering such an interpretation historically unfounded.

Another important issue highlighted by Behjat concerns the alteration of several *bayati* texts in Mumtaz's edition. He wrote:

"Many of the *bayati* included in the book *Sary Ashyg* were altered and deliberately presented in modified form. For example, the poet's most famous *bayati*, in which he identifies himself, was changed and published as follows:

Mən aşiq nə bu dadı,
Qəm məni nə bu badı.
Ad mənim, yar özgənin
Neyləyəm mən bu dadı.

Translation:

How bitter is the Ashyg's fate!
Sorrow has overwhelmed me.
The name is mine, yet the beloved belongs to another;
How can I endure such suffering?

The authentic version reads:

Aşığın Nəbidi adı,
Qəm məni nə budadı.
Ad mənim, yar özgənin
Neyləyim mən bu dadı.

Translation:

The Ashyg's name is Nabi;
See what sorrow has done to me.
The name is mine, yet the beloved belongs to another;
How can I bear such grief?

Perhaps this alteration was made deliberately in order to conceal the poet's real name, namely Nabi." [6]

An additional source supporting the identification of the poet with the name Nabi appeared in the journal *Azərbaycan Yurd Bilgisi*. In issue No. 29, published on 28 May 1934, Mirzada Mustafa Fahrettin published a short article entitled "Azeri Aşıklarından Aşık Nebi" ("Ashyg Nabi among the Azerbaijani Ashygs") [8]. Although occupying only three pages, the article is noteworthy because the title listed in the journal's table of contents also appears as "Azeri Aşıklarından Aşık Nebi." This indicates that, by the mid-1930s, at least some scholars regarded Ashyg Nabi as the historical identity of the poet later known more widely as Sary Ashyg.

Inside the journal itself, however, the article appears under a different title: "Azeri Aşıklarından Sarı Aşık**"** ("Sary Ashyg among the Azerbaijani Ashygs").

Within the article, M. Fahrettin writes:
"Bu mekalemde o güzel yurdun yetişdirdiği müşkin nefeslerden 'Sarı Aşık' lakabile maruf 'Aşık Nebi'den bahsetmek isterim." [8, p. 176]

Translation:

"In this article, I wish to speak about Ashyg Nabi, who was known by the epithet 'Sary Ashyg,' one of the gifted poets produced by that beautiful land."

Elsewhere in the same article, Fahrettin again refers to the poet by stating:
"...işte, adının 'Nebi' olduğunu oğrendiğimiz bu halk şairi..."

Translation:

"...thus, we learn that the name of this folk poet was Nabi."

Thus, according to Fahrettin, both the poet's personal name and his literary epithet were clearly known. Furthermore, the author cites a poetic passage from the works of Mir Hamza Nigari, in which the poet is explicitly referred to as *Sary Ashyg:*

Ol qurbdedir mezar-i Aşık
Elqabi şehiri Sarı Aşıq
Ol Aşıq-ı sadıq olsa layıq
Serdar-ı cünun-u Qays-ü Vamıq

Translation:

Far away lies the Ashyg's grave;
His celebrated title is Sary Ashyg.
That faithful lover is truly worthy
To lead the lovers Qays and Wamiq. [8, p. 176]

One of the *bayati* reproduced in Fahrettin's article also reads:

Aşıqın Nebidir adı,
Gam beni ne budadı.
Ad menim, yar özgenin
Neylerem Nebi adı.

Translation:

The Ashyg's name is Nabi;
Grief has overwhelmed me.
The name is mine, yet the beloved belongs to another;
How shall I bear the name Nabi?

In May 1936, the academician H. Arasli published his article *On Sary Ashyg* in the newspaper *Literature*, thereby joining the scholarly discussion that was then taking place. Referring to the verse from Nigari quoted above, Arasli continues:

"The earliest published information about the Ashyg is found in the *Divan* of Mir Hamza Efendi Nigari, published both in Türkiye and the Caucasus. Nigari states that

the Ashyg was buried in Karabakh, became famous for composing *bayati*, and was known by the epithet Sary Ashyg:

Original:

Ol qurbətdədir məzari aşiq
Əlqabi şəhiri Sarı Aşiq.

Translation:

The Ashiq's grave is located far from his homeland,
and he became renowned under the name Sarı Ashiq.

The second and third published references appeared in 1923 in issue No. 225 of the newspaper *Kommunist*, in the articles 'Sary Ashyg' and 'Garib Ashyg.' Signed under the name 'Huseyn,' these articles were largely based on Hasanali Khan Qaradaghi's *Tazkira*. I personally read this manuscript in the author's original copy preserved by A. A. Muznib. According to this source, the Ashyg's name was Gurban Ali. He became known as Sary Ashyg and Haqq Ashyg, composed *bayati*, came from Qaradagh, settled in the village of Gulaburd in the Zangazur district of Karabakh, and his love for Yakhshi is described in considerable detail. Qaradaghi's account is based primarily on oral folk tradition, with every *bayati*, and sometimes even each individual stanza, connected to a specific legendary event." [4]

After the 1930s, Azerbaijani folklorists continued to examine Sary Ashyg's literary heritage, generally repeating the arguments already expressed while attempting to formulate their own positions concerning his identity. Professor M. Tahmasib also addressed this issue in his fundamental monograph. Having analyzed Qaradaghi's *Tazkira* together with the interpretations of Salman Mumtaz, Bahlul Behjat, and other scholars, he concluded that the most reliable source remained the information preserved in Seyid Nigari's quatrain:

"...We place great confidence in these verses because Sheikh Hamza Seyid Nigari, one of the last representatives of Sufi literature in Azerbaijani literary history, was born and raised in this very region and belonged to the same lineage. 'Sary' has long been a common personal name in Azerbaijan. It has frequently been borne by historical figures

and continues to be encountered today, often without any connection to hair color or physical appearance. In our opinion, the poet's real name was indeed Sary, as Nigari indicates, whereas Nabi, Abdulla, and others were entirely different individuals. Because they also composed *bayati* resembling those of Sary Ashyg, they were later confused with him and eventually identified as the same person. As his poems demonstrate, Sary Ashyg frequently referred to himself as Garib Ashyg." [47, p. 245]

According to Tahmasib, therefore, the poet's personal name was Sary, while Garib Ashyg constituted his literary pen name.

One of the most noteworthy modern contributions to this discussion belongs to Academician A. Nabiyev. On the basis of a manuscript discovered in Derbent, Azad Nabiyev even attempted to establish the poet's dates of birth and death:

"According to a manuscript obtained in Derbent, Sary Ashyg was born in 1603, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and died in 1635."

Regarding the poet's name and literary epithet, Nabiyev writes:

"Abdulla was the name given to the Ashyg by his father, Muhammad. After receiving his mystical calling (*buta*), the poet became renowned among the people as a divinely inspired ashyg. The name Sary Ashyg was later bestowed upon him because of his fair complexion, and under this name he became widely known among the people." [20, p. 155]

Most folklorists writing about Sary Ashyg during the late twentieth century largely repeated the arguments advanced by earlier scholars and introduced no fundamentally new evidence concerning either his personal name or his literary pseudonym.

The available evidence may therefore be summarized by grouping the principal scholarly opinions as follows:

- Abdulla was the poet's personal name, while Misli, and later Ashyg, were his literary pen names (S. Mumtaz, A. Nabiyev, and others).
- Nabi was his personal name, and Sary Ashyg was his literary epithet (M. Fahrettin, B. Behjat, H. Arasli, and others).
- Abdal was his personal name, while Sary Ashyg was his pen name (S. Pashayev).

- Gurbanali was his personal name, and Sary Ashyg was his literary epithet (H. Qaradaghi).

-Sary was his personal name, whereas Garib Ashyg served as his literary pseudonym (M. Tahmasib).

These differing interpretations illustrate that the questions of Sary Ashyg's personal name and literary identity remain unresolved and continue to be among the most debated issues in the study of his life and works.

In our opinion, the interpretation based on Seyid Nigari's *Divan* is the most convincing. The available evidence suggests that the folk poet whom later generations came to know as Sary Ashyg was originally named Nabi.

The designation "Sarıca Nabi" ("Fair-haired Nabi"), which precedes the poet's name in several sources, most probably refers to his fair complexion rather than constituting part of his personal name.

At this point, another issue deserves brief clarification. Throughout his study, Bahlul Behjat frequently uses the word Aşiq instead of Aşıq. This usage appears to stem partly from the traditional opening formulas of Sary Ashyg's *bayati* and, most likely, from the folklorist's understanding that the two words derive from the same root and convey essentially the same meaning—namely, "one who is in love," "a devoted lover," or "one who is passionately attached."

As for the literary epithet Sary adopted by, or bestowed upon, the poet, its semantic range extends beyond the literal meaning of "fair-haired" or "blond." It may also evoke figurative associations arising from the poet's tragic love story, such as unfulfilled, separated, sorrowful, lonely, or estranged.

Although this issue has generated somewhat less controversy than the questions of the poet's name and origin, scholars have likewise failed to reach complete agreement regarding the village in which Sary Ashyg lived and worked. For example, the first volume of the three-volume *History of Azerbaijani Literature* (Baku: Elm, 1960) states:

"Sary Ashyg lived and created during the seventeenth century. His birthplace has not yet been established with certainty. The only well-attested fact is that he migrated from the Qaradagh region of Southern Azerbaijan to the Zangazur district, where he

settled in the village of Qaradaghli. Even today, a nearby hill is known as 'Ashyg's Highland.'" [35, p. 491]

Interestingly, although Bahlul Behjat mentions several villages in his research, he never refers to Gulaburd (also written as *Gulabird* or *Gulaburt*), which many other sources identify as Sary Ashyg's native village. Nevertheless, the available evidence strongly supports the conclusion that Gulaburd was indeed the place where the poet lived and pursued his creative activity.

In this respect, Professor M. Gasimli's assessment appears particularly convincing:

"The earliest written source mentioning Sary Ashyg is Qaradaghi's *Tazkirayi-Qaradaghi* (nineteenth century). According to Qaradaghi, Sary Ashyg was originally from the Qaradagh region. He later migrated to Zangazur and settled in Gulaburt on the banks of the Hakari River. Although many alternative opinions concerning his homeland, ancestry, and identity have subsequently been proposed, this source has retained its authority." [33, pp. 495–496]

It should also be emphasized that accepting Gulaburd, in present-day Lachin District, as Sary Ashyg's principal place of residence does not contradict the numerous references found both in historical sources and in the poet's own works to many other villages of the former Zangazur district, including Qaradaghli, Karamanli, Jijimli, Turklar, Safyan, Maqsudlu, Kirs, Gayan, Yazi, Bargushad, Maralyan, Nardivan, Mandil, Giziljig, Agali, and others. These settlements were evidently connected with different stages of the poet's life and activity.

It is impossible to imagine either Sary Ashyg's dramatic life or his poetic legacy without Yakhshi, the beloved who occupies the central place in his lyrical world. Although different studies identify Yakhshi's native village differently—among them Turklar, Safyan, and Maqsudlu—virtually all sources unanimously acknowledge her decisive influence on both the poet's personal destiny and his unique love poetry. Since this subject will be examined in greater detail in later chapters, attention here will instead be directed to other aspects of the poet's life and cultural environment.

Two fundamental factors played a decisive role in shaping Sary Ashyg's worldview and artistic maturity.

The first was his association from an early age with representatives of Sufi brotherhoods. One of the greatest strengths of Bahlul Behjat's study lies precisely in its detailed treatment of this issue [7, pp. 12–26]. Indeed, Sary Ashyg's mastery of mystical knowledge and his rapid recognition as a Haqq Ashyg ("Ashyg of Divine Truth") were closely connected with his contacts with educated religious figures belonging to the Sayyid lineage and the Sufi tradition.

It is hardly accidental that this same spiritual milieu later produced another outstanding representative of Azerbaijani literature, Seyid Hamza Nigari. Likewise, Sary Ashyg's connection with the revered Haji Garaman sanctuary, which continues to enjoy deep respect among the people today, reflects his attachment to the Sufi-Hurufi tradition. This spiritual affinity is expressed in the following lines:

Nəsimi tək bu Aşıq
Yolunda soyulandır

Translation:

Like Nasimi, this Ashyg
Has sacrificed everything upon his chosen path.

These verses reveal a profound philosophical and aesthetic connection with the mystical literary tradition.

The second important factor was the flourishing of Azerbaijani ashyg poetry during the seventeenth century, the period in which Sary Ashyg lived. Great masters such as Ashyg Gurbani, Ashyg Abbas Tufarganli, and the celebrated *bayati* poet Lala were either his contemporaries or belonged to the same literary milieu. Unfortunately, almost no reliable evidence survives regarding their direct literary influence upon one another. Yet the issue extends beyond questions of literary influence. Equally important is the vibrant competitive environment that characterized the traditional ashyg art, with its public performances and poetic contests. This cultural atmosphere undoubtedly contributed to the refinement of Sary Ashyg's poetic craftsmanship.

Another issue requiring separate consideration concerns the alleged relationship between Sary Ashyg and the folk poet Lala. According to several scholars, despite the

absence of documentary evidence, Sary Ashyg regarded Lala as his teacher and began composing *bayati* under his influence. One of the principal proponents of this hypothesis, F. Gurbanov, argues that:

"Sary Ashyg became famous as a *bayati* poet after learning from Lala's poetry." [13, p. 9]

He further states:

"...if Sary Ashyg lived during the seventeenth century and Lala was older than he was, then Lala's life and work must have extended from the 1540s to the 1650s. Sary Ashyg, most probably, was born in the 1630s and lived until the end of the seventeenth century. Consequently, Lala and Sary Ashyg never actually met." [13, p. 11]

As is evident, Gurbanov's conclusions rely more upon assumptions derived from folklore than upon verifiable historical evidence. Since Sary Ashyg's poetry contains no discernible references suggesting either Lala's influence or a teacher–disciple relationship, the claim that Lala served as Sary Ashyg's mentor cannot be regarded as convincing. While Lala's poems are first attested in Elias Museg's *Songs* (1721), Sary Ashyg's *bayati* are documented as early as 1677. Furthermore, neither the legends surrounding Sary Ashyg nor the folk epic *Yakhshi and Ashyg* contain any reference to Lala. Taken together, these facts strongly suggest that Lala most likely lived somewhat later than Sary Ashyg.

Another question attracting scholarly attention concerns whether Sary Ashyg should be regarded as a professional ashyg in the traditional sense—that is, whether he regularly performed with the saz at weddings, festivals, and public gatherings.

Salman Mumtaz writes:

"The Ashyg's mausoleum is situated in the village of Gulabird, on the left bank of the Hakari River. There is no inscription or date upon the monument. Only the image of a saz has been carved on the gravestone. From this one may infer that the Ashyg himself played the saz." [33, p. 497]



Figure 1. The grave and memorial site of Sari Ashiq in Güləbird village, Lachin district [78].

Bahlul Behjat, however, reaches a different conclusion:

"It is doubtful that the Ashyg actually played the saz. Neither the family traditions nor the narratives preserved by the descendants of his companions, Agha Balim and Haji Garaman, contain any indication of this. The image of the saz carved upon his gravestone most probably reflects his literary title 'Ashyg' rather than his occupation as a musician." [7, p. 20]

Thus, no scholarly consensus exists on this issue either.

Professor M. Gasimli offers perhaps the most balanced interpretation of Sary Ashyg's artistic status:

"Sary Ashyg's literary heritage presents a rather complex picture. This complexity arises partly from the uncertainty surrounding his artistic status and partly from the fact that a considerable portion of his poetic legacy became mixed with anonymous folk *bayati*. Was Sary Ashyg a classical ashyg or merely a folk poet? The available evidence does not convincingly demonstrate that he possessed the status of a professional ashyg. Nothing is known about his participation in the traditional master-disciple system, the identity of his teacher, or the existence of his own disciples. Likewise, neither the legends nor the epic associated with his name describe him performing at weddings, festive gatherings, or ashyg assemblies." [41, p. 42]

Another factor indicating that Sary Ashyg did not function as a professional ashyg is the manner in which his works were preserved. His poetry survived not through the

professional ashyg performance tradition but primarily in the oral memory of ordinary people.

Gasimli further observes:

"It should also be noted that Sary Ashyg's poetry occupies only a modest place within the repertoire of professional ashygs. The principal custodians of his works have been ordinary folk narrators, elderly men and women who preserved them in memory. Nevertheless, the word 'Ashyg' forms part of his title, his grave is known as 'the grave of the Haqq Ashyg,' and a saz is carved upon his gravestone. All these elements create a complex and somewhat contradictory picture of his artistic status. Both the legends concerning Sary Ashyg and his poetic legacy suggest that he should primarily be regarded as a folk poet. It appears that his spontaneous recitation of verse accompanied by the saz and his reputed gift of prophecy—many legends concern precisely this ability—led people to refer to him as 'Ashyg' and 'Haqq Ashyg.' In this sense, the term Ashyg acquires a symbolic rather than a strictly professional meaning." [33, pp. 498–499]

Indeed, the available historical evidence suggests that Sary Ashyg's status as an ashyg should be understood primarily in a symbolic and spiritual sense. No reliable documentary evidence confirms that he regularly performed as a professional saz player at weddings, festivals, or other public celebrations.



Figure 2. The gravestone associated with Sary Ashyg in Güləbird, Lachin district [78].

Another two unresolved issues in Sary Ashyg's biography concern the dates of his birth and death. In this regard, one of the master's *bayati* deserves particular attention:

Ha say, sana, say, sana,
Ömür yetdi saysana.
Əcəli gözlər Aşıq,
Ha saysana – saysana. [41, p. 41]

Translation:

Go on, count if you will, keep counting;
My life has reached eighty years.
Death is watching the Ashyg;
Count on, if you must.

The reliable autobiographical statement expressed directly by the poet in this *bayati—"My life has reached eighty years"*—inevitably casts serious doubt on several dates proposed in scholarly literature for Sary Ashyg's death, including the frequently cited year 1642 [41, p. 41]. Even if Sary Ashyg had been born at the end of the sixteenth century, these lines indicate that he was still alive at least during the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Therefore, setting aside various assumptions and hypotheses, it appears both more reasonable and historically sound to regard Sary Ashyg simply as a folk poet of the seventeenth century, even though the exact years of his birth and death remain unknown.

Up to this point, our discussion of the studies and collection of materials relating to Sary Ashyg has focused primarily on clarifying controversial and insufficiently explored aspects of his biography. However, this alone is insufficient for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the development of Sary Ashyg studies, its achievements, and its shortcomings. It is therefore necessary to provide a systematic overview of the history of collecting and researching the poet's literary heritage. At the outset, however, it should be noted that certain unavoidable repetitions may occur when discussing Sary Ashyg's life, personality, and works. Such repetition stems not from the structure of the present study but from the complexity of the problems themselves and the need to revisit key issues from different scholarly perspectives.

The history of research into the poetic heritage, biography, and literary environment of Sary Ashyg (seventeenth century), whose contribution to the development of Azerbaijani folk poetry—and especially to its most widespread genre, the *bayati*—is exceptional, may conventionally be divided into three major stages:

1. From the second half of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century;
2. From the 1950s until the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence;
3. The period of independence.

Each of these stages is characterized not only by specialized studies and articles devoted to Sary Ashyg but also by the observations and evaluations of prominent scholars and literary figures concerning the creative legacy of this outstanding folk poet.

The first stage begins with Hasanali Khan Qaradaghi's *Tazkirayi-Qaradaghi*, in which the author discusses Sary Ashyg's identity and the geographical setting of his life and activity. Most Azerbaijani folklorists who subsequently studied Sary Ashyg relied heavily upon Qaradaghi's account, particularly his information concerning the poet's place of origin. Although the geographical locations and place names recorded by Qaradaghi are presented with considerable precision, his chronological reference to events occurring "long ago" suggests that his information was derived primarily from oral tradition rather than documentary written sources. Nevertheless, while the question of Sary Ashyg's actual birthplace remains controversial in Azerbaijani folklore scholarship, there is broad scholarly agreement regarding the place where he developed as a poet and the cultural environment in which he lived and worked. It is precisely in this respect that the information preserved in Qaradaghi's *Tazkira* possesses enduring historical significance.

Beginning in the 1920s, scholarly interest in the personality and poetic legacy of Sary Ashyg gradually assumed a more systematic and scientific character. Among the most significant achievements of this first stage, the pioneering efforts of the distinguished folklorist and literary scholar Salman Mumtaz in recovering and

introducing Sary Ashyg's literary heritage deserve particular recognition. The importance of his contribution has been summarized by later folklorists as follows:

"Salman Mumtaz's activities in this field were of exceptional significance in introducing Sary Ashyg to the wider public. He prepared the first published collection of Sary Ashyg's *bayati* and, although only approximately, compiled the first biographical sketch of this literary figure. The book was published by *Azərnəşr* in 1927 under the title *Ashyg Abdulla* and was later revised, expanded, and republished in 1934 under the title *Sary Ashyg*. Drawing upon information gathered from various sources, Salman Mumtaz not only confirmed the earliest information recorded by Qaradaghi but also introduced numerous new details and clarifications. He wrote: 'Ashyg Abdulla, who lived until the beginning of the eleventh century according to the Hijri calendar, was a remarkably sincere and refined folk poet. Since he came from the other side of the Araz River and was fair-haired, he became known as Sary Ashyg ("Fair Ashyg") and Garib Ashyg ("The Stranger Ashyg"). Toward the end of the tenth century of the Hijri calendar, the Ashyg migrated from the Qaradagh region to the district of Zangazur, where he settled in the village of Qaradaghli. About a hundred years ago the village fell into ruin, but in the poet's lifetime it had been a prosperous and flourishing settlement. A hill associated with the Ashyg still bears the name Ashyg's Highland, where, according to local tradition, he would sit and recite his *bayati*.'" [33, p. 496]

Salman Mumtaz made an outstanding contribution not only through his scholarly research but also through his extensive collecting activities. The richness and diversity of the contents of his book *Sary Ashyg and His Bayati*, published by *Azərnəşr* in 1935 under the editorship of Seyid Huseyn, clearly demonstrate the exceptional scale of his work.

The volume includes six *qoshma* poems collected from oral tradition and attributed to Sary Ashyg—"A Yakhshi," "You Did Not Come," "If Only I Had Seen You," "Your Eyes," "There Is," and "It Has Arrived" [18, pp. 1–6]; one *tajnis* [18, pp. 7–8]; 439 *bayati* bearing the poet's pen name [18, pp. 9–79]; 193 anonymous *bayati* [18, pp. 80–111]; eleven *bayati* riddles [18, pp. 112–113]; several manuscript copies of Sary Ashyg's poems dating from the first half of the eighteenth century to the second half of

the nineteenth century [18, pp. 115–122]; and a photograph of a gravestone bearing the image of a saz, located in the cemetery known as Ashyg Cemetery, situated near the village of Muradkhanli on the right bank of the Hakari River [18, p. 123].

Moreover, in order to facilitate the reader's use of the collection, Mumtaz arranged the *bayati* alphabetically according to the final letter of the last line of each quatrain, following the classical tradition of Divan poetry [14].

Following Salman Mumtaz, the next scholar to make a major contribution to the study of Sary Ashyg's life and literary heritage was the folklorist, researcher, and collector Bahlul Behjat. Since his work will be examined separately and in greater detail in a subsequent section, only two particularly significant features of his book *Bahlul Behjat. The Bayati of Sary Ashyg* (transliterated and introduced by Rza Khalilov; Baku: Səda, 2006, 98 pp.) deserve mention here.

First, Behjat devoted considerably greater attention to paronomastic (*jinas*) bayati, whose attribution to Sary Ashyg's poetic style leaves virtually no room for doubt [7, pp. 27–94].

Second, the explanatory notes accompanying many of the *bayati* are of exceptional importance for reconstructing the historical and geographical environment in which the great folk poet lived. A single example from the commentary to the opening *bayati* sufficiently illustrates this point:

Aşiqəm, budağ ilən,
El gedər bu dağ ilən,
Sənə "Yaxşı" deməzlər,
Mən ölsəm bu dağ ilən.

Translation:

I am an Ashyg with this branch;
The people pass along this mountain.
No one would call you "Yakhshi"
If I were to die upon this mountain.

According to Behjat's commentary:

"Yakhshi was the beloved of the Ashyg. She lived with her mother in one of the villages on the left bank of the Hakari River. It is groundless to identify this village as Maqsudlu, Hakari, or any other settlement, since no reliable evidence exists. Yakhshi was eventually married to a wealthy landowner. His name was Yaman; perhaps this was not his real name but rather a nickname bestowed upon him by the people because of his unpleasant character. Such a name also creates an expressive contrast with the name Yakhshi ('Good')." [7, p. 27]

The information and analyses presented by Behjat clearly demonstrate his thorough knowledge of the historical geography in which Sary Ashyg lived. Drawing upon both documentary evidence and oral folk tradition preserved in popular memory, he was able to formulate well-reasoned scholarly conclusions. Although some of his interpretations remain open to debate, there is also considerable agreement between the materials and evaluations presented by Bahlul Behjat and Salman Mumtaz. This similarity indicates that both scholars carefully examined the earliest available sources.

The first stage in the study of Sary Ashyg's literary heritage was by no means limited to the research and collecting activities of Salman Mumtaz and Bahlul Behjat. The writings of such distinguished scholars as Hanafi Zeynalli, Amin Abid, Ali Nazim, Hamid Arasli, Hummat Alizadeh, Abdulazal Demirchizadeh, and several others also enriched this period through articles and critical studies devoted, wholly or in part, to Sary Ashyg and his poetic legacy.

Nevertheless, this initial stage also had its limitations. For example, several *jinas bayati* that are today unquestionably recognized as belonging to Sary Ashyg—including the celebrated quatrain beginning with the line "Zülfün suda mar kimi" ("Your tresses are like a serpent in the water")—were absent from the collections prepared by both Salman Mumtaz and Bahlul Behjat. Most likely, this omission reflects the fact that folklore collecting during that period had not yet achieved the systematic organization and methodological precision characteristic of later decades.

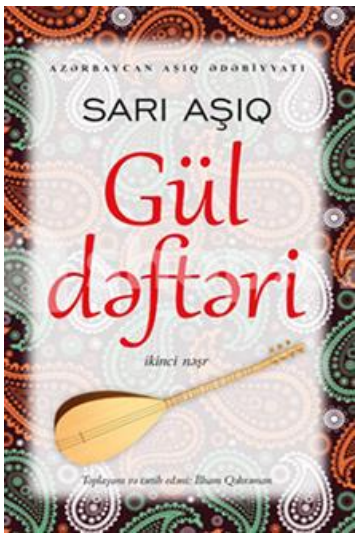


Figure 3. Cover of *Sarı Aşıq. Gül dəftəri*, compiled and edited by İlham Qəhrəman (Baku: Qanun, 2018) [79].

The second stage in the study of Sary Ashyg's heritage is closely associated with the research and collecting activities carried out at the Institute of Literature named after Nizami Ganjavi of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, particularly by the Department of Folklore, which was headed for many years (1944–1982) by the eminent folklorist Professor Mammad Huseyn Tahmasib.

Among the major achievements of this period was the inclusion of comprehensive essays on Sary Ashyg's life and works in such authoritative academic publications as *The History of Azerbaijani Literature*, as well as in university textbooks including *Azerbaijani Oral Folk Literature* and *Azerbaijani Folklore*. During these decades, scholars representing different generations of Azerbaijani folkloristics—including M. H. Tahmasib, A. Akhundov, V. Valiyev, P. Afandiyev, M. Seyidov, I. Abbasli, S. P. Pirsultanli, A. Nabiyev, B. Abdulla, M. Hakimov, E. Mammadli, S. Rustamov, A. Mammadova, and many others—either devoted independent studies to Sary Ashyg or examined his literary heritage within broader investigations of Azerbaijani folklore.

At the same time, significant progress was achieved in collecting and publishing Sary Ashyg's poems and *bayati*. Particularly noteworthy were two publications: Sary Ashyg: Poems, compiled, edited, and introduced by Ahliman Akhundov (1966), and the publication of the folk epic Yakhshi and Ashyg within the collection *Azerbaijani Folk Epics* (1983).

As Ahliman Akhundov observed:

"The poetic sections of this epic consist predominantly of *bayati*. As in many traditional love narratives, the lovers do not achieve union: first Yakhshi dies, and afterwards the Ashyg himself." [46, p. 6]

It should be emphasized that Ahliman Akhundov, like Bahlul Behjat and Salman Mumtaz before him, possessed an intimate knowledge of the Zangazur region, especially the Lachin area and the surroundings of the Hakari River where Sary Ashyg had lived and traveled. Consequently, his collecting, editorial work, and scholarly interpretations are of exceptional value. In particular, his publication of the epic Yakhshi and Ashyg represented a major contribution to Azerbaijani folklore scholarship.

The dissemination of Sary Ashyg's poetic heritage also became an important concern within secondary and higher education. In this respect, the folklorist and educator S. Rustamov drew attention to the pedagogical significance of introducing Sary Ashyg's poetry into school curricula [31; 141]. Comparing the poet with the greatest figures of classical Azerbaijani literature, he wrote:

"Sary Ashyg achieved lasting fame primarily through his *bayati*. Just as Nizami is inseparably associated with the epic and lyrical-philosophical poem, Mahsati with the *rubai*, and Fuzuli with the *ghazal*, so the *bayati* is inseparably associated with the name of Sary Ashyg. His *bayati* are delicate, refined, and profoundly meaningful lyrical compositions. They express the genuine emotions of a devoted lover, together with ideals of fidelity, loyalty, trust, respect, and devotion. Possessing extraordinary powers of observation, the poet was also able to perceive the most subtle psychological states and express them in an exceptionally delicate and poetic language." [31, p. 85]

Written during the 1970s, this study further emphasized the educational value of Sary Ashyg's *bayati* as an outstanding resource for teaching both the richness of the Azerbaijani language and the depth of its artistic expression.

Finally, the third—and arguably the most productive—stage in the study of Sary Ashyg's literary heritage coincides with the period of Azerbaijan's independence. This period has been characterized, on the one hand, by the first publication or republication

of many important works produced during earlier stages of Sary Ashyg scholarship, including the books of Salman Mumtaz and Bahlul Behjat, and, on the other hand, by the active research and collecting efforts of a new generation of folklorists working alongside established scholars.

Among the most significant achievements of this period is the publication of Sary Ashyg: Selected Bayati (compiled, edited, and introduced by Huseyn Kurdoglu; Baku: Sabah, 1993, 120 pp.). The collection clearly demonstrates that the *bayati* included were selected with great care from a wide range of sources. Most importantly, the compiler consistently prioritized quality over quantity, resulting in a carefully curated selection of the poet's finest works.

In the original and deeply moving introduction, addressed directly to the spirit of Sary Ashyg, Kurdoglu also pays heartfelt tribute to the scholars who preserved the poet's legacy:

"I stand beside your grave, Master! I think of those devoted servants of scholarship and literature who understood the value of the jeweled *bayati* you bequeathed to your people and homeland, and who, through immense effort, collected them from oral tradition, archives, forgotten *cüng* manuscripts, the margins of old books, memoirs, and private letters before bringing them into print. Masters of the written word such as Salman Mumtaz, Bahlul Behjat, and Amin Abid were themselves murdered by the twentieth-century successors of those very Yaman Beys who once darkened your life and left your heart forever unfulfilled. Yet their honoured names and their noble achievements remain immortal." [45, pp. 8–9]

Although this introduction does not present many previously unknown *bayati* or substantially different textual variants, it vividly reflects Huseyn Kurdoglu's profound admiration for Sary Ashyg and his deep appreciation of the poet's enduring place in the spiritual and literary heritage of Azerbaijan.

Among the publications of the most recent stage, particular attention should be paid to Sary Ashyg: The Book of Flowers (*Gül dəftəri*), dedicated to the memory of Salman Mumtaz (2nd edition, compiled, edited, and introduced by Ilham Gahraman; Baku: Qanun, 2018), which also represents an important contribution to Sary Ashyg studies

[44]. Nevertheless, the compiler's assertion that the number of Sary Ashyg's *bayati* approaches one thousand can hardly be regarded as consistent with either historical evidence or scholarly accuracy. From the editions prepared by Salman Mumtaz to those compiled by Huseyn Kurdoglu, none of the experienced specialists has suggested that the total number of Sary Ashyg's *bayati* exceeds seven hundred, even after taking textual variants into consideration. In our view, if anonymous folk *bayati* that coincide with Sary Ashyg's poems, together with their numerous variants, are excluded, and if due consideration is given to the fact that the poet was above all an unrivalled master of the jinas bayati, the authentic corpus of his surviving poetry most likely comprises approximately 300–350 quatrains. The artistic mastery achieved by Sary Ashyg is of such an exceptional level that his poetic legacy requires no quantitative exaggeration to demonstrate its significance.

Another noteworthy contribution to the dissemination of Sary Ashyg's heritage in Southern Azerbaijan is the volume Sary Ashyg, prepared by Mohammad Garakhanli Ibadi-Alishig (Tabriz: Akhtar, 2007) [43]. This publication is based primarily on the editions prepared by Salman Mumtaz, Ahliman Akhundov, and Huseyn Kurdoglu, while several additional *bayati* were collected independently by the compiler and incorporated into the volume.

One of the defining characteristics of the most recent stage in Sary Ashyg scholarship is the considerable expansion and deepening of theoretical approaches to the poet's creative legacy. Studies by Gara Namazov, Maharram Gasimli, Mahmud Allahmanli, Elkhan Mammadli, Mammad Aliyev, and many other folklorists and literary scholars contain numerous valuable observations concerning various aspects of folk poetry, including important assessments of Sary Ashyg's poetic heritage.

Particularly noteworthy in this respect is Professor Maharram Gasimli's study "Sary Ashyg: The Astonishing Monument of Our Bayati", first published in *Literature Newspaper* on 5 September 2015 [32, pp. 20–21]. In this article, the author not only clarifies several issues that had long remained controversial in the study of Sary Ashyg's life and works but also advances a number of original theoretical propositions concerning the poet's artistic world:

"Sary Ashyg's *bayati* primarily constitute the poetic expression of his genuine feelings for his beloved Yakhshi, reflecting the emotional experience of love, longing, separation, and spiritual suffering. At the same time, traces of divine love may also be discerned throughout his poetic universe. Interestingly, these mystical overtones are associated not so much with the Sufi and dervish traditions that characterize classical ashyg poetry in general as with the symbolic system of Hurufism.

Bu Aşıq zində deyil,
Yatmış, özündə deyil.
Kim deyir, Haqq camalı
Yaxşı üzündə deyil?

Translation:

This Ashyg is no longer truly alive;
He lies as though asleep, no longer himself.
Who would dare to say
That the Beauty of God is not reflected in Yakhshi's face?

The manifestation of the 'Divine Beauty' (*Haqq camalı*) in the face of Yakhshi is directly connected with the central concept of Hurufi philosophy—*Ana al-Haqq* ('The Truth is within me'). It is for this reason, apparently, that in one of his best-known *bayati* Sary Ashyg refers to one of the principal historical figures of Hurufism, Imadaddin Nasimi, and explicitly identifies himself with him:

Gözəllik, soy iləndir,
Şahmar da soy ilandır.
Nəsimi tək bu Aşıq
Yolunda soyulandır.

Translation:

Beauty is inherited by lineage;
Even the king serpent descends from its kind.

Like Nasimi, this Ashyg
Has sacrificed everything upon his chosen path." [33, p. 503]

Scholarly interpretations of this kind have opened new perspectives for understanding the profound philosophical dimension of Sary Ashyg's poetry and have stimulated further research into its symbolic and mystical foundations.

Finally, it should be emphasized once again that, during the years of Azerbaijan's independence, the Institute of Literature named after Nizami Ganjavi and the Institute of Folklore of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences have played a decisive role in both the study and publication of Sary Ashyg's poetic heritage. Their numerous scholarly editions—including the multi-volume *History of Azerbaijani Literature* and the extensive series Karabakh: Folklore Is Also History (Volumes I, II, III, IV, and VI)—contain a wealth of valuable research and folklore materials that have substantially enriched modern understanding of Sary Ashyg's life, literary legacy, and place within the history of Azerbaijani oral poetry.

It is an indisputable fact that the work of Sary Ashyg (seventeenth century) constitutes a distinct stage in the development of the *bayati*, the principal genre of Azerbaijani folk poetry, enriching it with new poetic forms and artistic features [35, pp. 491–495; 21, pp. 42–52]. Consequently, the activities of folklorists, collectors, and researchers who played a decisive role in preserving, studying, and transmitting Sary Ashyg's *bayati* to the present day are of particular scholarly interest.

One of the most distinguished figures who devoted tremendous effort to resolving these issues within twentieth-century Azerbaijani folkloristics was Bahlul Behjat. A victim of Stalinist repression, Behjat published two important articles in the newspaper *Literature* (*Ədəbiyyat*) in 1936—"Sary Ashyg" [6] and "The Biography of the Bayati Poet Known by the Pen Name 'Ashyg'" [5]—both devoted to the study of Sary Ashyg's life and literary heritage. In addition, he collected 349 *bayati* attributed to the poet. His manuscript collection, together with the study "The Biography of the Bayati Poet Sary Ashyg," was preserved in the Republican State Archive of Literature and Art within the file entitled *A Scholarly Study of Azerbaijani Bayati*.

Fortunately, Behjat's painstaking work was not lost. In 2006, it was published by Associate Professor Rza Khalilov as an independent volume entitled The Bayati of Sary Ashyg, within the series *Early Publications of Azerbaijani Folklore* [50]. For the first time, Khalilov brought together archival materials containing Behjat's research on Sary Ashyg's personality, historical milieu, biography, and creative legacy, along with his 1936 article "The Biography and Works of the Bayati Poet Known by the Pen Name 'Ashyg'" and the *bayati* he had collected, presenting them in a single scholarly edition [7, pp. 3–97].

The introductory essay, "Bahlul Behjat and the Bayati of Sary Ashyg," not only provides valuable information about the folklorist's life and scholarly achievements but also draws attention to the high regard in which Behjat's academic work (1885–1938) was held by his contemporaries [7, pp. 4–11].

One of the greatest merits of this carefully prepared edition lies in the fact that Rza Khalilov deliberately focused not only on Behjat's scholarly legacy but also on his tragic fate. As he explains:

"While preparing Bahlul Behjat's work for publication, we made every effort to preserve the author's original narrative style and syntactic structure, maintaining the historical character of the text rather than adapting it to contemporary language. In assessing his contribution as a folklorist and collector of oral literature, it is appropriate to recall the words of H. Zeynalli: 'Surely, when the history of folk literature is written, the names of such people should be inscribed in letters of gold in its most prominent place.' The publication of this work, which has until now existed only in manuscript form, represents one of the first steps toward publishing the scholarly heritage of a man who, like his work itself, became a victim of political repression, thereby contributing to his moral rehabilitation." [50, p. 11]

Khalilov further emphasizes that Behjat was not only a folklorist and literary scholar but also an accomplished theologian. Among his other important works are The History of Muhammad's Family, a complete Azerbaijani Turkish translation of the Qur'an, a translation of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh prepared jointly with Amin Abid, the book Nabati (1935), and a series of articles published in *Literature* during 1936,

including "Nabati – Khan Chobani," "Sary Ashyg," "The Folk Poet and Folk Poets," "Ashyg Mahmud," and others. Khalilov also notes that Behjat's studies devoted to Sary Ashyg received favorable evaluations from such prominent scholars as Hamid Arasli, Abdulazal Demirchizadeh, and Ali Karabaghli [50, pp. 5–6].

The introduction to Bahlul Behjat: The Bayati of Sary Ashyg is equally valuable for its concise yet informative account of Behjat's remarkable life and tragic destiny. Since these details are of direct relevance to the present study, two passages from the introduction deserve particular attention:

"Bahlul Mustafa Afandi oghlu Afandiyev was born in 1885 in the village of Dondarli, Qubadli district of the Zangazur region, into a family deeply rooted in the religious tradition. His father, Mustafa Afandi, one of the distinguished religious scholars of his time, attached great importance to providing his son with a thorough theological education. After receiving his initial instruction from his father, Bahlul continued his studies in Turkey and Iran. Upon completing his higher religious education, he returned to his homeland, where he served in various religious positions throughout the Zangazur district. Following the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918, he served as the Qadi (chief Islamic judge) of Zangazur until 1920 and actively supported the Democratic Republic through both his public service and personal commitment.

After the Bolshevik regime came to power in Azerbaijan in 1920, the most difficult period of his life began. In 1924 he was arrested for the first time on fabricated political charges. Following his release in 1934, he worked first at Azərnəşr and subsequently in the Department of Literature of the Azerbaijan Branch of the Academy of Sciences (AzFAN), which became his final place of employment. In August 1937 he was arrested once again on false accusations and was executed by firing squad on 15 March 1938. Twenty years later, on 5 November 1958, the Supreme Court of the Azerbaijan SSR officially rehabilitated him." [50, pp. 4–5]

With regard to the overall structure and content of Bahlul Behjat: The Bayati of Sary Ashyg, published by the Institute of Folklore of the Azerbaijan National Academy

of Sciences within the series *Early Publications of Azerbaijani Folklore*, the volume is noteworthy above all for consisting of two clearly distinct yet complementary parts.

The first part, entitled "The Biography of the Bayati Poet 'Ashyg'", is an original scholarly study authored by Bahlul Behjat himself and represents a substantial contribution to Sary Ashyg scholarship [40, pp. 12–26]. The second part, divided into five thematic sections—*"Mountain Bayati," "Hunting and Birds," "River Bayati," "Places and Cities,"* and *"Love and Beauty"*—primarily reflects Behjat's activity as a collector of folklore. At the same time, the valuable commentaries accompanying many of the *bayati* considerably enhance the scholarly importance of this section [7, pp. 27–97]. Together, these characteristics make it necessary to examine each part separately.

In the first section, Bahlul Behjat argues that Sary Ashyg's real name was Sarıca Nabi. According to his interpretation, the poet originally came from the Karaman region of Anatolia and later migrated to Karabakh for specific missionary purposes. Behjat writes:

"Because of the political conditions that prevailed within the Ottoman Empire, members of certain religious brotherhoods were compelled to leave their homeland and migrate elsewhere. Among one such group was the *bayati* poet whose biography we are presenting here—Sarıca Nabi. The group itself was not numerous. It was led by Mir Agha Balim, and its other members included Haji Garaman, Gara Pirim, and Sarıca Nabi. At that time they settled in the province of Karabakh, which was under the authority of the Safavid rulers." [7, pp. 13–14]

Another important issue examined and substantiated by Behjat is the story of Sary Ashyg's acquaintance with his beloved Yakhshi. The folklorist reconstructs this episode with remarkable vividness and convincing detail:

"...Leaving Mir Agha Balim, Sarıca Nabi travelled southward until he reached a small village on the left bank of the Hakari River, where he became the guest of an elderly widow. The woman with whom he stayed had only one child—a daughter. The young traveller, distinguished by his kindness and noble character, was warmly welcomed by his hosts. While living in their house, he fell deeply in love with the beautiful girl, whose name was Yakhshi. Her mother was an elderly widow who had

no one to help her with household duties or the care of her livestock. She greatly admired the good manners, wisdom, and character of her guest.

Sarıca Nabi remained in Yakhshi's home, managing the household as though he were a member of the family and constantly surrounding his beloved like a moth circling a flame...

During this period of his life, Sarıca Nabi experienced profound happiness and expressed his love through deeply meaningful and artistically refined *bayati*:

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

Translation:

The lowland before us is beautiful;
Fairer still than the summer pastures.
Fortunate are you, O Ashyg,
For life is sweetest beside the one you love.

From that time onward, Sarıca Nabi came to be known as Ashyg, and we have therefore chosen to refer to him by that name. Ashyg was happy, for Yakhshi loved him in return. He now led an orderly life, spending the winters with his modest herd on the banks of the Hakari River and moving to the mountain pastures each spring." [7, pp. 15–16]

In his study, Behjat also argues that Yaman Bey, the man responsible for separating Sary Ashyg from Yakhshi, was likewise a historical figure whose descendants were known until relatively recent times and who was regarded as one of the influential landowners of the region. According to Behjat, although Yakhshi's mother intended, in accordance with local custom, to marry Yakhshi to Ashyg, Yaman Bey frustrated the wishes of all three by taking Yakhshi by force. As a consequence, her elderly mother died of grief, while Ashyg was driven into a life of wandering [7, pp. 17–18].

It is noteworthy that the historical details reconstructed by Behjat correspond closely to the narrative structure and principal motifs of the folk epic Yakhshi and Ashyg, well known in Azerbaijani oral tradition.

At the same time, Behjat attempts to support several of his conclusions by referring to historical sources that he regarded as reasonably reliable. One of the most controversial questions in Azerbaijani folkloristics concerning Sary Ashyg's life has long been the issue of where he came from before arriving at the village situated on the banks of the Hakari River [44, pp. 7–10; 45, pp. 6–8, etc.]. This question has remained one of the central subjects of scholarly debate, and Behjat sought to strengthen his interpretation by combining documentary evidence with oral historical tradition.

The source upon which Bahlul Behjat relied in addressing this issue becomes evident from his own account:

"We succeeded in obtaining important information about Ashyg from Haji Qasim Chalabi, the seventh-generation descendant of Haji Garaman. In recording the genealogy of the Chalabi family, Haji Qasim also spoke about Sarıca Nabi, known by the pen name *Ashyg*. We reproduce his statement here in its original form: 'The Chalabi lineage began with the arrival of Haji Garaman in this region. It is said that he descended from the family of Chalabi Khalifa mentioned in the *Nafahat*. During the reign of Shah Abbas he came to this province from the Ottoman lands, specifically from the Diyarbakir region. He travelled together with several companions, among whom were Agha Balim, Haji Garaman, and Sarıca Nabi. Agha Balim settled in the village of Jijimli, where his grave still remains, in the cemetery of Goshagunbaz. One of the two mausoleums at Goshagunbaz belongs to Malik Ajdar, while the other is unidentified. All descendants of Agha Balim are Sayyids, and the Sayyid families of this region trace their origin to him. One of Agha Balim's disciples, named Nabi, was called Sarıca Nabi. He settled near the Hakari River, fell in love with Yakhshi, and became a true Ashyg of divine love. His grave is located at the entrance to Mazmazak.'" [7, p. 21]

This historical testimony appears particularly convincing because it is based upon a written source—namely, the manuscript preserved in the home of Qasim Chalabi, the hereditary custodian of the Haji Garaman lineage [50].

The second part of Bahlul Behjat: The Bayati of Sary Ashyg contains 349 bayati collected by the folklorist, together with a concise glossary. As noted above, these texts are organized under several thematic headings—*"Mountain Bayati," "Hunting and Birds," "River Bayati," "Places and Cities,"* and *"Love and Beauty."* Although certain examples repeat one another to some extent or resemble well-known anonymous folk *bayati*, the overwhelming majority—especially the jinas bayati—stand out as unmistakable examples of Sary Ashyg's poetic craftsmanship.

Another feature that significantly enhances the scholarly value of Behjat's collection is the extensive commentary accompanying many of the poems. These explanations often illuminate the historical, geographical, and ethnographic background of Sary Ashyg's poetry. For example, the eighty-third *bayati* is accompanied by the following commentary:

Bərgüşad Baş Ağalı,
Əkməyən başaq alı.
Bu, Süleyman mülküdü,
Bunda kim başa qalı?!

Translation:

Bargushad, Bash Aghali;
Only those who sow shall harvest.
This is Solomon's dominion—
Who could ever prevail here?

Behjat explains:

"Bargushad is the river that flows through the present-day Gubadli district before joining the Araz River. It originates from springs rising on the southeastern slopes of Mount Arikli, the highest peak of the Sisyan Mountains. After receiving numerous tributaries, it flows eastward and, near Gorus, becomes known as the Bazar River

before descending rapidly through the valley. The Bargushad irrigates all the surrounding lands before entering the Araz River. In spring it frequently overflows its banks and is rich in fish. Aghali is the name of a village situated on the left bank where the Bargushad and Hakari rivers meet. There are two settlements—Upper Aghali and Lower Aghali—whose fertile lands are particularly suitable for the cultivation of rice and cotton." [7, p. 48]

Through such geographical and ethnographic commentaries, many of the *bayati* included in Behjat's collection shed valuable light on the complex circumstances of Sary Ashyg's life and biography. Overall, most of the poems assembled by Behjat, together with their textual variants, appear more reliable than those preserved in many other published collections and editions [18; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45, etc.].

As noted earlier, Sary Ashyg's life and literary heritage have repeatedly attracted the attention of both researchers and textbook authors in recent decades. Among those who have made particularly significant contributions are Professor Maharram Gasimli, Professor Suleyman Pashayev, and the folklorist Ahliman Akhundov.

Professor Suleyman Pashayev's research on Sary Ashyg began during the 1970s. His earliest publications on the subject—*"On the Bayati Cycles of Sary Ashyg"* [25, pp. 1–2] and *"The Legend of Lala and Sary Ashyg"* [22, p. 1]—appeared in the Ganja newspaper Yüksəliş, while his article *"Sary Ashyg and the Epic Yakhshi–Yaman"* [24, pp. 99–107] was published in the methodological journal *Teaching Azerbaijani Language and Literature*. In 1983 he published "The Traditions of Sary Ashyg in Folk Poetry" [28, p. 3] in the newspaper *Kirovabad Kommunisti*, "Pearls from the Ocean: The Bayati Cycles of Sary Ashyg" [27] in *Sovet Kəndi*, and "The Jinas Bayati of Sary Ashyg" [26] in *Azərbaycan Müəllimi*. The following year, his study "Sary Ashyg" [23] appeared in the journal *Science and Life*.

In 2011, Pashayev brought together the results of his long-standing and previously scattered investigations into a single monograph entitled The Summit of Bayati Poetry: Sary Ashyg in Our Poetic Tradition [30].

In addition, Sary Ashyg's literary heritage has repeatedly been examined in university textbooks and scholarly works authored by Professor Suleyman Pashayev

[29; 117], Professor P. Afandiyev [51; 52; 53], Professor M. Hakimov [9; 10; 11], Professor A. Nabiyev [20], Professor G. Namazov [19; 185], and Professor V. Valiyev [49], among many others [15].

When reconstructing the overall history of research on Sary Ashyg's literary heritage, it becomes evident that studies devoted to this outstanding master of the *bayati* have also been conducted outside Azerbaijan. Particularly noteworthy are the investigations carried out in Türkiye. These studies may be divided into two principal groups:

1. Studies devoted specifically to Sary Ashyg;
2. Studies of Azerbaijani ashyg poetry and folk literature in which Sary Ashyg is discussed as part of a broader literary tradition.

The principal work belonging to the first category is naturally the article "Azeri Aşıklarından Aşık Nebi", published in 1934 [8, pp. 176–178]. The second category comprises numerous collections and anthologies devoted to Azerbaijani ashyg poetry and folk literature published in Türkiye [38; 39; 40; 31, etc.].

An outstanding contribution to the study and promotion of Azerbaijani literature in Türkiye was made by the journal Azərbaycan Yurd Bilgisi, founded in 1932 on the initiative of the distinguished Azerbaijani émigré scholar and Professor of Istanbul University, Ahmad Jafaroglu. Although the journal existed for only three years, it played a remarkable role in introducing Azerbaijani literature, history, and culture to Turkish academic circles. As Professor V. Guliyev observes:

"This journal, which may justifiably be described as the 'Encyclopaedia of Azerbaijan' of the 1930s, published dozens of articles rich in factual material concerning the Azerbaijani language, history, ethnic origins, relations with neighbouring cultures, its place within the Turkic world, music, folklore, ethnography, and many other subjects. Even had Ahmad Jafaroglu never written the works that later brought him international recognition, the publication of *Azərbaycan Yurd Bilgisi* alone would have been sufficient to ensure his permanent place in scholarly history and the grateful remembrance of future generations." [13, p. 14]

Published monthly in Istanbul by the Burhaneddin Printing House, each issue of *Azərbaycan Yurd Bilgisi* consisted of forty-eight pages. Ahmad Jafaroglu served as editor, while the editorial board included Professor Mehmet Fuad Köprülüzade, Professor Zeki Velidi Togan, Dr. Mirza Hajizade, Dr. Mohammad Agaoglu, and Abdulkadir, assistant professor at Istanbul University [18, p. 18; 27, p. 14].

Between 1932 and 1934 the journal published thirty-six issues. As recorded in one study:

"The first volume of *Azerbaycan Yurt Bilgisi*, consisting of twelve issues under the editorship of Prof. Dr. Ahmet Caferoğlu, appeared in 1932; the second volume was published in 1933, and the third in 1934. Publication concluded with the combined thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth issues. After a long interruption, an attempt was made to revive the journal in February 1954 with the publication of issue no. 37 as the official organ of the Association for the Promotion of Azerbaijani Culture. However, since this initiative proved unsuccessful, no further issues appeared, and the journal unfortunately ceased publication with that final number." [39]

The purpose of *Azərbaycan Yurd Bilgisi* extended far beyond the study of Azerbaijan alone. The journal also sought to publish scholarly materials concerning other peoples living under Russian domination, particularly the Turkic nations. As noted by one researcher:

"When forming the editorial board, Ahmad Jafaroglu deliberately considered the broader scholarly interests of the Turkic world. Mehmet Fuad Köprülüzade represented Anatolia; Mirza Hajizade and Mohammad Agaoglu represented Azerbaijan; Professor Zeki Velidi Togan represented the Volga region; and Abdulkadir represented the Turks of Central Asia." [14, p. 29]

It is particularly significant that *Azərbaycan Yurd Bilgisi* did not overlook the literary heritage of Sary Ashyg. Issue no. 29, published on 28 May 1934, included the article "Azeri Aşıklarından Aşık Nebi" by Mirzade Mustafa Fahrettin [175]. Although occupying only three journal pages, this article contains valuable information concerning Sary Ashyg. The study has been subjected to detailed analysis by Sh.

Hasanova in her book *Yurd Bilgisi: A Heritage of Azerbaijani Emigration*, where she draws a number of important conclusions [15].

The author of the article, Mirzade Mustafa Fahrettin, was most probably a descendant of Azerbaijani emigrants who had settled in Türkiye. Sh. Hasanova likewise concludes:

"...Judging from both the style of writing and several details contained in the article, its author, Mirzade Mustafa Fahrettin, was evidently one of the Azerbaijani émigrés." [50]

In recent years, a substantial study devoted to the author's identity has appeared. In her article "Sari Âşık ve Mîr Seyyid Akabâlî Nesli," Associate Professor Afina Barmanbay (Kafkas University, Türkiye) clarifies several previously obscure issues. She writes:

"The author identified as Mirzâde M. Fahreddin is in fact Mustafa Fahreddin Akabâlî (1889–1972), the grandson of Mir Mustafa, who was the cousin of Mir Seyyid Hamza Nigari. His grandfather, Seyyid Sadeddin Efendi, migrated from Karabakh to Amasya, where he became a disciple of Mir Hamza Nigari. A few years after Nigari's death, in 1889, Fahreddin Akabâlî was born in Amasya and was raised within Nigari's intellectual circle. He was given the name Mustafa Fahreddin after his grandfather Mir Mustafa, while the surname Mirzâde reflected his descent from the Mir family." [32, pp. 33–45]

Mustafa Fahrettin's article attracts scholarly attention for several important reasons.

First, it contains observations concerning Sary Ashyg's real name, an issue that remained the subject of scholarly debate for many decades.

Second, it provides information regarding the poet's date of birth.

Third, it includes examples of Sary Ashyg's poetry.

Fourth, it contains information concerning the poet's grave.

Finally, it records popular legends and oral traditions connected with Sary Ashyg that were still circulating among the people [48].

When discussing the publication and study of Sary Ashyg's literary heritage, it should also be noted that his works have been translated into Russian and included in

Russian-language anthologies of Azerbaijani literature. These translations were prepared by the distinguished translator and expert on Azerbaijani folklore V. Gafarov.

Thus, in reconstructing Sary Ashyg's historical identity, geographical environment, and poetic legacy, three principal groups of sources emerge as fundamental for revealing the poet's true image:

1. Historical manuscript sources, including *tazkira* literature and hagiographical manuscripts, such as Hasanali Khan Qaradaghi's Tazkirayi-Qaradaghi, the genealogical manuscript preserved by Qasim Chalabi, and related documentary materials.
2. Folklore sources, including oral legends and the epic tradition associated with Sary Ashyg, as well as the materials collected by Bahlul Behjat, Salman Mumtaz, Ahliman Akhundov, Huseyn Kurdoglu, Ilham Gahraman, S. Rustamov, Vali Nabioglu, Mukhtar Kazimoglu, Afzaladdin Asgar, Ilkin Rustamzada, Laman Vagifgizi (Suleymanova), and other researchers.
3. Autobiographical and documentary traces preserved within Sary Ashyg's own *bayati*, which provide valuable evidence concerning the poet's life and artistic worldview.

In conclusion, one final observation deserves particular emphasis. Regardless of where Sary Ashyg was born or from where he ultimately came, the spirit, imagery, atmosphere, and poetic substance of his works unmistakably belong to the artistic tradition of Azerbaijani literature. His creative personality was formed within the cultural environment of Zangazur, whose landscapes, settlements, rivers, mountains, customs, and traditional way of life are vividly reflected throughout his poetry. From the frequent references to towns, villages, mountains, and rivers to the artistic representation of Azerbaijani national customs and ethnic traditions, countless poetic images testify that Sary Ashyg was an integral representative of the Azerbaijani literary and cultural heritage.

SARI ASHIQ AS A MASTER OF BAYATI

2.The Ideological and Aesthetic Characteristics and Imagery System of Sari Ashiq's Bayatis

When reflecting on the place of the bayati in Azerbaijani oral folk literature and, more broadly, in the spiritual culture of the nation, one cannot help recalling the famous lines spoken by the protagonist in the celebrated drama *Vagif* by the great Azerbaijani poet Samad Vurgun:

Külli Qarabağın abi-həyatı,
Nərmə-nazik bayatıdır, bayatı!

Translation:

The very water of life of all Karabakh
Is the delicate and graceful bayati.



Figure 4. The Hakari River valley, a geographical space associated with Sary Ashyg's poetic world [80].

Although in *Vagif* these lines refer specifically to Karabakh, reflecting the historical setting and dramatic context of the play, they can justifiably be extended to the whole of Azerbaijan. Indeed, among all the forms of Azerbaijani oral and written poetry, it is difficult to imagine one that is both more widespread and more emotionally expressive than the bayati.

Throughout the history of Azerbaijani poetry, both before and after Sari Ashiq, many ashugs and poets composed bayatis and produced remarkable examples of the genre. Yet none of them became so inseparably associated with the bayati, nor did any

reach the artistic summit attained by Sari Ashiq. In this chapter, we seek to explain this phenomenon through a detailed analysis of his bayatis and by examining the poetic innovations he introduced into the genre.

Before proceeding, however, one important issue requires clarification. A number of the bayatis attributed to Sari Ashiq and published in various collections contain significant textual distortions that cannot be attributed to the poet himself. These inaccuracies most likely originated from oral transmitters, collectors, or editors. Similar problems can also be found in other poetic genres represented in Sari Ashiq's oeuvre, discussed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, because the bayati constitutes the central genre of his creative legacy, such distortions cannot be overlooked.

One of the most common defects concerns the violation of one of the defining formal features of the bayati—its strict syllabic structure (*isosyllabism*). Every line of a bayati must contain exactly seven syllables. The following examples, taken respectively from the editions prepared by B. Behjat and I. Gahraman, illustrate how this rule has been violated.

Original:

Aşiq yay işin bilməz,
Kaman yay işin bilməz,
Yapalaqdan tərlan olmaz,
Süzüşün, yayışın bilməz [7, p. 44].

Translation:

The Ashiq knows nothing of the bow,
Nor does the bow know its own task.
A falcon cannot come from an owl,
Nor does it know how to soar or glide.

Another example reads:

Original:

Geydiyin saf aldı,
Gey, sallan, saf aldı.
Yardan xəbər gəlməsə,
Qəm məni saf aldı [44, p. 207].

Translation:

The garment you wear is pure,
Wear it proudly and gracefully.
If no news comes from the beloved,
Sorrow has completely overcome me.

As can be seen, in the first example the third and fourth lines contain eight syllables instead of the required seven, whereas in the second example the rhyming lines consist of only six syllables. Thus, in both texts the fixed metrical structure of the bayati has been violated. Unfortunately, similar inconsistencies occur rather frequently in some published editions.

In our view, the task of a folklore collector should not be limited merely to reproducing the text exactly as it was recorded from the narrator. Without in any way diminishing the efforts of previous collectors, it should nevertheless be noted that whenever a collector encounters an obvious textual defect resulting from oral transmission or other circumstances, the text should not be published for a general readership without first consulting alternative versions or, at the very least, providing an explanatory commentary regarding the evident irregularity. Otherwise, defective versions may create a misleading impression of the artistic mastery of the original author.

A good illustration of this problem may be found in another well-known tajnis bayati by Sari Ashiq, cited earlier in this study in a different context.

Version published by B. Behjat:

Yol düşdü Birün dağa,
Duman, gəl Birün dağa,

Yaxşısını itirmiş Aşiq
Salıbdır bir ün dağa! [7, p. 31].

Version published by I. Gahraman:

Yol düşdü Birün dağa,
Duman, gəl, bürün dağa,
Yaxşısını itirmiş Aşıq
Salıbdır bir ün dağa [44, p. 48].

If one concentrates on the third line alone, it becomes evident that one version contains nine syllables while the other has eight. Yet by omitting the possessive and accusative suffixes—which do not alter the semantic content—the metrical irregularity disappears entirely, restoring the line to its probable original seven-syllable form:

Yaxşı itirmiş Aşıq

("The Ashiq who has lost Yakhshi.")

If, however, the collector wishes to preserve complete fidelity to the recorded version while still indicating the metrical inconsistency, scholarly editorial practice allows the superfluous suffixes to be enclosed in parentheses—for example:

Yaxşı (sını) itirmiş Aşıq

or

Yaxşı(sın) itirmiş Aşıq

Such editorial conventions make it possible to preserve the authenticity of the source while simultaneously indicating the probable original structure of the poetic text.

On the other hand, there is another reason why it is necessary to draw attention, at the very beginning of this chapter devoted to Sari Ashiq's mastery of the bayati, to the most common textual flaws found in different published editions of his poetry. As the discussion proceeds and various aspects of the master's poetic craftsmanship are examined, repeatedly commenting on every defective text would distract the reader from the principal issues under consideration. Nevertheless, in addressing certain

problems comprehensively, we shall occasionally have to cite such imperfect texts, since no alternative sources are available.

At this point, another important observation should be emphasized. Our attention to the classical requirements of poetics in discussing defective bayati texts should not be interpreted as suggesting any contradiction between Sari Ashiq's poetic legacy and its belonging to the tradition of folk literature or ashug poetry. On the contrary, Sari Ashiq's greatest achievement and his unparalleled mastery of the bayati resulted precisely from his ability to unite the traditions of folk poetry with those of classical written literature. Even the art of tajnis (paronomasia), which made him the unrivalled master of the bayati, drew simultaneously upon the inexhaustible lexical richness of the spoken language and upon the refined poetic techniques developed in classical literary tradition.

From the perspective of thematic content, Sari Ashiq's bayatis may be divided into four principal groups:

a) bayatis devoted to love, union, and separation;

b) poems celebrating nature;

c) works expressing the suffering of the homeland, the people, and exile;

d) bayatis reflecting moral values and other aspects of human ethics.

In many cases, however, these thematic groups are closely interconnected, with the imagery of one serving to reinforce and deepen the artistic expression of another [16].

Among these themes, motifs of love and separation unquestionably occupy the central place. Bayatis devoted to these subjects may themselves be divided into two categories. The first includes poems expressing the universal significance of love in human life and spirituality. For example:

Original:

Aşığa yaz incə gül,
Açılıb yazınca gül.
Bülbül yüz ayə oxur
Bir əlif yazınca gül [45, p. 70].

Translation:

Spring writes a delicate rose for the Ashiq,
The flower blooms with the coming of spring.
The nightingale recites a hundred verses
As the rose unfolds like the letter alif.

Or:

Original:

Mən Aşıq dalda yeri,
Bülbülün dalda yeri.
İki könül bir olsa,
Tez tapar dalda yeri [45, p. 69].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq, seeking a secluded place,
The nightingale too seeks a hidden branch.
When two hearts become one,
They soon find a place of their own.

Both examples skillfully employ the traditional imagery of the rose and the nightingale, which occupies a central position in both Azerbaijani folk poetry and classical literature. Although the rose is not mentioned explicitly in the second bayati, the poet's artistry lies precisely in his ability to evoke its image indirectly. By referring first to the nightingale perched upon a branch and then to the union of two loving hearts, he naturally calls to mind the inseparable symbolic pair of the rose and the nightingale, long established in both folk and classical poetic traditions as representations of the beloved and the lover.

Moreover, in the first example Sari Ashiq introduces notable poetic innovations into these traditional symbols. The nightingale's song is metaphorically described as "reciting a hundred verses," while the blossoming rosebud is compared to the Arabic

letter alif, the first letter of the alphabet and of the word ayah ("verse"), thereby enriching conventional imagery with original artistic associations.

The second and numerically larger group of love poems differs from the first in that it is devoted not to the abstract concept of love but to a specific beloved and the emotional turbulence associated with her. The principal figures in these bayatis are the lyrical "I"—the Ashiq himself—and his beloved Yakhshi. For example:

Original:

Yaz yerə xalı saldı,
Butası xalis aldı.
Aşığı qara günə
Yaxşının xalı saldı [45, p. 30].

Translation:

Spring spread its carpet upon the earth,
Its ornaments became pure and bright.
It was Yakhshi's beauty mark
That plunged the Ashiq into dark days.

Or:

Original:

Gəldi bu yaxşı suvar,
Gir bağa, yaxşı suvar.
Aləmin malı, mülkü,
Aşığın Yaxşısı var [45, p. 32].

Translation:

The good water has arrived—irrigate the fields;
Enter the garden and water it well.
Let others possess worldly wealth and property;
The Ashiq possesses his Yakhshi.

In the first bayati, the Ashiq's profound love for Yakhshi is presented against the background of spring, when nature awakens and the earth is adorned with colourful flowers. In the second, love is portrayed as an incomparable spiritual treasure that surpasses all worldly riches, while the poet openly takes pride in the love of his beloved.

Bayatis devoted to the celebration of nature likewise occupy a significant place in Sari Ashiq's lyric poetry and possess distinctive artistic characteristics. It is therefore no coincidence that Behul Behjat organized *The Bayatis of Sari Ashiq* according to the following thematic categories:

1. Bayatis of the Mountains
2. Bayatis of Hunting and Birds
3. Bayatis of Rivers
4. Bayatis of Places and Cities
5. Bayatis of Love and Beauty

In recognition of the outstanding contribution of this eminent collector and researcher, and out of respect for the scholarly tradition he established, it is appropriate to consider, in sequence, several characteristic examples and commentaries from his sections devoted to the mountains, birds, rivers, and geographical places.

Original:

Aşiqəm, bir ov səndən,
Alaydım bir ov səndən,
Dağlar qüzeyli könlüm,
Getməz qar-qırov səndən.

Translation:

I am an Ashiq—I wish to take one prey from you;
I long to take but a single quarry from you.
My heart is like the northern mountains,
Its frost and snow never melt away.

Behjat comments:

"Game is abundant on Mount Murov, and the Ashiq wishes to take only a single prey from it. He then turns to his own heart, saying that, like the northern mountains, it is forever covered with frost—that is, sorrow and grief never leave it." [7, p. 31].

Original:

Yayladıq Daşdıcanı,
Tərlanın daşdıcanı,
Qəmini çəkər Aşiq,
Deyərlər, daşdı canı.

Translation:

We spent the summer in Dashtijan,
The falcon's soul belongs to the rocks.
The Ashiq bears his sorrow,
They say his very soul has turned to stone.

Behjat explains:

"Dashtija is one of the summer pastures of Karabakh. The falcon's nature is rocky; while hunting it prefers cliffs and stony places rather than bushes or meadows. Its favourite prey is the partridge, which is likewise found among the rocks." [40, p. 34].

Original:

Aşiqəm, Həkərim,
Yet dadıma, ha Kərim,
Sizə sizinki dünya,
Mənə mənim Həkərim.

Translation:

I am an Ashiq—my Hekari;
Come to my aid, O Generous One!
Let the world belong to you,
Leave me my Hekari.

Behjat notes:

"Although his companions Mir Agha Balim and Haji Garaman invited him to join them elsewhere, the Ashiq refused, declaring through this bayati that Hekari was his true homeland." [7, p. 49].

Original:

Aşiqəm, Barıncaya,
Bağbana, Barıncaya,
Aləm bir Təbrizə möhtac,
Təbriz də Barıncaya.

Translation:

I am an Ashiq on the road to Barinja,
To the gardener, to Barinja.
The whole world depends on Tabriz,
And Tabriz depends on Barinja.

Behjat explains:

"Barinja is a small settlement in Iran situated near the city of Tabriz. Baghban is also a place name." [7, p. 58].

These characteristic examples have been cited from Behjat's edition for another important reason. Besides demonstrating Sari Ashiq's remarkable mastery in depicting nature, the accompanying commentaries written by the collector himself clearly show that some of the textual defects and distortions found in published versions of the poet's bayatis resulted from editorial negligence.

Indeed, Behjat's own explanations reveal that the first line of the first example should originally have read "Aşiqəm Mirov səndən" ("I am an Ashiq—from Murov"), but was transmitted incorrectly in print. This conclusion is confirmed by the more complete version published later by Huseyn Kurdoglu:

Original:

Mən Aşıq, Murov səndən,
Heç getməz qırov səndən.
Yüz il səyyadın oldum,
Vurmadım bir ov səndən [45, p. 96].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq—of Murov;
Its frost never departs.
For a hundred years I have been your hunter,
Yet I have not taken a single prey from you.

A similar textual inaccuracy may also be observed in the second example discussed above. Behjat's own commentary makes it clear that the second line should read "Tərlanın daşdı canı." A more complete version preserved in another edition reads:
Original:

Ovladıq Daşdıcanı,
Tərlanın daşdı canı.
Aşıq dözsün bu dərdə,
Desinlər daşdı canı [45, p. 48].

Translation:

We hunted in Dashtijan;
The falcon's soul belongs to the rocks.
Let the Ashiq endure this sorrow,
Though they say his heart has turned to stone.

Likewise, the bayati devoted to the Hekari River, whose first line contains only six syllables in some editions, appears in a more complete and metrically correct form elsewhere:

Original:

Mən Aşığam ha kərim,
Dada yetiş, ha Kərim!
Sizə sizin gen dünya,
Mənə mənim Həkərim [45, p. 48].

Translation:

I am an Ashiq—O Generous One;
Come to my aid, O Most Merciful!
Let the vast world belong to you,
Leave me my Hekari.



Figure 6. Güləbird village, one of the principal geographical images associated with Sary Ashyg's poetic world [81].

Similarly, another version of the Barinja bayati eliminates the metrical irregularity found in the third line:

Original:

Aşığam barın caya,
Bağbana, Barıncaya.
Aləm Təbrizə möhtac,
Təbriz də Barıncaya [44, p. 49].

Translation:

I am an Ashiq by the flowing stream,
To Baghban, to Barinja.

The world depends upon Tabriz,

And Tabriz upon Barinja.



Figure 7. Güləbird village, a geographical image associated with Sary Ashyg's poetic world [82].

Among Sari Ashiq's bayatis there are also numerous examples devoted to the suffering of the homeland and love for one's native land. These poems preserve, with remarkable emotional intensity, the lyrical hero's profound attachment to his homeland and its natural landscape.

For example:

Original:

Mən Aşıq qalınca bağ,

Bar verməz qalınca bağ.

Viranə qalsa yeydir,

Düşmana qalınca bağ [45, p. 53].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq of the remaining garden;

A deserted garden bears no fruit.

Better that it lie in ruins,

Than remain in the enemy's hands.

Or:

Original:

Aşığın çardağı var,
Bərşadın çar dağı var.
Çərxi dönmüş fələyin
Sinəmdə çar dağı var [45, p. 57].

Translation:

The Ashiq has his arbor,
Bershad has its four mountains.
From the wheel of cruel fate
Four wounds remain upon my heart.

In both bayatis, love for the homeland and the sorrow of one's native community are expressed through vivid poetic imagery and emotionally charged symbolism. Their artistic message continues to resonate today, reflecting the historical experience of a nation whose lands have endured occupation and whose people have long cherished the hope of return.

Finally, a fourth thematic group within Sari Ashiq's bayatis consists of poems glorifying moral virtues and spiritual values.

For example:

Original:

Aşığıyam dürüstün,
Dürüst iman, dürüst din.
Ya məclisdə lal otur,
Ya dinirsən, dürüst din [45, p. 76].

Translation:

I stand for honesty;
For true faith and true religion.
Either remain silent in the gathering,
Or, if you speak, speak truthfully.

Or:

Original:

Gözəl allah, gül allah
Qul bəndənə gül, allah.
Mən ki haqq Aşığıyam,
La ilahə illəllah [45, p. 88].

Translation:

O beautiful God, O gracious God,
Smile upon Your humble servant, O God.
Since I am an Ashiq of Truth,
There is no deity but Allah.

Even without further commentary, these two bayatis clearly demonstrate the moral and spiritual ideals that occupy a central place in Sari Ashiq's poetic worldview. They emphasize honesty, integrity, sincere faith, and devotion to divine truth, revealing that ethical values constitute one of the fundamental dimensions of his artistic legacy.

In Sari Ashiq's bayatis, such human virtues as loyalty and faithfulness, courage and bravery, generosity and magnanimity, compassion and mercy, simplicity and sincerity are celebrated with profound admiration. Conversely, their opposites—treachery and betrayal, cowardice and dishonor, greed and selfishness, cruelty and heartlessness, arrogance and hypocrisy—are exposed with equal moral indignation. Yet both the positive and negative qualities attributed to human nature ultimately derive from the central opposition that permeates the poet's entire creative legacy: the eternal struggle between good and evil.

In this sense, the conflict between good and evil, between virtue and wickedness, constitutes the principal lyrical conflict of Sari Ashiq's poetry. To understand fully the ideological content and imagery of his bayatis, it is therefore necessary to examine this lyrical conflict in detail.

At one pole of this conflict stand goodness and love, representing the forces of virtue; at the opposite pole stand evil and hostility. When these abstract concepts are embodied in concrete poetic figures, the conflict unfolds between the Ashiq and

Yakhshi on one side and Yaman Bey on the other. This opposition is clearly illustrated in the following bayatis.

Original:

Qarşıda ha İrandı,
Ha Rumdu, ha İrandı.
Yamana baxmaz Aşıq,
Yaxşıdan ayırandı [45, p. 34].

Translation:

Whether before me lies Iran,
Or Rum, or once again Iran—
The Ashiq will never look toward Yaman,
For he has been separated from Yakhshi.

Or:

Original:

Bağların aramı su,
Aşığa haram su.
Yamandan betər kəsib,
Yaxşıynan aramı su [45, p. 41].

Translation:

The gardens are watered by peaceful streams,
Yet that water is forbidden to the Ashiq.
More cruelly than Yaman himself,
It has severed my peace with Yakhshi.

In some bayatis the poetic idea becomes so highly generalized that Yakhshi and Yaman function not merely as personal names but as symbolic representations of good and evil.

For example:

Original:

Mən Aşıq keçdi məndən,
Ox dəydi, keçdi məndən.
Yaxşıya körpü oldum,
Yaman da keçdi məndən [45, p. 52].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq—everything has passed me by;
The arrow struck and passed through me.
I became a bridge for Yakhshi,
Yet even Yaman passed over me.

Or:

Original:

Qannısan, yaxşı dağlar,
Yaman da, yaxşı da dağlar.
Hər kəsin bir dağı var,
Aşığı Yaxşı dağlar [45, p. 34].

Translation:

You know well, O beautiful mountains,
Both the evil and the good mountains.
Everyone has a mountain of their own,
But the Ashiq has the mountains of Yakhshi.

Throughout this study, the figures of the Ashiq and Yakhshi have repeatedly been discussed and will continue to receive attention. It is therefore equally important to consider Yaman, who occupies the opposite pole of the lyrical conflict. Several bayatis in which Yaman Bey is mentioned preserve valuable biographical information about the tragic episodes of the poet's own life.

For example:

Original:

O yar mənim yarımdı,
Yamanlar da yar umdu.
Aşığın qaçaq yeri
Ya İrandı, ya Rumdu [45, p. 56].

Translation:

That beloved is truly mine,
Though the Yamans also desired her.
The Ashiq's only refuge
Is either Iran or Rum.

Or:

Original:

Mən Aşıq amanatdı,
Gəlməsin Yaman atdı.
Keçirt mənu bu çaydan,
Yar gözlər, aman atdı! [45, p. 59].

Translation:

I, the Ashiq, am entrusted to fate;
May Yaman never arrive on horseback.
Help me cross this river,
My beloved is watching—have mercy!

A careful reading of these bayatis clearly suggests that Sari Ashiq endured serious persecution and pressure from Yaman Bey because of his love.

Nevertheless, the poet's unwavering devotion to his beloved and his determination to struggle for both his own love and Yakhshi's happiness are repeatedly emphasized.

For example:

Original:

Atdanmışam, düşmənəm,
Yamanlığa düşmənəm.
Aşığam, Yaxşı yarın
Heç yadına düşmənəm [45, p. 30].

Translation:

I have been cast aside, yet I remain defiant;
I am an enemy of all evil.
I am the Ashiq of beloved Yakhshi,
May I never be forgotten by her.

Or:

Original:

Bu qala yaman qala,
Düşmüşəm yaman qala.
Rəvamı Yaxşı ölə,
Yerində Yaman qala?! [45, p. 36].

Translation:

This fortress is a cruel one;
I have fallen into a dreadful stronghold.
Can it be just that Yakhshi should perish,
While Yaman remains alive?

The lyrical hero not only refuses to yield to the enemy who has destroyed his happiness but openly declares his readiness to fight against that hostile force.
Original:

Mən Aşığam bu daşa,
Könül qəmlə budaşa.

Elə vur ki, Yamanı,
Kəlləsindən bud aşa! [45, p. 95].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq upon this stone;
My heart has become burdened with grief.
Strike Yaman with such force
That his head is split apart!

The principal figures throughout Sari Ashiq's poetic universe are undoubtedly the lyrical "I" and his beloved, namely the Ashiq and Yakhshi. Virtually every bayati devoted to love and separation evokes one of these figures through the presence of the other, whether explicitly named or merely implied. At the same time, however, the figure of the Ashiq possesses a broader symbolic significance, since he also serves as the central image in many bayatis dealing with themes beyond romantic love.

Several of these poems provide valuable insight into the poet's worldview and spiritual character.

Original:

Mən Aşığam baxtı kəm,
Yar zülfünə bağ tikəm.
Fələyə neyləmişdim,
Fələk mənə baxdı kəm [45, p. 41].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq of unhappy fortune;
I would build a garden beneath my beloved's hair.
What wrong had I done to fate
That fate should look upon me so cruelly?

Or:

Original:

Mən Aşıq özüm neynim,
Bu dərdə dözüm neynim.
Ah çəksəm aləm yanar,
Çəkməsəm, özüm neynim [8, p. 60].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq—what shall I do?
How can I endure such sorrow?
If I sigh, the whole world will burn;
If I remain silent, what will become of me?

The Ashiq's complaint against fate reflects not only the suffering caused by separation from his beloved but also the injustice of the age in which he lived. This idea is expressed particularly clearly in the following bayatis.

Original:

Mən Aşıq üzüm qara,
Bağında üzüm qara.
İstərəm dosta varam,
Əlim boş, üzüm qara [45 p. 64].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq, my face is dark with shame;
Dark are the grapes within the vineyard.
I long to visit my beloved,
Yet my hands are empty and my face is filled with shame.

Or:

Original:

Mən Aşıq Sultanbuda,
Naxələf Sultan buda.

Ölkə viranmı qaldı,
Sayılır sultan bu da?! [45, p. 57].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq of Sultanbud;
Can such an unworthy man be called a sultan?
Has the whole country become desolate
That even this man is counted among rulers?

As can be seen, the first example emphasizes the difficult living conditions of ordinary people, whereas the second expresses open protest against the country's fate being entrusted to an unworthy ruler.

At times, however, the Ashiq's reflections and questions extend beyond conventional religious and worldly conceptions concerning the mysteries of existence and the origins of creation, acquiring a profound philosophical dimension.

For example:

Original:

Aşıq deyər yüz qandı,
Bir oxudu, yüz qandı.
Kəbə yıxsan, bir evdi,
Könül yıxsan, yüz qandı [45, p. 65].

Translation:

The Ashiq says: there are countless wounds;
One was opened, yet a hundred bled.
If you destroy the Kaaba, it is but one house;
If you break a human heart, a hundred wounds are born.

Or:

Original:

Aşıq, yara dan hanı,
Bayqu yara dan hanı?
Aləmi haqq yaratdı,
Haqqı yaradan hanı?! [45, p. 65].

Translation:

Ashiq, who created the wound?
Who gave the owl its cry?
The world was created by Truth (God),
But who created Truth Himself?

Yet no matter how compelling these philosophical reflections or how profound their moral and spiritual implications may be, they never surpass the emotional power of the lyrical self's passionate experiences of love. This once again demonstrates that the true essence of Sari Ashiq's lyric poetry lies precisely in his extraordinary love bayatis.

To appreciate this fully, one must observe how masterfully the poet intertwines the emotions of love with the beauty of nature. Such observations are equally important for understanding the role of numerous auxiliary images—the rose, the nightingale, the mountain, the garden, spring, winter, the moon, the sun, the gazelle, the partridge, the falcon, the deer, and others—within his poetic system.

Consider several representative examples.

Original:

Aşığam, deməmiş gül,
Həll oldu demə müşkül.
Ağzın açdı, bülbülə
Nə qaldı deməmiş gül?! [45, p. 105].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq—before the rose had spoken,
The hardship was already resolved.

The rose opened its lips to the nightingale—
What remained left unsaid?

Or:

Original:

Bağda gül, yazıda gül,
Yazdığı yazı degil.
Bu il hicran ilidir,
Bülbülün yazı degil [45, p. 62].

Translation:

There are roses in the garden, roses in the spring,
Yet this is not the spring that was written.
This year belongs to separation;
It is not the season of the nightingale.

Throughout centuries, both folk poetry and classical literature have produced innumerable metaphors, similes, and poetic associations linking the rose and the nightingale to the experience of love. Against this rich literary tradition, the third and fourth lines of these bayatis stand out for their exceptional freshness, emotional sincerity, and originality.

Original:

Başı bəlgəli dağlar,
Dibi kölgəli dağlar.
Yol üstdə gözlər Aşıq,
Nə vaxt el gəli, dağlar?! [45, p. 62].

Translation:

O mountains crowned with snowy peaks,
O mountains wrapped in shadow below!

The Ashiq waits beside the road—
When will my people return, O mountains?

Or:

Original:

Mən Aşığam yay bağlar,
Nar giləsin yay bağlar.
Qaşın, gözün təhrində
Usta gəlsə, yay bağlar [45, p. 107].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq of summer gardens;
Summer adorns them with pomegranate fruit.
If a master could imitate
Your eyebrows and your eyes, he would adorn the gardens.

In the first bayati, the longing of the mountains for their people parallels the yearning of the lover's heart. In the second, the beauty of the summer gardens is skillfully compared with the beloved's graceful eyebrows and expressive eyes.
Original:

Mən Aşıq yazam yaz,
Al qələm, yaz, a Niyaz!
Bülbül gülün yarpağın
Saxlamış yaza niyaz [45, p. 98].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq—write, O Spring!
Take up the pen and write, O Niyaz!
The nightingale has preserved the rose's petals
As an offering for the coming spring.

Or:

Original:

Yamansan, yaman, a qış,
Qaraynan yaman, a qış!
Kəsdin Aşıq yolunu,
Açmısan yaman ağuş [45, p. 46].

Translation:

Cruel you are, O winter,
Dark and merciless are you, O winter!
You have blocked the Ashiq's path
And opened your merciless embrace.

In these examples, spring becomes a poetic symbol of love and reunion, while winter symbolizes separation, loneliness, and longing.

The use of the moon and the sun as metaphors for beauty and love has long been widespread in both oral and written poetic traditions. Nevertheless, Sari Ashiq's treatment of these conventional images displays remarkable originality.

Original:

Aşıq deyər ləkə var,
Belin götür, ləkə var.
Üzünə ay demərəm,
Ay üzündə ləkə var [45, p. 93].

Translation:

The Ashiq says: there is a blemish;
Lift the veil—there is a blemish.
I shall not compare your face to the moon,
For the moon itself bears spots.

Or:

Original:

Ay haçan gördü günü,
Gör dərdi, gör dügünü.
Cənnətdə görməz Aşıq
Qoynunda gördügünü [45, p. 75].

Translation:

When has the moon ever seen the sun?
Behold its sorrow, behold its fate.
Even in Paradise the Ashiq
Will never behold what he has seen in your embrace.

This distinctive reinterpretation can also be observed in Sari Ashiq's traditional images of the gazelle and the deer. In accordance with the emotional themes of separation and loneliness, the poet enriches these conventional symbols with new semantic nuances. This is clearly evident in the following examples:
Original:

Dağlarda keyik mənəm,
Buynuzu əyik mənəm.
Bu dərdi ki, mən çəkdim,
Yaxşı ki, keyikmənəm [45, p. 62].

Translation:

Among the mountains, I am the gazelle,
I am the one with the bent antlers.
The sorrow that I have endured—
It is well that I have become a wandering gazelle.

Or:

Original:

Bu dağda maral azdı,
Ovçu çox, maral azdı.

Ağlama, ala gözlüm,
Ölmərəm, mar alazdı [45, p. 86].

Translation:

There are few deer upon this mountain,
Many hunters, but few deer.
Do not weep, my bright-eyed beloved,
I shall not die—the serpent has no venom.

In these bayatis, the concluding wordplays significantly enrich the poetic and stylistic texture of the verse. The expression keyikmənəm simultaneously conveys the literal meaning "I have become a gazelle" and the figurative sense of becoming restless, wandering aimlessly through the mountains in madness and grief. Likewise, mar alazdı literally means "the snake is harmless", while also functioning as a sophisticated pun that transforms the emotional meaning of the poem.

Following the lyrical self, the second principal image in Sari Ashiq's bayati poetry is that of Yakhshi.

Scholars have extensively discussed the historical prototype of Yakhshi, her love for the young Ashiq, the mutual devotion between the lovers, and the role of Yaman Bey, whose selfish ambitions destroyed their happiness. According to these accounts, Yaman forcibly separated Yakhshi from the Ashiq and married her against her will. Unable to endure this separation, Yakhshi soon fell gravely ill and died at a young age, leaving Sari Ashiq to spend the remainder of his life immersed in grief. These tragic events became deeply embedded in his poetry—particularly in his bayatis—and later echoed throughout Azerbaijani folklore. Various aspects of this tradition have already been examined in previous sections of the present study and will continue to be addressed where relevant.

Within the poetic universe of the bayatis, the image *of Yakhshi may be classified into several thematic groups.*

a) Bayatis devoted to Yakhshi's beauty and expressing the lyrical hero's boundless love

Original:

Mən Aşıq el çiməni,
El yurdu, el çiməni.
O qaş, o göz, o kirpik
Salıbdır elçi məni [45, p. 80].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq of the people's meadow,
The meadow of my homeland.
Those eyebrows, those eyes, those eyelashes
Have made me the messenger of love.

Or:

Original:

Aşıq yaxşı dan gözlər,
Mürgün yaxşı dən gözlər.
Baxdıqca şirin düşər,
Doymaz Yaxşıdan gözlər [45, p. 28].

Translation:

The Ashiq gazes upon Yakhshi,
His sleepy eyes seek only her.
The longer they behold her, the sweeter she becomes;
His eyes can never tire of Yakhshi.

In the first bayati, Yakhshi's beauty is presented as something admired by the entire community, while the second offers the sincere confession of a heart completely captivated by her beauty.

b) Bayatis portraying mutual love and the Ashiq's inability to endure separation

Original:

Mən Aşıq yara bağlar,
Yetişsin yara bağlar.
Yaramı yar bağlasın,
Yar Yaxşı yara bağlar [45, p. 82].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq who binds his wounds;
May healing come to every wound.
Let my beloved heal my heart,
For only Yakhshi can bind its wounds.

Or:

Original:

Gəl, aşığın baxtı, gəl,
Yaman yatan vaxtı gəl.
Göz yaşım selə dönüb,
Aramızdan axdı, gəl! [45, p. 59].

Translation:

Come, fortune of the Ashiq, come,
Come while Yaman lies asleep.
My tears have become a flood
Flowing between us—come!

Although the transformation of the Ashiq's tears into a river separating the lovers is an obvious hyperbole, it remains one of the most original poetic representations of sincere human emotion.

c) Bayatis depicting Yakhshi's coquettishness and the Ashiq's affectionate reproaches

Original:

Gecələr ay ilişi,
Yaxşının ay, il işi.

Aşığı candan eylər
Yuxudan ayılışı [45 p. 28].

Translation:

The moon lingers through the night;
Such is Yakhshi's nightly way.
When she awakens from sleep,
She robs the Ashiq of his soul.

Or:

Original:

Mən Aşıq yar alması,
Şirindi yar alması.
Yaxşı olar yar könlün
Yar yıxıb, yar alması [45, p. 98].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq of my beloved's apple,
Sweet is the apple of the beloved.
Would it not be better
To win a beloved's heart without breaking it?

In the first bayati, the symbolic image of the moon acquires fresh emotional meaning, while in the second the traditional image of the apple is reinterpreted through the poet's refined craftsmanship.

d) Bayatis expressing separation from Yakhshi

Original:

Dağda qar alar məni,
Xalın qaralar məni.
Aşığam, Yaxşı yarsız
Basar qaralar məni [45, p. 32].

Translation:

The snow upon the mountain overwhelms me;
Your beauty mark darkens my soul.
Without my beloved Yakhshi,
Dark sorrow engulfs me.

Or:

Original:

Gün düşüb dağda qara,
Ahımdan dağ da qara.
Yaxşın görünmür, Aşıq,
Hey axtar, dağ-dağ ara [45, p. 62].

Translation:

Darkness has fallen upon the mountain;
Even the mountain has darkened from my sighs.
Yakhshi is nowhere to be seen, O Ashiq—
Search every mountain and every valley.

In both bayatis, the poetic contrast between snow (qar) and darkness (qara) serves to symbolize the alternating moments of happiness and despair, union and separation.

e) Bayatis that sound like elegies mourning Yakhshi's death

Original:

Qarşımızda ya dağlar,
Ya düyünlər, ya dağlar.
Aşıq, Yaxşı ölübdü,
Dost inildər, yad ağlar [45, p. 38].

Translation:

Before us stand either mountains
Or knots of sorrow, O mountains.
Ashiq, Yakhshi has died;
Friends sigh, while strangers weep.

Or:

Original:

Mən Aşıq düşdü gözüm,
Gördüyüm duşdu, gözüm!
Baxdı yarı görmədi,
Gözümdən düşdü gözüm [45, p. 40].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq—my sight has failed;
What I saw has vanished from my eyes.
I searched for my beloved and found her not;
My very eyes have fallen from my face.

In summary, these are the principal aesthetic and semantic dimensions through which the image of Yakhshi, one of the central figures of Sari Ashiq's bayati poetry, is realized.

When discussing the imagery of Sari Ashiq's bayatis, one should not overlook the numerous historical and geographical names that appear throughout his poetry.

These toponyms function not merely as geographical references. In most cases, they interact poetically with the surrounding imagery, becoming integral artistic elements of the bayati itself. At the same time, they provide valuable evidence concerning the poet's geographical environment and the authenticity of his corpus. As M. Gasimli observes:

"...Based on folklore materials collected during expeditions in Zangezur, as well as the neighbouring regions of Karabakh and Garadagh where Sari Ashiq lived and travelled, it is possible to identify several additional distinguishing features. The

collections assembled by S. Mumtaz and B. Behjat during the 1920s and 1930s, by A. Akhundov in the 1950s and 1960s, and by S. Pirsultanli, S. Rustamov, H. Kurdoglu, E. Mammadli, and others during the 1970s and 1980s demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of Sari Ashiq's bayatis are 'poems of place.' In other words, most of them originated from specific events or local legends" [33, p. 501].

Since these narratives are inseparably connected with concrete places and landscapes, the significance of the historical and geographical names occurring in the bayatis becomes even more evident. Certainly, some of these place names appear simply to create punning rhymes and have no direct connection with the poet's biography or travels. Nevertheless, in the overwhelming majority of cases they perform important artistic, historical, and documentary functions within the poetic structure of Sari Ashiq's works.

This distinctive reinterpretation can also be observed in Sari Ashiq's traditional images of the gazelle and the deer. In accordance with the emotional themes of separation and loneliness, the poet enriches these conventional symbols with new semantic nuances. This is clearly evident in the following examples:

Original:

Dağlarda keyik mənəm,
Buynuzu əyik mənəm.
Bu dərdi ki, mən çəkdim,
Yaxşı ki, keyikmənəm [45, p. 62].

Translation:

Among the mountains, I am the gazelle,
I am the one with the bent antlers.
The sorrow that I have endured—
It is well that I have become a wandering gazelle.

Or:

Original:

Bu dağda maral azdı,
Ovçu çox, maral azdı.
Ağlama, ala gözlüm,
Ölmərəm, mar alazdı [45, p. 86].

Translation:

There are few deer upon this mountain,
Many hunters, but few deer.
Do not weep, my bright-eyed beloved,
I shall not die—the serpent has no venom.

In these bayatis, the concluding wordplays significantly enrich the poetic and stylistic texture of the verse. The expression *keyikmənəm* simultaneously conveys the literal meaning "I have become a gazelle" and the figurative sense of becoming restless, wandering aimlessly through the mountains in madness and grief. Likewise, mar alazdı literally means "the snake is harmless", while also functioning as a sophisticated pun that transforms the emotional meaning of the poem.

Following the lyrical self, the second principal image in Sari Ashiq's bayati poetry is that of Yakhshi.

Scholars have extensively discussed the historical prototype of Yakhshi, her love for the young Ashiq, the mutual devotion between the lovers, and the role of Yaman Bey, whose selfish ambitions destroyed their happiness. According to these accounts, Yaman forcibly separated Yakhshi from the Ashiq and married her against her will. Unable to endure this separation, Yakhshi soon fell gravely ill and died at a young age, leaving Sari Ashiq to spend the remainder of his life immersed in grief. These tragic events became deeply embedded in his poetry—particularly in his bayatis—and later echoed throughout Azerbaijani folklore. Various aspects of this tradition have already been examined in previous sections of the present study and will continue to be addressed where relevant.

Within the poetic universe of the bayatis, the image of Yakhshi may be classified into several thematic groups.

a) Bayatis devoted to Yakhshi's beauty and expressing the lyrical hero's boundless love

Original:

Mən Aşıq el çiməni,
El yurdu, el çiməni.
O qaş, o göz, o kirpik
Salıbdır elçi məni [45, p. 80].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq of the people's meadow,
The meadow of my homeland.
Those eyebrows, those eyes, those eyelashes
Have made me the messenger of love.

Or:

Original:

Aşıq yaxşı dan gözlər,
Mürgün yaxşı dən gözlər.
Baxdıqca şirin düşər,
Doymaz Yaxşıdan gözlər [45, p. 28].

Translation:

The Ashiq gazes upon Yakhshi,
His sleepy eyes seek only her.
The longer they behold her, the sweeter she becomes;
His eyes can never tire of Yakhshi.

In the first bayati, Yakhshi's beauty is presented as something admired by the entire community, while the second offers the sincere confession of a heart completely captivated by her beauty.

b) Bayatis portraying mutual love and the Ashiq's inability to endure separation

Original:

Mən Aşıq yara bağlar,
Yetişsin yara bağlar.
Yaramı yar bağlasın,
Yar Yaxşı yara bağlar [45, p. 82].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq who binds his wounds;
May healing come to every wound.
Let my beloved heal my heart,
For only Yakhshi can bind its wounds.

Or:

Original:

Gəl, aşığın baxtı, gəl,
Yaman yatan vaxtı gəl.
Göz yaşım selə dönüb,
Aramızdan axdı, gəl! [45, p. 59].

Translation:

Come, fortune of the Ashiq, come,
Come while Yaman lies asleep.
My tears have become a flood
Flowing between us—come!

Although the transformation of the Ashiq's tears into a river separating the lovers is an obvious hyperbole, it remains one of the most original poetic representations of sincere human emotion.

c) Bayatis depicting Yakhshi's coquettishness and the Ashiq's affectionate reproaches

Original:

Gecələr ay ilişi,
Yaxşının ay, il işi.
Aşığı candan eylər
Yuxudan ayılışı [45, p. 28].

Translation:

The moon lingers through the night;
Such is Yakhshi's nightly way.
When she awakens from sleep,
She robs the Ashiq of his soul.

Or:

Original:

Mən Aşıq yar alması,
Şirindi yar alması.
Yaxşı olar yar könlün
Yar yıxıb, yar alması [45, p. 98].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq of my beloved's apple,
Sweet is the apple of the beloved.
Would it not be better
To win a beloved's heart without breaking it?

In the first bayati, the symbolic image of the moon acquires fresh emotional meaning, while in the second the traditional image of the apple is reinterpreted through the poet's refined craftsmanship.

d) Bayatis expressing separation from Yakhshi

Original:

Dağda qar alar məni,
Xalın qaralar məni.
Aşığam, Yaxşı yarsız
Basar qaralar məni [45, p. 32].

Translation:

The snow upon the mountain overwhelms me;
Your beauty mark darkens my soul.
Without my beloved Yakhshi,
Dark sorrow engulfs me.

Or:

Original:

Gün düşüb dağda qara,
Ahımdan dağ da qara.
Yaxşın görünmür, Aşıq,
Hey axtar, dağ-dağ ara [45, p. 62].

Translation:

Darkness has fallen upon the mountain;
Even the mountain has darkened from my sighs.
Yakhshi is nowhere to be seen, O Ashiq—
Search every mountain and every valley.

In both bayatis, the poetic contrast between *snow (qar) and darkness (qara)* serves to symbolize the alternating moments of happiness and despair, union and separation.

e) Bayatis that sound like elegies mourning Yakhshi's death

Original:

Qarşımızda ya dağlar,
Ya düyünlər, ya dağlar.
Aşıq, Yaxşı ölübdü,
Dost inildər, yad ağlar [45, p. 38].

Translation:

Before us stand either mountains
Or knots of sorrow, O mountains.
Ashiq, Yakhshi has died;
Friends sigh, while strangers weep.

Or:

Original:

Mən Aşıq düşdü gözüm,
Gördüyüm duşdu, gözüm!
Baxdı yarı görmədi,
Gözümdən düşdü gözüm [45, p. 40].

Translation:

I am the Ashiq—my sight has failed;
What I saw has vanished from my eyes.
I searched for my beloved and found her not;
My very eyes have fallen from my face.

In summary, these are the principal aesthetic and semantic dimensions through which the image of Yakhshi, one of the central figures of Sari Ashiq's bayati poetry, is realized.

When discussing the imagery of Sari Ashiq's bayatis, one should not overlook the numerous historical and geographical names that appear throughout his poetry.

These toponyms function not merely as geographical references. In most cases, they interact poetically with the surrounding imagery, becoming integral artistic elements of the bayati itself. At the same time, they provide valuable evidence concerning the poet's geographical environment and the authenticity of his corpus. As M. Gasimli observes:

"...Based on folklore materials collected during expeditions in Zangezur, as well as the neighbouring regions of Karabakh and Garadagh where Sari Ashiq lived and travelled, it is possible to identify several additional distinguishing features. The collections assembled by S. Mumtaz and B. Behjat during the 1920s and 1930s, by A. Akhundov in the 1950s and 1960s, and by S. Pirsultanli, S. Rustamov, H. Kurdoglu, E. Mammadli, and others during the 1970s and 1980s demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of Sari Ashiq's bayatis are 'poems of place.' In other words, most of them originated from specific events or local legends" [33, p. 501].

Since these narratives are inseparably connected with concrete places and landscapes, the significance of the historical and geographical names occurring in the bayatis becomes even more evident. Certainly, some of these place names appear simply to create punning rhymes and have no direct connection with the poet's biography or travels. Nevertheless, in the overwhelming majority of cases they perform important artistic, historical, and documentary functions within the poetic structure of Sari Ashiq's works.

Some geographical names in Sary Ashyg’s *bayati* serve primarily as elements of *jinas* rhyme:

Mən Aşıq Bağdad ara,
Zülfünü bağda dara.
Bir vəfalı yar üçün
Rumu gəz, Bağdad ara. [45, p. 65]

Translation:

I am the Ashyg—search through Baghdad,
Comb your tresses in the garden.

For the sake of one faithful beloved,
Travel through Rum and search Baghdad.

Other toponyms, however, provide valuable information about the poet's life and love story:

Mən Aşıq yüz sənəmi,
Səfyanın yüz sənəmi.
Yaxşıynan keçən günə
Verərəm yüz sənəmi. [45, p. 36]

Translation:

I am the Ashyg of a hundred beauties,
Of Səfyan's hundred beauties.
For one day spent with Yakhshi,
I would give a hundred years of my life.

The natural use of the toponym Səfyan in this *bayati* strengthens the hypothesis that Yakhshi may have come from that village, although Türklər and Maqsudlu are also mentioned in other sources.

The historical and geographical names found in Sary Ashyg's poetry outline the spatial boundaries of his poetic world and reflect his connection with Zangazur, Karabakh, Southern Azerbaijan, and neighbouring regions. Among them are Gulabird, Hakari, Bargushad, Murov, Maqsudlu, Safyan, Turklar, Gorus, Mehri, Mincivan, Tabriz, Khoy, Savalan, Araz, and numerous other settlements, rivers, and mountains. These names were identified from materials collected and published by scholars ranging from Salman Mumtaz to Ilham Gahraman.

Many of these toponyms are important not only for interpreting the imagery of Sary Ashyg's poetry but also for reconstructing his biography and preserving historical memory. A number of places mentioned in his *bayati* were affected by the political conflicts and population displacements of the twentieth century. Their presence in folklore therefore serves as a literary record of the historical geography and cultural memory of the Azerbaijani people:

Aşıq deyər, ha kərim,
Yetsin dada, ha Kərim!
Sənə dünya cənnəti,
Mənə gözəl Həkərim. [46, p. 28]

Translation:

The Ashyg says: O Generous One,
Come to my aid, O Merciful One!
Let the world's paradise be yours,
But leave me my beautiful Hakari.

Mən Aşıq gülə bir də,
Yol gedir Güləbirdə.
Yaxşını görə gözüm—
Açılıb gülə bir də. [46, p. 30]

Translation:

I am the Ashyg—may the flower bloom again;
The road leads to Gulabird.
May my eyes behold Yakhshi
And open like a flower once more.

Thus, one of the important qualities of Sary Ashyg's *bayati* is their ability to preserve historical geography and national identity.

The study of Sary Ashyg's poetry is complicated by the existence of numerous textual variants, especially among his *jinas bayati*. This variation reflects the widespread popularity of his works in oral tradition, but it also makes it difficult to establish the most authentic version. A well-known example is the *bayati* traditionally regarded as the poet's final request:

Aşıq tər sinə qoyun,
Yuyun, tərsinə qoyun.

Yaxşını qibləsinə,
Məni tərsinə qoyun. [46, p. 4]

Translation:

Lay the Ashyg in the fresh grave,
Wash him and place him the other way.
Lay Yakhshi facing the qibla,
And place me turned away.

Among the three known versions, this form appears closest to the original. The plural imperative is more appropriate for a dying poet addressing those gathered around him, while the expression tər sinə—"into the fresh grave"—preserves the central *jinas* and should be written separately.

The same textual problem is evident in the different versions of the well-known Karamanli *bayati*:
Aşıq Qaramanlıdır,
Xalın qara manlıdır.
Yarın soyuq üzündən
Yenə qar amanlıdır. [7, p. 71]

Translation:

The Ashyg is from Karamanli;
Your beauty mark bears a dark intention.
Because of the beloved's cold expression,
Once again the snow cries for mercy.

Although the surviving versions differ considerably, Behjat's text appears relatively closer to the probable original, provided that qara manlıdır is written separately in order to preserve the *jinas* rhyme.

Sary Ashyg was such a refined master of language that the alteration of even a single word could weaken the meaning and beauty of his poetry. The study of textual variants must therefore remain an essential part of research into his poetic legacy.

In conclusion, Sary Ashyg enriched the traditional poetics of the *bayati* through original imagery, wordplay, historical-geographical detail, and profound lyrical expression. These artistic innovations not only distinguished his poetry from that of earlier masters but also exerted a powerful influence on the subsequent development of Azerbaijani ashyg literature.

CONCLUSION

The present monograph has examined the life, poetic legacy, and folkloric image of Sary Ashyg, one of the most distinguished representatives of Azerbaijani ashyg poetry and a major folk poet of the seventeenth century. Drawing on historical sources, manuscript materials, folklore narratives, published collections, and modern scholarly approaches, the study has produced the following principal conclusions.

Sary Ashyg occupies a special place in the history of Azerbaijani ashyg literature. By continuing and enriching the artistic traditions of earlier folk poets, he created an original poetic school centred on the *bayati* genre and exerted a strong influence on subsequent generations of ashyg poets. His work represents one of the highest achievements of Azerbaijani folk lyricism.

Although historical information about his life and cultural environment remains limited, the collecting and research activities conducted since the 1920s have gradually established Sary Ashyg studies as a distinct field within Azerbaijani folkloristics. The works of Salman Mumtaz, Bahlul Behjat, Ahliman Akhundov, Huseyn Kurdoglu, Suleyman Pashayev, Maharram Gasimli, Mohammad Garakhanli Alishig, Ilham Gahraman, and other scholars have played a decisive role in preserving and interpreting his legacy.

The controversies surrounding Sary Ashyg's birthplace and origin have not yet been fully resolved. Nevertheless, his artistic identity belongs unquestionably to Azerbaijani literature, while the historical and geographical references found in his *bayati*, legends, and narratives clearly associate his poetic formation with the cultural environment of Zangazur and Karabakh.

The exact dates of the poet's birth and death are likewise unknown. However, the evidence presented by Bahlul Behjat and other collectors, together with autobiographical traces preserved in the *bayati*, supports the conclusion that Sary Ashyg lived and created primarily during the seventeenth century and may have reached approximately eighty years of age.

The *bayati* became the central genre of Sary Ashyg's creative activity because its concise structure offered exceptional possibilities for displaying the richness of the Azerbaijani language, developing semantic ambiguity, and perfecting the art of *jinas*. By raising paronomastic rhyme to a high artistic level and employing its various forms with remarkable skill, he introduced important innovations into both the poetics of the *bayati* and the broader tradition of ashyg verse.

Comparative analysis demonstrates that the most distinctive and reliable part of Sary Ashyg's poetic corpus consists of *jinas bayati*. Although his works became intertwined with anonymous folk poetry during oral transmission, the complexity of the wordplay, the individuality of the imagery, and the refinement of the rhyme system remain important criteria for identifying poems that may be attributed to him.

The unity of content and form in Sary Ashyg's poetry is closely connected with his personal fate and tragic love for Yakhshi. The principal figures and images of his lyric world—the lyrical "I," Yakhshi, Yaman, the rose, the nightingale, the moon, the sun, mountains, gardens, rivers, and other natural images—acquire new emotional and symbolic meanings. Through them, the poet transformed personal suffering into a universal artistic expression of love, loyalty, separation, injustice, and spiritual endurance.

The legends and narratives concerning Sary Ashyg, examined here as an independent body of folklore, reveal both his authority among the people and the manner in which his historical personality was gradually transformed into a folkloric image. These narratives also preserve valuable information about the circumstances in which many of his *bayati* originated and about their connection with particular places, events, and oral traditions.

The narrative traditions surrounding Sary Ashyg created an important artistic foundation for the formation of the epic tale *Yakhshi and Ashyg*. By incorporating elements of oral biography, tragic love, poetic improvisation, and popular memory, these narratives gradually developed into a coherent epic structure.

The epic *Yakhshi and Ashyg* enriches both the tradition of Azerbaijani love epics associated with celebrated ashyg poets and the broader gallery of ashyg figures

preserved in national folklore. It belongs to the same cultural and artistic tradition as such works as *Shah Ismayil and Gulzar*, *Gurbani*, *Abbas and Gulgaz*, and *Khasta Gasim and Malaksima*.

From the standpoint of both moral content and artistic craftsmanship, *Yakhshi and Ashyg* represents a rare synthesis of collective folk imagination and Sary Ashyg's individual poetic talent. It preserves the memory of the poet's tragic fate while transforming his personal experience into a lasting cultural narrative.

Thus, Sary Ashyg's poetic heritage is significant not only as an outstanding achievement of seventeenth-century Azerbaijani folk poetry but also as an essential part of the historical memory, linguistic richness, ethical values, and cultural identity of the Azerbaijani people.

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