Diversity and Contact among Singer-Poet Traditions in Eastern Anatolia

edited by Ulaş Özdemir
Wendelmoet Hamelink
Martin Greve

Orient-Institut Istanbul

Istanbuler Texte und Studien 40

Diversity and Contact among Singer-Poet Traditions in Eastern Anatolia

ISTANBULER TEXTE UND STUDIEN

HERAUSGEGEBEN VOM
ORIENT-INSTITUT ISTANBUL

BAND 40

Diversity and Contact among Singer-Poet Traditions in Eastern Anatolia

Edited by
Ulaş Özdemir
Wendelmoet Hamelink
Martin Greve

BADEN-BADEN 2018

ERGON VERLAG
IN KOMMISSION

Umschlaggestaltung: Taline Yozgatian

Cover photo:
Musicians during the “Festival of Folk Poets in Sivas”, 1931.
Tecer, A. K. (1932). Sıvas Halk Şairleri Bayramı. Sivas: Kamil Matbaası.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

ISBN 978-3-95650-286-6 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-95650-481-5 (ePDF)
ISSN 1863-9461

© 2018 Orient-Institut Istanbul (Max Weber Stiftung)
Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung des Werkes außerhalb des Urheberrechtsgesetzes bedarf der Zustimmung des Orient-Instituts Istanbul. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen jeder Art, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmung sowie für die Einspeicherung in elektronische Systeme. Gedruckt mit Unterstützung des Orient-Instituts Istanbul, gegründet von der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, aus Mitteln des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung.

Ergon – ein Verlag in der Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden

Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Papier

Contents

Ulaş Özdemir, Wendelmoet Hamelink, Martin Greve
Introduction 7

Xi Yang
History and Organization of the Anatolian
Ašuł/Âşık/Aşıq Bardic Traditions 15

Canser Kardaş
The Legacy of Sounds in Turkey:
*Âşık*s and *Dengbêj*s 37

Lokman Turgut
Imagining a New *Mitirb*:
A Text Analysis of a Singer-Poet Tradition in Ṭûr ʻAbdîn 53

Marlene Schäfers
Tracing Connections:
Kurdish Women Singers and the Ambiguities of Owning Oral Tradition 77

Martin Greve
Neither *Âşık* nor *Dengbêj* –
The Lament Singers from Dersim (Tunceli) 95

Hande Sağlam
Musical and Textual Characteristic of Alevi and Sunni *Âşık*s
in Sivas/Turkey 131

Ulaş Özdemir
Hakikatçi Âşıklık: Historical and Musical Traces of a Religious Movement 149

Mahmut Ağbaht
A Genre of Oral Poetry, the *Fann*, in the Alawi Community
in the Hatay (Antioch) Province of Turkey 183

Stefan Williamson Fa
“Hüseyn’im Vay!”:
Voice and Recitation in Contemporary Turkish Shi’ism 209

Farhad Shidfar
Azerbaijani *Ashiq* Saz in West and East Azerbaijan Provinces of Iran 225

Contributors 247

Introduction

Ulaş Özdemir, Wendelmoet Hamelink, Martin Greve

The photo on the cover of this book was probably made on 7 November, 1931 during the first "Festival of Folk Poets in Sivas" (*Sivas Halk Şairleri Bayramı*) (Tecer, 1932). It depicts a number of participating folk singers, including (upright from left) Âşık Ali, San'ati, Yusuf, Talibi (Hacı Bektaş Coşkun), Yarım Ali, Âşık Müştak, (sitting from left) Hikayeci Ağa Dayı, Karslı Mehmet, Âşık Süleyman (Süleyman Fırtına), the two famous brothers Suzani (Vahap Bozkurt) and Revani (Kurtveli Bozkurt), and finally, (on the right outside) the at that time still completely unknown Âşık Veysel (Veysel Şatıroğlu). This festival marked a turning point for the singer-poet tradition in the young Republic of Turkey. Here, Ahmet Kutsi Tecer discovered folk poets who from then on would become the most important symbols for national Turkish literature and music.

The Diversity of Singer-Poets in Anatolia

The tradition of singing shorter or longer poems or even epics, accompanied (or not) by the singer himself/herself on instruments such as a long-necked lute or a bowed fiddle is widespread in a large area reaching from the Balkans over Anatolia, through the Caucasus, Iran until Central Asia. Within this larger context, a great number of languages are used, including Turkic, Persian, Kurdish, Armenian, Arabic, Slavic or Caucasian languages, further complicated by bilingualism or multilingualism, an important issue that still needs to be studied more in-depth. However, even within Anatolia, the diversity, communication and interaction of singer-poets of different ethnic groups have not been explored enough to date. Only exceptionally did researchers pay attention to diversity leaving nationalistic debates on the side. The following are the most important examples: Greek folk poets writing and singing in Turkish (Salcı, 2004); Turkish folk poets writing and singing in Greek (İslamoğlu, 1994; Öztürk, 2006); Armenian *aşug*s writing and singing in Turkish (Pamukciyan, 2002; Bayrak, 2005; Koz, 2014); Kurdish tales in Armenian folk literature (Seropyan, 2017); Turkish folk songs from Karaman Greeks (Stravridis, 2017); *âşık* poets with Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian verses (Hakobyan, 2016); comparable characteristics of Armenian and Kurdish lullabies (Bilal & Estelle, 2013); *âşık*s influenced by *dengbêj*s and vice verse (Hamelink, 2016). With these examples showing what a large variety of forms existed, we most probably only know a small part of them.

Furthermore, the content of the songs might be influenced by different religions and denominations including Sunni and Shia Islam (Fa in this volume),

Alevism, Yezidism (Amy de le Bretéque, 2012; Allison, 2001), and Armenian (Xi in this volume) or Syriac Christianity. Some performers "sing" (in the narrow sense) while other rather recite or tell stories, possibly with inserted sung passages or songs. Moreover, similarities, transitions and exchange between singer-poets and traditions such as *hikaye* (story-telling; Boratav, 2002; Başgöz, 2008), *ağıt* (laments; Esen, 1982; Gökçen, 2015), *destan* (epic; Esen, 1991) or religious poetry of different denominations have rarely been discussed.

We might conclude that the relationship and interaction of the singer-poets belonging to different ethnicities or religions and speaking different mother tongues are important topics affecting the poetry and musical performance. As a contemporary example of interaction between different regions and languages, two female singer-poets, Dengbêj Gazîn from Van and Âşık Leyli from Armenia, performed together at concerts, and released an album together.[1]

Nationalistic Discourses of Singer-Poets

Despite this obvious diversity, during the twentieth century, several (newly founded) nation-states tried to turn singer-poet traditions into political symbols of their respective national culture with the rather absurd consequence that the so-called *âşık* tradition was accepted three different times by the UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage, that is for Turkey (2009), Azerbaijan (2009) and Armenia (2014)–not to mention the UNESCO recognition of other epic traditions in the region, such as the *Akyn* Epic tellers in Kyrgyzstan (2008), the Meddah theatrical storytellers in Turkey (2008), or epic singing to the accompaniment of the fiddle *gusle* in Serbia (2018). In Turkey, in particular Turkish literature studies have described the tradition of *âşık* or *ozan* (also refered to by some other names) as a homogeneous national Turkish tradition (Balkılıç, 2015; Öztürkmen, 1998), widely ignoring non-Turkish influences and related traditions. Turkish folk literature and music scholars used terms such as *halk şairi* (folk poets), *saz şairi* (poets with the *saz/bağlama* instrument) or *âşık* within a general nationalistic discourse, claiming them to be the most important carriers of a Turkic cultural memory supposedly originating in Central Asia (Köprülü, 2004). This later notion deeply changed both the tradition and its perception.

While the cover photo of 1931 shows some poor rural singers of the region of Sivas, without any indication of the high prestige and honours which they would receive in the following decades, Âşık Veysel later became the most prominent representative of the Turkish *âşık* tradition. Interestingly, even though his life and

[1] For more information about this project and the album see: http://www.anadolukultur.org/tr/calisma-alanlari/ermenistanla-kultur-sanat-diyalogu/kadin-asik-ve-dengbejler/152 (accessed: 24 February 2018); https://kalan.com/audio/vandan-yerevana-dengbej-gazin-ve-asik-leyli (accessed: 24 February 2018).

work was studied in-depth, his possible Armenian roots have never been mentioned in studies on Turkish folk literature (Bayrak, 2017), and even his Aleviness was only mentioned many years after his death. Since the *âşık* tradition was part of the ideological mission of the Turkish nation-state to nationalize, Turkify, and unify its citizens, affiliation with different ethnicities or faiths of *âşık*s were mostly ignored in official Turkish discourse. As one of the few exceptions to this subject, studies on Turkish folk literature and music did mention that the Armenian *aşug*s were often influenced by Turkish *âşık*s (Köprülü, 1999; Gazimihal, 1962). However, the opposite possibility has never been suggested (Kerovpyan & Yılmaz, 2010).

Meanwhile a number of encompassing studies have been published on the *âşık* tradition and its poems (e.g. Artun, 2014; Kaya, 1994; Reinhard & de Oliveira Pinto, 1989). However, its exact regional and historical scope is still unclear, for example western periphery (Şenel, 2007), possible transitions to traditions on the Balkan (Bohlman & Petković, 2012), its connection with related traditions at the Black Sea coast and those in Iran (Allison & Kreyenbroek, 2013) and further east (Küchümkulova, 2016). In some few studies, the multilingual character of different traditions has been examined (Pamukciyan, 2002; Salcı, 2004; Bayrak, 2005; Öztürk, 2006). These latter studies form an interesting example of how some local researchers moved into the opposite direction of the Turkish state, not conforming to the "nationalization" process of the Turkish state. Generally, however, non-Turkish traditions were (and still are) ignored by most Turkish scholars, of which the Kurdish *dengbêj* is the most notable example because of its recent revival. During the early 2000s a process of Kurdish nationalization of the *dengbêj*s took place in the Kurdish political movement, this time excluding non-Kurdish traditions and actors in the region, and disregarding the vast variety of Kurdish singer-poet traditions (Turgut and Schäfers in this volume).

Main Contribution of this Book

The present volume, focusing on the widely neglected but extremely rich cultural area of eastern Anatolia, suggests that six major steps are needed to enrich and strengthen the research on singer-poets:

1) Almost all articles in this volume question the nationalist narratives of homogeneous traditions connected with one (and only one) nation or ethnic group. Even if languages create serious borders for both the performance and perception of songs and epics, similarities and exchange regularly crossed (and still cross) these borders. Singer-poet traditions rather have to be investigated as local, regional, sometimes super-regional phenomena that developed their individual styles in interaction with different traditions in their local environments. Under the influence of media and politics, however, some recent actors have become effective over a much larger area. Such internationalization was accelerated

by the many migrants settling outside of Anatolia, building new communities in which there continued to be a demand for singer-poets from the region of origin. This mediazation was often influenced and reinforced through the construction of social and political identities of the different ethnic groups, both in the "homeland" and abroad. And even though social and political homogenizing currents strongly influenced the way in which Anatolian traditions exist today, the artistic power of individual creativity should never be neglected.

2) In order to understand the place and role of traditions or individuals, a comparative approach, which bridges the traditions from different ethnic and linguistic groups, is essential. Because of the politicization of this topic, not only the traditions itself, also the works written about them often do not relate to each other, thereby missing the chance to understand mutual influences and exchange. In addition to the "major" traditions of *âşık*, *ozan* or *dengbêj*, also smaller, today lesser known traditions should be taken into account, including *destan*, *hikaye*, the *sa* from Dersim, *finnans* in Antakya, and religious singers of Sunni, Shia, Alevi, and Christian traditions. Since the short but pioneering article of Ursula Reinhard (1997), hardly any serious comparison has been published. Obviously, before an encompassing overview and comparison can be achieved, numerous small-scale case-studies need to be conducted. Future field research would need to be sensitive to the necessity of a comparative approach both regional and historical, to which the chapters in this volume give a first incentive.

3) Gender is a topic that needs much more attention in research on singer-poets, as this has been lacking in much of the writing up to this date (Köksel, 2012; Birkalan, 2013; Çınar, 2008; Erdener, 1995; Hamelink, 2016). Important themes that need investigation are the participation (historical and contemporary) of women in singer-poet traditions, their specific contribution to the repertoire and genres, and their acceptance as professional singers by the public as well as by the music market (see Marlene Schäfers in this volume).

4) Instead of the wide-spread assumption of timeless "traditions" which are assumed to have remained basically unchanged over centuries, this volume takes on a historical, source-based approach, encompassing methods of oral history as well as the analysis of historical music recordings. Furthermore, the study of oral tradition needs to include the study of political choices and developments regarding its "heritage-making". Recent works, such as that of Christine Allison (2001), Metin Yüksel (2011), Clémence Scalbert-Yücel (2009), Marlene Schäfers (2015), and Wendelmoet Hamelink (2016), have paid attention to these aspects.

5) This volume demonstrates the rich results of interdisciplinary research and exchange, including disciplines such as cultural anthropology, which might focus on issues such as cultural meaning of traditions and identity (Schäfers), (socio-)linguistics (Ağbaht), (ethno-) musicology (Sağlam, Özdemir, Greve), organography (Shidfar), and literature studies. It also brings together the works of local and foreign researchers, who have a different history of collecting.

6) Finally, an important subject discussed throughout the book is the role that singer-poets play in popular music, especially since the 20th century. Singer-poets came to the fore when cultural identities were expressed through music in different communities. Recent works related to the subject are increasingly showing the role of radio, television, music industry and social media (Fidan, 2017; Özdemir, 2017).

Almost naturally these six aspects are mutually interlinked. For example, a focus on the regional cultural history of present-day eastern Anatolian singer-poets, combined with a historical approach, will necessarily force the researcher to investigate contacts and exchange with Armenian singer-poet traditions that were influential in the region previously, in particular during the nineteenth century.

The concept of this volume was initially developed for a panel held at the *Turkologentag* in Hamburg in 2016. The editors, struck by the unexpected large field and approaches, decided to contact further scholars working in the field. During this process the field more and more enlarged, and today we even consider a second volume on the issue.

The editors would like to thank the Orient-Institut Istanbul for its support.

References

Allison, Ch. (2001). *The Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.

Allison, Ch. & Kreyenbroek, Ph. (Ed.). (2013). *Remembering the Past in Iranian Societies*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Amy de le Bretéque, E. (2012). Voices of Sorrow: Melodized Speech, Laments, and Heroic Narratives among the Yezidis of Armenia. *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 44, 129–148.

Artun, E. (2001/ 2014). *Âşıklık Geleneği ve Âşık Edebiyatı*. Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları.

Balkılıç, Ö. (2015). *Temiz ve Soylu Türküler Söyleyelim: Türkiye'de Milli Kimlik İnşasında Halk Müziği*. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları.

Başgöz, İ. (2008). *Hikâye. Turkish Folk Romance as Performance Art*. Bloomington: Indiana University.

Bayrak, M. (2005). *Alevi- Bektaşi Edebiyatında Ermeni Âşıkları (Aşuğlar)*. Ankara: Özge Yayınları.

– (2017). Kadim Ermeni Yerleşkelerinde Hüzünlü Bir Gezinti. *Kürt Tarihi Dergisi*, 29.

Bilal, M. & Amy de le Bretéque, E. (2013). The Oror and the Lorî: Armenian and Kurdish Lullabies in Present-day Istanbul. In Kreyenbroek, Ph. & Allison, Ch. (Eds.). *Remembering the Past in Iranian Societies*, 125–140. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Birkalan, H. (2013). Reconsidering Gender and Genre: Female Aşıks, Tradition and Tactics. In Shankland, D. (Ed.). *Archeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia*, 123–153. Istanbul: Isis Press.

Bohlman, Ph. V. & Petkovi´c, N. (Eds.) (2012). *Balkan Epic. Song, History, Modernity*. Lanham (etc.): The Scarecrow Press.

Boratav, P. N. (1996). Giriş. In Esen, A. S. *Anadolu Ağıtları*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

– (2002). *Halk Hikayeleri ve Halk Hikayeciliği*. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları.

Coşkun, Zeki (1995). *Aleviler, Sünnüler ve ... Öteki Sivas*. Istanbul: İletişim.

Çınar, S. (2008). *Yirminci Yüzyılın ikinci Yarısında Türkiye'de Kadın Âşıklar*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Istanbul Technical University. Istanbul.

Erdener, Y. (1995). *The Song Contests of Turkish Minstrels. Improvised Poetry Sung To Traditional Music*. New York: Garland Publishing.

Esen, A. Ş. (1982). *Anadolu Ağıtları*. Istanbul: Türkiye Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları.

– (1991). *Anadolu Destanları*. Istanbul: Türkiye Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları.

Fidan, S. (2017). *Âşıklık Geleneği ve Medya Endüstrisi: Geleneksel Müziğin Medyadaki Serüveni*. Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları.

Gazimihal, M. R. (1962). Ermenicede Turani Ses Unsurları. In *Türk Folklor Araştırmaları*, 7 (150), 2604–2605.

Gökçen, A. (2015). *Kadim bir ses: Ezidi Ağıtları*. Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Hakobyan, A. (2016). *Arapgir: Songs*. Retrieved from http://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayetofmamuratulazizhrput/kaza-of-arapgir/lochal-characteristics/songs.html (last accessed 24 February 2018).

Hamelink, W. (2016). *The Sung Home: Narrative, Morality, and the Kurdish Nation*. Leiden: Brill..

İslamoğlu, M. (1994). Kıbrıslı Türk Âşıklar ve Rum Halk Edebiyatma Katkıları. *Kıbrıs Türk Kültur ve Sanatı*, l05–124.

Kaya, D. (1994). *Sivas'ta Âşıklık Geleneği ve Âşık Ruhsatî*. Sivas: Cumhurriyet Üniversitesi Yayınları 55.

Koz, S. (2014). *Gül Ağacı Boy Vermez: Ermeni Harfli Türkçe ve Ermenice Maniler*. Istanbul: Turkuaz Yayınları.

Köksel, B. (2012). *20. Yüzyıl Âşık Şiiri Geleneğinde Kadın Âşıklar*. Ankara: Akçağ.

Köprülü, M. F. (1999). Türk Edebiyatı'nın Ermeni Edebiyatı Üzerindeki Te'sirleri. In Köprülü, M. F. *Edebiyat Araştırmaları*, (239–269) Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları.

– (2004). *Saz Şairleri*. Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları.

Küchümkulova, E. (2016). Introduction to Central Asian Epic Traditions. In Levin, Th.; Daukeyeva, S.' & Küchümkulova, E. (Eds.). *The Music of Central Asia*. Bloomington: Indian University Press.

Özdemir, U. (2017). *Senden Gayrı Âşık mı Yoktur: 20. Yüzyıl Âşık Portreleri*. Istanbul: Kolektif Kitap.

Öztürk, R. (2006). Sözlü Anlatımların Bir Başka Dil İle Anlatılması: Rumca Anlatılarda Türk Halk Verimleri. *İlmî Araştırmalar: Dil, Edebiyat, Tarih İncelemeleri*, 26, 187–203.

Öztürkmen, A. (1998). *Türkiye'de Folklor ve Milliyetçilik*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Pamukciyan, K. (2002). *Ermeni Harfli Türkçe Metinler*. Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık.

Reigle, R. (2013). A Brief History of Kurdish Music Recordings in Turkey. *Hellenic Journal of Music, Education and Culture*, 4. www.hejmec.eu (last accessed 4 May 2018).

Reinhard, U. (1997). Dichtersänger im Nordosten der Türkei, in Armenien und Aserbaidschan. Ein Vergleich. *Jahrbuch für musikalische Volks-und Völkerkunde*, 16, 71–92.

Reinhard, U. & de Oliveira Pinto, *T.* (1989). *Sänger und Poeten mit der Laute. Türkische Aşık und Ozan*. Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde, Veröffentlichungen des Museums für Völkerkunde Berlin. Neue Folge 47, Abteilung Musikethnologie VI.

Salcı, V. L. (2004). Türkleşmiş Hristiyan Bektaşî Şairler I-II. *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Velî Araştırma Dergis*i, 31–32.

Scalbert Yücel, C. (2009). The Invention of a Tradition: Diyarbakırs's Dengbêj Project, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10. http://ejts//revues.org/index 4055.html (last accessed 4 May 2018).

Schäfers, M. (2015). Being Sick of Politics: The Production of dengbêjî as Kurdish Cultural Heritage in Contemporary Turkey. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 20, 2–16.

Seropyan, S. (2017). *Aşiq û Maşûq: Ermenice Kaynaklardan Kürt-Ermeni Aşk Masalları*. Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık.

Stravridis, St. (2017). *Anatol Türküleri. 1896 Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İlk Türkü Mecmuası*. Istanbul: Literatür Yayıncılık.

Şenel, S. (2007). *Kastamonu'da Âşık Fasılları*. Kastamonu: Kastamonu Valiliği.

Tecer, A. K. (1932). *Sivas Halk Şairleri Bayramı*. Sivas: Kamil Matbaası.

Kerovpyan, A. & Yılmaz, A. (2010). *Klasik Osmanlı Müziği ve Ermeniler*. İstanbul: Surp Pırgiç Ermeni Hastanesi Vakfı Kültür Yayınları.

Yüksel, M. (2011). *Dengbêj, Mullah, Intelligentsia: the survival and revival of the KurdishKurmanji language in the Middle East, 1925–1960*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago.

History and Organization of the Anatolian *Ašuł/Âşık/Aşıq* Bardic Traditions

Xi Yang

Introduction

Sources about the *ašuł/âşık/aşıq* bardic tradition, especially before the seventeenth century, are deplorably poor and the situation does not significantly improve until the nineteenth century, when modern scholarly practices were introduced into the area. Therefore, much information concerning the bardic tradition during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries has to be pieced together or even conjectured from later sources, which inevitably raises certain questions about the reliability of the resulting construction.

For the sake of brevity, whenever the context is clear, I will refer to "*ašuł*, *âşık*, and *aşıq*" as "bardic tradition" and the exponent as "bard". In many cases the term *ašuł/âşık/aşıq* will be individualized to refer purely to ethnic Armenian, Turkish or Azarbaijani bards respectively. The terms Azerbaijan/Azerbaijani/Azeri are used without any political implications. "Azerbaijan" refers to both the territory of the current Republic of Azerbaijan (called "Tartary" in Russian in the nineteenth century) as well as the region in the Northwest of Iran, which bears this name from ancient times. "Azerbaijani" as a noun refers to the Turkic inhabitants of both territories mentioned above in addition to those Turkic inhabitants who used to live, or still live in the Republic of Armenia and the mostly eastern and southern parts of the Republic of Georgia, which belonged to the Persian Empire in the early modern period, since from Russian Imperial times onward these people are identified as "Azerbaijanis". As an adjective, "Azerbaijani" pertains to the Azerbaijanis. "Azeri" refers to the Turkic language spoken by the "Azerbaijanis" as defined above. For Armenian, Georgian and Russian, the Library of Congress system of transliteration is followed; while transliterations of Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman follow the system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES).

The *ašuł/âşık/aşıq* type of bard is associated with a composite performing art, a unity of narration and song to instrumental accompaniment with the appropriate use of gesture. On the whole the requirements for becoming a bard resemble those in other bardic traditions, i.e. that the candidate should possess a good memory and be able to master the art of singing and playing musical instruments (primarily strings; especially the *saz*) (Başgöz, 2008: 98). There seems to have been no prescription regarding their family background, and only a few

hailed from a well-off family[1] while even rarer individuals could lay claim to high rank.[2] Blind bards are found from time to time, e.g. the famous early nineteenth-century Armenian *ašuł* Širin[3] or the twentieth-century Turkish Âşık Veysel,[4] but the claim by some scholars that bards were frequently blind is unsupported,[5] as established by Garegin Levonyan's list of Armenian *ašuł*s up to the late nineteenth century (Levonyan, 1892: 16–132) and Erman Artun's list of famous sixteenth-to-twentieth-centuries Turkish *âşık*s (Artun, 2011: 273–488), most of whom do not belong to that category.[6] On the contrary, a number of bards were orphaned at a very early age, losing at least one parent, e.g. Ašuł Širin and J̌ivani, but here, too, it is hardly possible to draw any significant correlations between their family situation and their becoming a bard (Başgöz, 2008: 104–109). There are reports that Armenian Christian *ašuł*s learned the art from Turkic masters, such as the example of the nineteenth-century Armenian *ašuł* Zahri who studied with the Turkish *âşık* master Necmi (Levonyan, 1944: 39),[7] though I have not encountered any example in the opposite direction.

Judging from extant written sources, there were hardly any women bards before the nineteenth century,[8] when Armenian and Azerbaijani female *ašuł/aşıq*s first appeared in what are now the republics of Armenian and Azerbaijan. From

---

1 For example, the late nineteenth-century Armenian *ašuł* Šahir-Xač'atur, on whom see Grigoryan's chapter in: *Hay nor grakanut'yan patmut'yun*, vol. 4, 1972, p. 704, or the Turkish *âşık* İsa Kemali, on whom see: Başgöz, 2008: pp.72–73.

2 For example, Kul Mehmed, a sixteenth-century Turkish *âşık*, was born into the family of a pasha (Köprülü, 1962–1965: 59–60).

3 (1827–1854) Born as Yovhannēs Karapetean in Kołb, lived and performed in Alek'sandrapol and Vałaršapat. See Š. Grigoryan's chapter on him in: *Hay nor grakanut'yan patmut'yun*, vol. 1, 1962, pp. 273–289.

4 (1894–1973) Born in the village of Sivrialan in the Sivas province, he first attracted the attention of the local teacher Ahmet Kutsi Tecer (1901–1967, a Turkish scholar and politician) by a song composed for the tenth anniversary of the Turkish Republic, and later won nation-wide fame. See Artun, 2011: 389–391.

5 Abovean's description in *Verk' Hayastani* (Abovyan, 1948: 4). See also Von Haxthausen, 1982: 11, as excerpted from Taylor 1854. See also Levonyan, 1892: 32.

6 However, among the four Armenian *ašuł*s known for their storytelling to Levonyan, three of them were blind: T'uǰǰar, Bangi, Feyradi (Fahrad). In the case of Abovean and von Haxthausen, the blind *ašuł*s are reported more for their story-telling as well. Therefore, it might be possible that among the Armenian *ašuł*s who lived more on storytelling in the nineteenth century, a significant percentage of them were blind. See Levonyan, 1963: 109–110.

7 I also heard from Prof. Zumrud Dadaşzadə in Baku on Jun. 5th, 2011 that she knew of a contemporary Armenian *ašuł* from Urmia region in the Western Azerbaijan Province, Northwestern Iran, who had studied with an Azeri master.

8 Aşıq Pəri is often labeled as the first woman *aşıq*. She was from Karabakh and died in 1834 (Axundov et al., 1985: 118). However, in an article of Anna Oldfield Senarslan an even earlier name appears: Aşıq Zərnigar from Derbent, who was the wife of *aşıq* Valəh (Oldfield Senarslan, 2007: 2). But this name is otherwise unknown. Levonyan also reported the names of several nineteenth-century female Armenian *ašuł*s such as Maro Naxiǰevanc'i, Varso Łarsec'i, and T'amar Erevanc'i, on which, see Levonyan, 1944: 44. I cannot find any biographical reference to them.

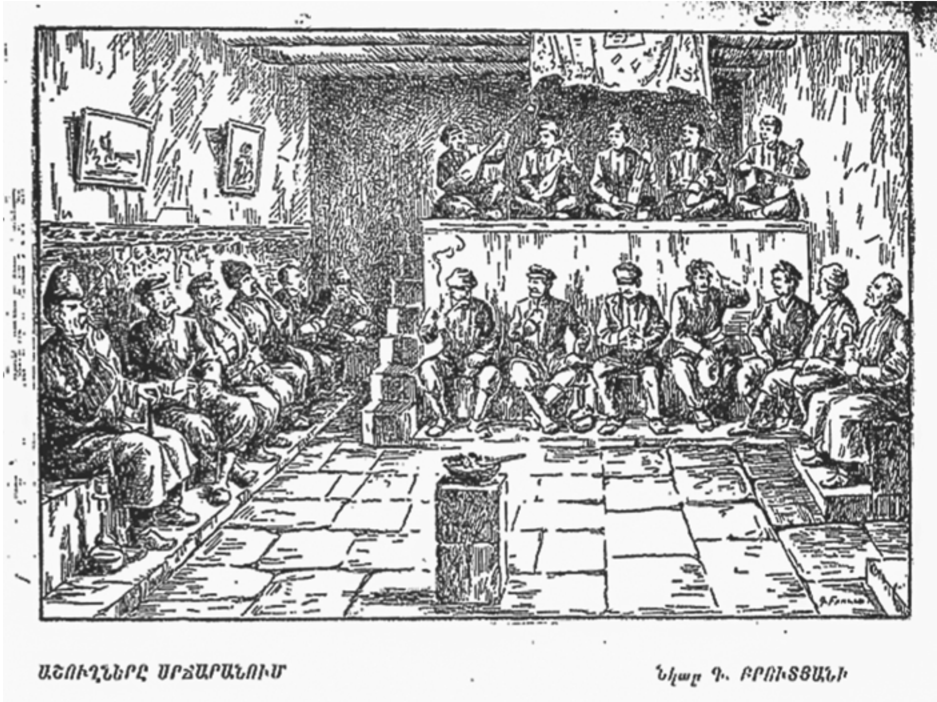

Figure 1: *Ašuł* in a coffee house (Levonyan, 1944: 19)

the available sources, there seems to have been no restriction on what or where they performed (Oldfield Senarslan, 2007: 2–3). In contrast, even in the mid-twentieth century in Eastern Turkey and Iranian Azerbaijan the concept of a female *âşık* was still strenuously rejected by locals. Significantly, all six female *âşıks* listed by Artun were born after the 1920s in the Adana, Eskişehir, Çorum, and Sivas provinces, with only the last emanating from inland Anatolia (Artun, 2011: 480–488). For the sole case from the Sivas province, it is not clear whether the Âşık Şahturna is of Alevi-Bektaşi family background (Artun, 2011: 483–484). This is important as in that community there are fewer restrictions on women's activities. According to Başgöz, since the term *âşık* denotes a person in the throes of passionate love, it would be considered a disgrace for a Muslim woman to become an *âşık* before marriage, but even a married *âşık* would expose herself to serious pressure from men.

> Only after the 1960 Turkish constitution was ratified guaranteeing human rights and civil liberties to all citizens, did women *âşık*s, mainly from Alevi groups, begin to join *âşık* organizations and participate in concert tours with male *âşık*s. Yet even after this, there are no reports of a single woman *âşık* narrating *hikaye* (Başgöz, 2008: 208–209).

Until WWI, bards from a Sufi background propagating their religious beliefs by way of bardic performance were not rare. However, subsequently radical changes

in both Soviet domains and the Turkish Republic significantly reduced their numbers. At the same time, *hikaye* story telling, or in some cases secular *âşık/aşıq* performance in general is opposed by conservative Muslim clerics.[9]

Origin and Etymology

As constituted in the sixteenth century, this tradition is characterized by a Turkic matrix. However, the term *ašuł/âşık/aşıq* derives from the Arabic form *ʿāshiq* ("lover"), the Armenian form *ašuł* emerging from a Turkic intermediary.[10] İlhan Başgöz adduces an important source, which provides grounds for speculating on the possibility of a secular Arab prefiguration of the later bardic tradition. This is found in the *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, composed in 987 CE by the Arab bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm (ca. 935–990/1). The eighth chapter of the work deals with "the names of passionate lovers during the pre-Islamic period and the period of Islam about whose historical traditions there were books". According to his explanation, these "passionate lovers (*ʿushshāq* in Arabic, the plural of *ʿāshiq*)" refer to "tribal minstrels called *ʿāshiq*", who performed "the life stories, legendary or real (or a mixture of both), of the Arab minstrels" (Başgöz, 2008: 7–8). Though this tradition was in circulation in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, this far no record of it has been found postdating Ibn al-Nadīm in the tenth century, while the current bardic tradition originates in the sixteenth century. Despite the time gap, this new approach raises important issues regarding the origin of the tradition, which merits further investigation.

In his monograph *Hikâye*, Başgöz also contextualizes the *ašuł/âşık/aşıq* genre within the development of earlier romance, epic- and story-telling traditions in the Near East. In addition to the Arabic *maddāḥ*[11] and Persian *naqqāl* traditions, another important trajectory is sketched by bards of the Parthian *gōsān* type widely disseminated in the Persian and Armenian realms in the Late Antique period and beyond.[12] In the Armenian sphere the parallel term *gusan* is attested into the fifteenth century,[13] at which point certain practitioners of the art are referred to by the Turkic form *ozan,* which was later used to refer to the *âşık* as well.[14] De-

9 As reported by Başgöz, in the 1960s, some conservative *mullah*s in Tabriz were still opposed to the *aşıq*s' singing and storytelling (1998a: 27).

10 The Armenian consonant *ł* renders Oghuz Turkic q in loan words. For this consonantal correspondence, see Pisowicz, 1995: 95–110.

11 Başgöz has not treated the *maddāḥ* story-telling tradition among Ottoman Turks in the book in general, on which, see *Encyclopedia of Islam*, "New edition" (2nd edition), (951–953). Leiden: Brill 1979–1985, vol. V, 1986.

12 For the Parthian *gusan* tradition, see Boyce, 1957: 10–45.

13 It is difficult to provide first-hand material on this issue. However, since Aṙakʻel Siwnecʻi used *awzan=ozan* in his treaties rather than *gusan*, one might conjecture that the latter term was not in circulation at that time. See Cowe, 1995: 43.

14 Fuad Köprülü, "Ozan", included in *Edebiyat araştırmaları,* Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1966, p. 144.

spite certain linguistic problems with the reconstruction, attempts have been made to establish etymological connections between the two terms (Baxčʿinyan, 1987: 105 and Başgöz, 2001: 234).

Since bardic storytelling (*hikâye*) consists of prose narration interspersed with rhymed songs, it is useful to examine earlier examples of such techniques already extant in the Near East. These include *The Arabian Nights* and the related Armenian *Kafa* tradition, which flourished from around the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries (Simonyan, 1975). These traditions may afford more plausible and immediate connections with the bardic tradition than those often highlighted but of more distant origin.

Previous scholarship tended to identify the *ašuł/âşık/aşıq* bard as an offspring of the Central Asian Turkic minstrel tradition (Köprülü, 1966: 131–144; Başgöz, 2001: 229–235)[15] associating this with the epic tradition of that region, and ultimately, Shamanism.[16] Here, too, Başgöz has weighed in on the debate, arguing against the suggested parallels between shamans and *âşık*s (Başgöz, 2008: 94–95). According to him, the *âşık* does not share the same or similar character traits to troubled individuals, as has been postulated for shamans. Nor does the *âşık*'s dream or selection of his profession parallel the shaman's initiatory dreams and ceremony to cure mental illness. Another essential aspect underexplored by proponents of a Central Asian origin is that in much of the literature supporting this view, the storytelling aspect of the tradition, as opposed to the very different style of epic declamation, lacks a comprehensive treatment (Başgöz, 2008: 3–13).

In this connection, some scholars actually applied the term "*âşık* traditions" to storytelling among the various Turkic peoples in general, as, for example, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz *aqyn*.[17] Yet this categorization is questionable, since, even if these traditions share a common origin with the *âşık/aşıq* tradition, if we accept the arguments regarding Shamanism and epic, they nevertheless mapped out their own distinct route of development over several centuries and do not necessarily maintain many common religious, thematic, prosodic, or musicological features. Hence, there is no documentation on the Kazakh and Kyrgyz *aqyns*, for example, engaging in the performance of prose narrative rather than singing or chanting to instrumental accompaniment. Moreover, the content of their narratives is predominantly epic, while in the *âşık/aşıq* bardic tradition the themes are overwhelmingly romantic (Chadwick and Zhirmunsky, 2010: 316).

---

15 It should be mentioned that the word *ozan* survived quite tenaciously into the eighteenth century, since famous âşık Karacaoğlan was called an *ozan* in a song from 1707. See Öztelli, 1971: XIX. It is also found in some modern Turkish dialects, as reflected in Başgöz's article. Another reference worth mentioning is that the Turkish term *ozan* even appeared in Armenian sources in the form of *awzan*, on which see Cowe, 1995: 43. For the critical edition of the Armenian text, see Xačʿarean, 1982: 84.

16 See Fuad Köprülü, "Bahši", included in *Edebiyat araştırmaları,* pp. 145–156, Başgöz, 2008, *passim*, and Qasımlı, 2003, *passim*.

17 An example of such broad definition can be found in Artun, 2011: 26–29.

Most scholars agree now that the *ašuł/âşık/aşıq* tradition established itself by the sixteenth century when records of such bards begin to appear.[18] To support this view, both Boratav and Başgöz have formed their respective arguments on this formation. Boratav's approach is very innovative. He bases his argumentation on the evolution of poetic forms. According to him, an important support is the significant circulation of the 11-syllable line *koşma*, which is enormously popular among *âşık*s, at the turn of the sixteenth century, though it is rarely recorded in the early period.[19]

Returning to issues of nomenclature, there is a widespread view associating the application of the term *ašuł/âşık/aşıq* to bards within the Muslim Sufi mystical tradition.[20] After the rise of Sufism, the term's reference to Sufi practitioners was transferred to bards, since according to Sufi mystical philosophy they are lovers, whose love is God. This usage continues today among various Sufi orders. Even for secular bards the title *Hak âşık/Həqq aşıq* "God's lover"[21] or *Hak Aşığı* "God-inspired lover-poet"[22] is bestowed on those virtuosi, as had been used among Sufi *âşık/aşıq*s to address themselves (Başgöz, 2008: 9).

The nineteenth-century growth of nationalism in the Ottoman and Tsarist Russian domains and its twentieth-century developments in the Turkish Republic and USSR have spurred a widespread movement among Armenians, Turks, and Azerbaijanis alike to replace the lingering foreign connotations of the Arabic term *ašuł/âşık/aşıq* with "native" terms in their own languages pertaining to earlier bardic traditions. In the Armenian case, the alternative is *gusan*, while in Turkey and Azerbaijan that of *ozan* as well as *saz şair* (*saz*[23] poet), *halk şair* (folk poet) and less frequently, *müğənni* (singer), *el şair* (folk singer), etc. Ironically, the term *gusan* is ultimately Parthian; while the forms *şair*, *müğənni* etc. are Arabic still.

The bardic tradition used to be found over a vast geographic expanse mostly inhabited by the Oghuz Turks, roughly from the Balkans to Iran,[24] however, the focus of this study will be primarily Anatolia and Southern Caucasia and, to a less degree, Iranian Azerbaijan, due to the availability of materials and their historical importance.[25]

---

[18] As reflected in Köprülü, 1966; Günay, 1999; Artun, 2011; Sahakyan, 1961; Qasımlı, 2003; all holding this view.

[19] "La littérature des 'ašïq" in Jean Deny et al. Ed., *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden: Aquis Mattiacis Apud Franciscum Steiner, 1964, pp. 138–139.

[20] For example, Başgöz, 2008, *passim*.

[21] For the Turkish title, see Başgöz, 2008: 9 and, for the Azeri one, see Qasımlı, 2003: 89–117.

[22] For this title, see Başgöz, 2008: 197.

[23] The *saz* is the most important musical instrument in the bardic tradition.

[24] From Zhirmunsky's description (Chadwick and Zhirmunsky, 2010: 316), it seems that the Turkmens have traditions of romance-telling parallel to the Turks and Azeris. Artun also has a very brief description of the "Turkmen *âşık* tradition" in Artun, 2011: 26–27.

[25] It also briefly covers Algiers, once the major base of Ottoman navy in West Mediterranean, and Georgia where bardic tradition had a tiny branch will be mentioned only when necessary. For a brief reference, see Hacılar, 2011: 40–44; Üstünyer, 2009: 137–149.

Figure 2: *Ašuł* in a town (Levonyan, 1944: 33)

An Overview of the History of the Bardic Tradition in the Target Region

It is regrettable that biographical materials regarding bards tend to be rather sparse, particularly for the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, so that the main source for data on them is the text of their songs. In this they differ from elevated poets, whose biographies can be found in *tezkire* collections (memorandum, memoir) in Turkish or the lives (*vark'*) and manuscript colophons of ecclesiastics, who largely filled the ranks of Early Modern Armenian literati. Another complicating factor is that several bards share the same professional name. Thus, there may be at least two Turkish *âşıks* from different centuries and different locations known by the name Karacaoğlan.[26] Evidence includes anecdotes circulating in the area where a bard flourished and references in later bards' narratives or songs about their illustrious predecessors, such songs comprising the tiny subgenre of bardic songs called *şairname* (record of poets) in Turkish.[27] Other materials include tangible objects related to them, such as tombstones, manuscripts,

26 There are different opinions about how many Karacaoğlans there may have been. See Öztelli, 1971: XIII-XXIII, which argues for the single authorship of the songs in the collection. See also Günay, 1999: 185–214, where two different *âşık* Karacaoğlans from different centuries and origin are differentiated.

27 The same term is also used in the sense of *tezkire* as well. According to Artun, the first *şairname*s date back to the seventeenth century (Artun, 2011: 303).

etc. In contrast, evidence for the development of the bardic tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is much more profuse, and often serves as the only basis for reconstructing aspects of the earlier period. The overview of the tradition that follows loosely narrates the history of the genre by century without intending any rigid application of that timeframe.

1500–1600

This century is generally regarded by scholars as the era when the bardic tradition ultimately took shape.[28] The Ottoman navy and army as well as Sufi *tekkes* are the main institutions from this period that preserve the works of contemporary Turkish *âşık*s. Much of the naval material derives from Algiers, the Ottoman navy's major base in the West.[29] From the scarce record of these early *âşık*s, we learn that they served in the Ottoman navy and were regularly required to perform to improve the sailors' morale.[30] Information also exists about bardic activity in Anatolia and Azerbaijan. Several of the Turkic *âşık/aşıq*s there have explicit military affiliations, as can be seen from their works, either as soldiers or officers in the Ottoman army or Celâli rebels,[31] who were Alevites with Shiite affinities and hence hostile to the former group. A second strain of *âşık*s in these regions bore strong links to Sufism, e.g. Pir Sultan Abdal in Anatolia, who was an Alevi;[32] and Aşıq Qurbani from the Safavid sphere, who is said to have been at the court of Safavid Shah Ismail for a while and has songs in fervent praise of Shah Ismail Khaṭā'ī.[33] Later, such famous early *âşık*s, as well as Shah Khaṭā'ī, were to become the subject of *âşık* songs and heroic or romantic tales, though much of the data in these works is fictional.[34] From the sixteenth century onwards, the center for *aşıq* activity in Iran was Tabriz, center of the Azerbaijan re-

28 Various titles, for example, Köprülü, 1962–1965: 39 and Artun, 2011: 273–274.

29 In Köprülü's collection, 5 out of 11 *âşık*s from this period were navy *âşık*s. See Köprülü, 1962–1965: 59–64.

30 Ibid.

31 The Celâlî rebellions were a series of Alevi resistance movements against the Ottoman authorities in Anatolia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of which the first broke out in 1519 under the leadership of Celâl, an Alevi preacher. See Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, Islâm Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü: *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfi Islâm Ansiklopedisi*, Üsküdar, Istanbul, vol. 7, 1993, pp. 252–257.

32 Very little is known about his life, except stories and his poetry, in which he always turns out to be an Alevi, participating in the Alevi revolt against the Ottoman Empire under the influence and instigation of the Safavids. See Artun, 2011: 286–289.

33 Very little is known about his life. Though he was probably born in a village called Diri, its exact location is still not very clear. Qəzənfər Kazımov, his editor, claims it should be in what is now the Azerbaijani Republic, while others argue for a location currently in Iranian Azerbaijan. See Kazımov, 1990: 4–20; Axundov, Saim Sakaoğlu et al., 1985, vol.1: 1. For the fervent paean for Shah Ismail Khaṭā'ī, see: Kazımov, 1990: 53.

34 For the plots of these stories, see Appendix A: Plot outlines of fifty *hikaye* romances, Başgöz, 2008 217–285.

gion, an early Safavid power base, and an important longstanding center of international trade. The first Armenian *ašuł*, Nahapet K‘uč‘ak,[35] from Xaṙakunis in the Lake Van area also flourished in this century, of whose Turkish compositions about ten songs in standard *ašuł* meters are transmitted, treating themes common in Armenian *ašuł* literature.[36] Apart from Nahapet K‘uč‘ak we also hear of the activities of other contemporary Armenian bards like *ašuł* Mesihi.[37]

1600–1700

Fuad Köprülü designated the seventeenth century as the "golden age" of the Turkish *âşık* tradition (Köprülü, 1966: 209) granted the emergence of exponents from a large geographical range and more diversified background. These included at least two of the most prolific and most accomplished pre-nineteenth century Turkish bards, Âşık Gevheri[38] and Âşık Ömer[39] who adopted not only the *ʿarūḍ* quantitative meters but also the style of the *divan* literature tradition and became the most prolific and successful among their peers. Sources for *ašuł*/*aşıq*s in the Iranian domain, however, are relatively few. Two famous Azerbaijani *aşıq*s flourished in this century: Abbas Tufarğanlı[40] and Sarı Aşıq.[41] This century also witnessed the appearance of Łul Egaz[42] and Łul Arzuni,[43] the first Armenian *ašuł*s from the town of New Julfa across the river from the Safavid capital of Isfahan, where they were born in the 1650s. They are also the first extant *ašuł*s composing in the Armenian language, which thrived in the context of the cosmopolitan atmosphere associated with the international trade network created by

35 See Bardakjian, 2000: 428–430 and, for the text of the songs, Ōnnik Ēganyan, "Nahapet K‘uč‘aki hayataṙ t‘urkeren tałerě", *Banber Matenadarani* (5), 1960, pp. 465–481.

36 His tombstone used to be found in the graveyard of S. T‘eodoros Monastery in his home village Xaṙakunis, which bore his name and the year of death: 1592. See Nairi Zaryan's account in Hrant T‘amrazyan ed., *Nahapet K‘uč‘aki banastełcakan ašxarhě*, Yerevan: Erevani Petakan Hamalsarani Hratarakč‘ut‘yun, 2001, pp. 117–118.

37 One of exceptions is *ašuł* Mesihi, on whom, see Köprülü: "Turk Edebiyatinin Ermeni Edebiyati üzerindeki Tesirleri", in *Edebiyat araştırmaları,* 1966, pp. 263–264.

38 Little is certain about him apart from data in some of his songs, such as one welcoming the Crimean Khan Selim Giray I to Constantinople, which was written in 1100 A. H./1688–1689 C. E.. See Elçin, 1984: 11–19 and Artun, 2011: 311–312.

39 Little is certain about him except that he thrived in this century. This situation is true even in the most comprehensive collection of his works. See Ergün, 1936: 5–14. An brief updated description can be found in Artun, 2011: 305–307.

40 Little is known about his life except his birthplace, the village of Tufarğan (close to Tabriz), as reflected in his professional name. See Dadaşzadə, 1973: 3.

41 Little is known about his life except that his tomestone was discovered in Karabakh in 1927. See further Axundov, Sakaoğlu et al., 1985, vol. 1: 41.

42 Born in the 1650s, little is sure about his life, except that he was circuiting among the Armenian villages around Isfahan with his musical instrument, the chongur; and his tombstone was in the Armenian cemetery there, erected in 1734. See Eremean, 1930: 2–3.

43 He was a contemporary of Łul Egaz. But he spent much of his life in Kolkata, India. See Eremean, 1930: 12–13.