



Fret by Fret: The *Saz/Qopuz* and Sociopolitical Change in Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq Art

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Abstract: This article examines the historical transformation of the *saz/qopuz*—the central instrument of Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq art—and analyzes how sociopolitical and cultural changes between the 1930s and 1980s reshaped Ashiq performance practices, whose legacies survive in contemporary performances. Focusing comparatively on Soviet Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan, it shows how the institutionalization and canonization of *mugham* under Soviet cultural policy reconfigured the musical hierarchies and marginalized Ashiq art; a shift that was materially registered in the expansion of the *saz*'s fret layout. Using archival research and ethnomusicological fieldwork, the article reconstructs the early six-fret configuration of the *saz*. It also traces subsequent fret additions that occurred earlier in Soviet Azerbaijan and later in Iranian Azerbaijan, arguing that the structural limitations of this layout in realizing key components of the canonized *mugham* modal system placed new pressures on this gradual expansion process. Through the lens of revival theory, the analysis demonstrates how Ashiq art—once deeply embedded within ritual and narrative traditions—shifted toward a concertized, music-centered performance form, which was mirrored in the progressive addition of frets to the *saz*. The findings underline how state-initiated cultural policies reshaped not only Ashiq performance forms but also the physical design of its central instrument.

Keywords: Ashiq art; *saz* (*qopuz*); *mugham*; fret arrangement; Azerbaijan-Turkish music; revival; Soviet cultural policy; musical instruments

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Introduction

In 1938, in a film recording of the Second Congress of Azerbaijani Ashiqs¹ in the city of Ganja, Azerbaijan, Ashiq Mirzə steps onto a concert stage adorned with portraits of Stalin and Lenin.² Mirzə plays the *saz* and sings a *hava* in praise of Stalin, closing the song with a B-natural fret—a tone that would have

been impossible to produce on the six-fret *saz* still commonly used by *ashiqs* in Qaradağ, Iranian Azerbaijan, four decades later: “When I was a child, our *saz* had only six frets.”³ The fret may be the smallest component of the *saz*, yet it encapsulates a major transformation in performance practice: from the narrative tradition of “Ashiq art” to the staged “Ashiq music” shaped by institutional and ideological reforms in both Soviet and post-revolutionary Iranian contexts.

Ashiq art developed prominently among Oghuz Turkic communities across a broader cultural area, with major centers in contemporary Turkey, the South Caucasus, and northwestern Iran. Historically, *ashiqs* have not only performed as musicians or artists but also assumed leadership roles, performing rituals by narrating diverse *dastans* or stories through improvised music and poetry recitations, alongside singing, dancing, and playing their instrument, known as the *saz* or *qopuz*, at weddings, funerals, festivals, and other communal gatherings.⁴

The regional focus of this research draws on meso-regional approaches that seek to move beyond state-centered historiography. In this framework, the term “Azerbaijan meso-region” refers to the historically continuous region of Azerbaijan prior to its early nineteenth century division into two micro-regions: the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan (northwestern Iran). For clarity, the terms “Azerbaijan-Turkish” and “Turkey-Turkish” are used here to distinguish Oghuz Turkic communities of the Azerbaijan meso-region from those of contemporary Turkey. Within the wider Oghuz cultural sphere, the Azerbaijan meso-region can be considered one of the most vital centers of Ashiq art.

In the northern micro-region, Ashiq art’s trajectory was profoundly shaped by cultural shifts and political changes unfolding in the late Russian Empire in the early twentieth century, and later under Soviet rule. During this period, the composer, musicologist, and music theorist Uzeyir Hajibeyli⁵ played a pivotal role in formulating a new modal music theory by drawing on elements from both *maqam-dastgah*⁶ and Ashiq traditions⁷—though these contributions were not later represented equally. His theoretical framework subsequently formed the basis for the general tone system of Azerbaijan-Turkish “folk music,” which was later appropriated and institutionalized under Soviet cultural policy as part of the broader “re-identification” process in Soviet Azerbaijan.⁸ This era marked a transition from the narrative-rich Ashiq art to a more music-centric

approach, signaling a shift from “Ashiq art” to “Ashiq music” and a significant decline in *dastan* narration among *ashiqs* in the current Republic of Azerbaijan region.⁹ This transformation paralleled the consolidation of the genre now known as *mugham*, which, although often framed as a direct continuation of *maqam-dastgah*, also incorporated performance elements from Ashiq music while obscuring its narrative and ritual dimensions.

In this historical context, *mugham's* contemporary dominance can be approached as the outcome of historical reconfiguration. The institutionalization of *mugham* as the legitimate heir to *maqam-dastgah*, together with the restructuring of the musical hierarchy in Azerbaijan under Soviet cultural policy, significantly shaped Ashiq art’s evolution. While these processes unfolded unevenly across the Azerbaijan meso-region, their consequences extended beyond Ashiq performance to the material configuration of its instrument, the *saz*.

Unlike in the northern micro-region, Ashiq art in Iranian Azerbaijan evolved along a distinct path, thriving in various settings until the 1979 revolution, when new cultural restrictions and sociopolitical changes prompted a similar transition from “Ashiq art” to “Ashiq music.”¹⁰ Despite similarities in this shift, significant differences exist in form and timing. They provide a comparative lens for understanding how distinct policy regimes reshaped both Ashiq practice and the *saz* itself.

Against this background, this article aims to uncover how these sociopolitical and cultural dynamics impacted the transformation of the *saz* fret arrangement between 1930 and 1980. It asks: what was the early fret arrangement, why and how did it change, and what sociopolitical and cultural factors explain the different timelines of fret addition between Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan? To address these questions, the study reconstructs the early fret arrangement and then discusses its subsequent transformations through the broader historical and ideological shifts that have shaped musical life in Azerbaijan.

To interpret these “shifts,” the study draws on revival theory, which conceptualizes musical change by focusing on revival and revitalization,¹¹ “a process of traditionalization that goes on in the present, to create symbolic ties to the past, for reasons of the future.”¹² Within this framework, music revivals are viewed as social movements that seek to restore musical systems perceived as endangered,¹³ preserving them against concepts such as “modernity” and cultural homogenization by positioning “tradition” as a

central concept.¹⁴ Ultimately, this framework leads the article to interpret the evolution of Ashiq art—particularly the transformation of the *saz*'s fret structure—as a parallel to the revitalization of Azerbaijan-Turkish music in response to sociopolitical changes in the USSR. The Azerbaijani case further suggests that revival and revitalization processes may also be traced within instrument design (fret arrangement), alongside repertoire and institutions, thereby positioning organology as a significant site of revival movements.

The musicological and ethnomusicological scholarship on Azerbaijani music has tended to focus on *mugham*'s modal structure, operatic reform, institutionalization, and national canon formation (e.g., Huseynova; Naroditskaya; Dessiatnitchenko; During; Şuşinski; İsmayilov),¹⁵ or on addressing performance practice, repertoire, transmissions, poetry, gender, and social changes in the *ashiq* tradition (e.g., Oldfield and Nikaeen; Albright; Eldarova; Allahmanli; Məmmədov; Başgöz; Nəbiyev; Reinhard and Pinto),¹⁶ in most of which *mugham* serves as the central modal framework for understanding Azerbaijani music in general, including *ashiq*. Although these works provide significant insights into modal theory, canonization, and cultural policy, the historical development and transformation of the *saz*'s fret arrangement have received comparatively limited attention. By focusing on the historical evolution of the *saz*'s fret arrangement alongside institutional and ideological shifts, this article extends the scholarly debate by locating organology as an overlooked dimension of modal canonization and revival processes.

Building on this theoretical framework, the study utilizes archival-historical analysis alongside multiple ethnomusicological methods, including participatory observations at physical locations and on virtual platforms like Clubhouse, alongside personal experiences and memories as an insider. Documentary fieldwork was primarily conducted in Berlin and Vienna, with primary explorative fieldwork involving non- and semi-structured interviews both virtually and face to face.

The article begins by providing historical background on *Ashiq* art and its instrument, the *saz*. It then continues with a comparative discussion of the development and current state of *Ashiq* art across the two micro-regions of Azerbaijan, drawing on ethnomusicological fieldwork and interviews. Within this context, it proceeds to an in-depth analysis of the early fret arrangement of the *saz*, based on archival and historical sources as well as early recordings and

maps indicating when, where, and why additional frets entered into practice across the region. Finally, it brings together the historical, ethnographic, and organological findings to explain how divergent timelines in fret expansion correspond to the rise and institutionalization of *mugham* under Soviet cultural policy—and how these legacies continue to shape contemporary Ashiq practice across both Azerbaijan micro-regions.

Ashiq Art in Historical Context

To understand how political structures influenced the design and meaning of the *saz*, it is essential to situate Ashiq art within its historical and organological development. Ashiq art, deeply rooted in the cultural tapestry of the broader Azerbaijan meso-region, unfolds through the captivating figure of the *ashiq*—a bard proficient in singing, playing the *saz*, and occasionally engaging in dance. Known by a multitude of names across Turkic cultures, including *bakhshi*, *ozan*, *dede*, and *ashiq*, this figure embodies the role of a storyteller, narrating *dastan* (*destan*, *hikaye* or story), and a performer, gracing events ranging from ceremonies and weddings to funerals and festivals,¹⁷ as well as public places like cafés in modern cities. *Ashiqs'* creativity is embedded with mystical religious matters, unlike Western minnesingers, who are primarily concerned with worldly matters.¹⁸

Ashiq art as a cultural phenomenon traces its roots to the *qam-shaman* of pre-Islamic Turkic cultures, undergoing a transformative journey shaped by dynamic shifts in Turkic lifestyle, particularly within the Oghuz Turk community, and the assimilation of Islamic influences.¹⁹ According to this line of interpretation, the medical, religious, and magical duties of the earlier *qam-shamans* were divided due to the transition from *qam-shaman* to *ozan*.²⁰ With consolidation of the Islam and Sufi influence, some scholars argue that *ozan* lost their spiritual responsibilities and religious activities, leading to the transition from *ozan* to *ashiq*.²¹ Unlike *ozan*, *ashiq* began to tell more love stories and romantic tales, while remaining embedded in mystical religious frameworks.²²

Ashiqs were historically significant among the Oghuz Turks, particularly in contemporary Turkey and the Azerbaijan meso-region. The divergence in Ashiq traditions between these communities partly stems from historical Sunni and Shia divisions.²³ *Ashiqs* preserve their cultural heritage through performances that transcend religious and linguistic boundaries.²⁴ Unlike the

rarity of musical funerals in Turkey-Turkish Ashiq art,²⁵ in Azerbaijani villages *ashiqs* traditionally performed at funerals, singing and playing the *saz* until mid- to late twentieth century.²⁶ This distinction clarifies the article's focus on Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq art, shaped by distinct Soviet and Iranian historical trajectories. While the tradition has historically been predominantly led by males, female *ashiqs* are documented in nineteenth-century written records and have become increasingly visible in twentieth- and twenty-first-century institutional contexts.²⁷

The Saz (Qopuz) as the Main Instrument of Ashiq

Ashiqs' instrument, the *saz* or *qopuz*, is a long-necked, fretted, and plucked lute. Currently, both names are used for this instrument in the Azerbaijan region. However, there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the *qopuz*²⁸ is the ancestor of today's *saz*, as most organological historical accounts treat them as distinct instruments.²⁹ Abdul Al-Qadir Maraghi notes two types of *qopuz*: (1) the *qopuz-i ozan*, a three-stringed instrument used to accompany Turkish poetic and prosaic narratives,³⁰ and (2) the *qopuz-i rumi*, a five-stringed version associated with court music.³¹ During the Ottoman period, related instruments spread widely, influencing lutes such as the Yemeni *qanbus* and the Hungarian *koboz*, showing the broader cultural diffusion of *qopuz*.³² Whether the *qopuz* was the predecessor of the current *saz* or not, it is evident that in parallel with the transition and changes from *ozan* to *ashiq* after approximately the fifteenth century, the *qopuz* was also changed or may have transformed into the *saz*.³³ The modern *saz* used by *ashiqs* differs from the old *qopuz* in that it is fretted rather than unfretted and lacks a skin soundboard.

Contemporary Saz: Forms, Types, and Tunings

The contemporary *saz* used by *ashiqs* in Azerbaijan exhibits a variety of sizes and names. In Azerbaijan, instruments range from the *ana saz* (mother *saz*, also known as the main *saz*) to the *cürə saz* (small *saz*) and, more recently, a bass *saz* introduced by Mehdipour in 2019.³⁴ The modern *saz* consists of eight or nine metal strings divided into three string courses (3+2+3 or 3+3+3). The most common tuning is *şah kök* or *ümumi kök* (general tuning), versatile for all songs. Additional tunings include *urfanı vəya orta pərdə kökü* (middle fret tuning), *dilqəm vəya baş pərdə kökü* (first fret tuning), *çoban bayatı kökü*, and *açıq kök* (open tuning), adjusting the middle strings while keeping the first

and third stable.³⁵ Mehdipour remembers from his childhood in the Qaradağ region that the *ashiqs* did not change the tuning in the middle of the *dastan* narration but performed all the songs in *şah pərdə kökü* or basic tuning.³⁶

A basic tuning comparable to that used in Azerbaijan also appears among the *saz* of Turkey-Turkish *ashiqs*, often termed *bozuk düzeni*.³⁷ There are, however, several types of tunings used in Turkey-Turkish *saz* (e.g., triadic tunings and an old *bağlama* tuning called *aşık düzeni*)³⁸ that are not common among Azerbaijan-Turkish *ashiqs*. The key distinction I observed between Turkey and Azerbaijan is that while *ashiqs* in Azerbaijan use alternative tunings by altering the middle string, in Turkey the third string is adjusted and the middle string remains constant.³⁹

The modern Azerbaijan-Turkish *saz* has a total of twenty frets (figure 1)⁴⁰. This expansion of the fret arrangement reflects broader cultural and ideological shifts, setting the stage for the transformations—earlier in Soviet Azerbaijan and later in Iranian Azerbaijan—explored in the following section.

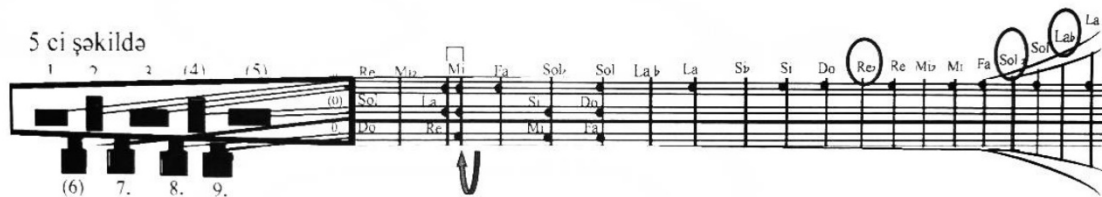


Figure 1: The fret arrangement of the modern *saz*(Mahdipour, *The School*, 44).

Ashiq Art Today: Contemporary Performances and the Dominance of *Mugham*⁴¹

In the Azerbaijan meso-region, Ashiq art performances occupy a far smaller and less visible place in the musical landscape than other musical genres. Despite cultural and historical similarities between Azerbaijan-Turkish societies in the two micro-regions of Republic of Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan, their separation since the early nineteenth century has led to distinct social and political developments, especially in recent decades. Thus, this section examines the current state of Ashiq art in two distinct contexts: (1) official concerts and festivals, including diaspora events, and (2) informal performances in local and community settings—examined separately across the two micro-regions.

Republic of Azerbaijan

In urban and state-sponsored cultural contexts of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *mugham* performances—an institutionalized, staged art music tradition articulated within the *mugham* system that took shape during the Soviet era—now dominate the musical landscape, marginalizing the *ashiqs'* narrative and ritual role. During my residence in Baku (2010–2015), I do not recall any Ashiq music concerts, showing the notable scarcity during this period. Since 2023, however, official Ashiq music concerts in Baku have been held by the Tabriz-based Dalğa Group, led by Mehdipour. My observations pertain primarily to the urban concert life of Baku. Obviously, Ashiq performances continue to take place at regional events outside the capital, particularly in western regions such as Ganja and Tovuz. However, these performances are mostly brief, music-centered, and largely detached from *dastan* narration.

In major state-sponsored music festivals such as the Uzeyir Hajibeyli and Gabala international music festivals, Ashiq art is largely absent. Similarly, the Khari Bulbul music festival in Shusha (2021–2025) has featured only one Ashiq music performance each year since 2022—programmed alongside other local and international folk ensembles rather than as national art categories, where *mugham* and classical music figured prominently. These performances, while labeled as Ashiq music, often adopt *mugham* performance aesthetics and formats—such as staged presentation, ensemble formats, and pre-structured repertoires, often introducing *mugham*-style improvisatory preludes or considering Ashiq *havalār* as *mugham* categories (for example performing *dilqəm* as *segah* or *urfani* as *orta mahur* or *rast*)—effectively subsuming *ashiq* under the *mugham* umbrella while detaching it from its narrative and ritualistic functions.

The situation in the diaspora and at international music events largely mirrors urban and state-sponsored contexts in Azerbaijan: classical, jazz, pop, and *mugham* genres dominate, while Ashiq art is extremely rare. According to Elgün Niftali, deputy director of the Azerbaijan Cultural Center in Vienna (ACCV), diaspora events have the two primary goals of promoting Azerbaijani culture abroad and connecting the Azerbaijani community overseas.⁴² These events typically align with significant dates, such as national holidays and international festivals.

In Vienna, a key center for international music, the Azerbaijani diaspora is notably active, particularly in “classical, jazz, national music, and *mugham*, which are recurrent throughout the year.”⁴³ Niftali recalls only two Ashiq performances in Austria between 2013 and 2025.

During my fieldwork, I attended one of the events noted by Niftali at the 2022 Novruz festival.⁴⁴ The event featured an ensemble⁴⁵ performing Azerbaijan-Turkish folk songs and dances based on Mugham music. Ashiq Samirə Əliyeva later presented only two Ashiq songs in *mugham* style accompanied by an ensemble. In that way, the saz appeared on stage mainly as a visual symbol (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Performance of Ashiq Samirə Əliyeva with ensemble at the Azerbaijan Cultural Center in Vienna

On 30 November 2023, I conducted documentary and participant observation fieldwork at the ACCV concert commemorating the 130th anniversary of Ashiq Şəmşir (Dədə Şəmşir). The event featured two distinct musical groups. The Ashiq Ensemble Quintet—consisting of four men in black suits with bow ties, one woman in traditional Azerbaijani attire, and a *nağara* player—led by Fəzail Orucov. They performed a blend of Ashiq and Mugham music, with two members singing and others playing the *saz*. The piano and *kamança* duo performed Fikret Amirov’s classical piece *Aşiqsayağı* and Ashiq Veysel’s Turkey-Turkish song *Uzun Ince Bir Yoldayım* on solo piano. Both performances included *mugham* introductions—*şur mugham* by the pianist before *Uzun Ince Bir Yoldayım* and *segah mugham* by Orucov before *Yanıq Kərəm*. After the

concert, a discussion between Orucov and the audience regarding costumes ensued. Some audience members suggested integrating traditional elements like the *papaq*,⁴⁶ whereas Orucov advocated for Western attire: “Do you want me to wear a *papaq* and long boots and perform while sweating profusely from head to toe?”⁴⁷ When questioned about his identity as an *ashiq* or *saz* player, he responded critically: “What does *saz* player mean? These terminologies are created by some musicologists who have no idea about the practice of Ashiq performances. An *ashiq* is an *ashiq*, whether singing, narrating, or otherwise.”⁴⁸ This exchange reflects a contemporary redefinition of Ashiq identity as a modern musical stage performer, distanced from its traditional narrative and communal functions.

These examples highlight the absence of *dastan* narration in contemporary Ashiq performances, where they occur on stage, in ensemble form rather than solo, with a clear distance from the audience, and featuring preselected music repertoire performed in structured form. Apart from the Dalğa Group and Orucov’s Ashiq ensemble, other examples adopt a *mugham*-style format, often incorporating Western instruments. In summary, aside from the limited Ashiq music activities at official concerts and festivals, including those in the diaspora, traditional Ashiq performances—involving solo *dastan* narration, central to communal rituals—are clearly absent, and “Ashiq music” has replaced “Ashiq art.”

This transition from “Ashiq art” to “Ashiq music” continues in contemporary practice, where narrative and ritual functions remain largely absent, yet the *saz* is gaining a renewed position within a growing trend, particularly in the context of weddings. On the basis of interviews I conducted in 2023 and recent observations, I found that *ashiqs* in Baku have frequently been invited to perform on certain television programs and at weddings in recent years, particularly with immigrant communities from surrounding regions.⁴⁹ Both rural and urban weddings feature lively and rhythmic music for dancing, blending Ashiq and *bayağ*⁵⁰ songs, often with synthesizers and rhythmic instruments. Rural weddings may include brief episodes of Ashiq *dastan* narratives, while urban weddings typically prioritize musical performance over storytelling.⁵¹ According to Mehdipour, “there is an increasing demand for *saz* performances at weddings.”⁵² He observes that “*tar* players are learning *saz* ... and it is rare to find a wedding in Baku where *saz* is not played.”⁵³ Qəsəbova recounts a colleague’s request for a female *ashiq* at her son’s wedding: “Let her play *saz* at my wedding. Instead of singing *mahnı* [Mugham

song], I prefer her to sing Ashiq *hava* [Ashiq song].”⁵⁴ This trend marks a reconfiguration of the social role of *ashiqs* in recent years, from traditional ritual leaders to occasional performers at weddings, where *saz* is played by guitarists or *tar* players in a “symbolic” manner. From an organological perspective, the symbolic function of the *saz* is particularly significant. Curt Sachs, a pioneer in modern organology, emphasized that instruments often serve dual roles as both musical tools and cultural symbols.⁵⁵ For instance, the piano symbolizes “modernity” in Tehran’s middle-class homes, despite it being used only occasionally.⁵⁶ Similarly, Eliot Bates notes that Turkey-Turkish musicians find *saz* integral to their identity.⁵⁷ A similar tendency is evident in the Azerbaijan-Turkish community, as seen in Əliyeva’s symbolic *saz* performance at Vienna’s Novruz festival. This symbolic use of the *saz* extends to global stages as well.⁵⁸

Islamic Republic of Iran

The situation of Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq art in concert programs in the Islamic Republic of Iran parallels that in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Concert programs predominantly feature Farsi and Azerbaijan-Turkish pop music groups, alongside occasional rock, Azerbaijan-Turkish Mugham, and Iranian Radif music concerts, while Western classical music events are rare. Ashiq music is primarily represented by the Dalğa Group.⁵⁹ However, organizing such concerts poses significant challenges due to the stringent licensing procedures enforced by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, particularly by the Public Places Monitoring Police.⁶⁰ These include bureaucratic hurdles and occasional controversies, such as political sensitivities surrounding the use of the *Dede Qorqut/Korkut* banner.⁶¹ Mehdipour laments encountering disrespectful conduct. “Each time I go there, they behave as if they are seeing me for the first time”⁶² and highlights persistent challenges with licensing requirements.⁶³ These difficulties contribute to the rarity of Ashiq concerts in Iran, where *dastan* narration remains notably absent even during the infrequent performances.

Participation of *ashiqs* at celebrations, weddings, and public venues in Iran differs slightly from that in the Republic of Azerbaijan. While Ashiq performances are rare, they are occasionally seen at weddings, particularly in rural areas. Over the past twenty-five years, Ashiq Javad Maharrami has meticulously documented his participation in weddings,⁶⁴ concerts,

and celebrations, where he prefers to maintain a traditional trio format in his performances: *saz*, *balaban*, and *qaval*. He rejects requests to include synthesizers. While Maharrami allows *xanəndə*⁶⁵ to sing intermittently between his segments, he emphasizes the importance of leading wedding rituals by himself as an *ashiq*.⁶⁶

Field Interviews conducted by Akbarpouran with Azerbaijan-Turkish *ashiqs* in Iran show a gradual decline in traditional narrative performance, replaced by music-centered formats. Ashiq Bulud Saed from Zanjan notes that, unlike in Tabriz, several cafés in Urmia and Zanjan still host *ashiqs*.⁶⁷ Ashiq Changiz Biri from Tabriz observes a shift in preference for *ashiqs* who excel as singers rather than storytellers.⁶⁸ In addition, Ashiq Abdi from Tehran attributes the decline in traditional performances to the rise of wedding halls and recorded music, which have displaced live ritual practices.⁶⁹ Despite efforts by *ashiqs* such as Maharrami to perform episodes from famous *dastans*, time limitations resulting from the high number of guests restrict narration, and, in contrast, requests are more often for song performances.⁷⁰ Maharrami's repertoire includes approximately 130 Ashiq *hava* (songs), which occasionally integrate *mugham* during performances.⁷¹ The absence of *dastan* narration at weddings remains a common issue in Iran, echoing trends observed in Azerbaijan.

More broadly, post-revolutionary Iranian music policy did not entail the complete suppression of music; rather, it reorganized and reordered musical life through regulatory and classification frameworks, in which certain licensed and institutionally recognized genres were legitimized, while others remained marginal or subject to tight control.⁷² The challenges faced by *ashiqs*, including economic hardships, limited governmental support, societal changes, and modern distractions, hinder the development and preservation of Ashiq art in Iran. Ashiq Ali Qaraaghaji adds that financial pressures and time constraints reduce audience engagement with *ashiqs* at various venues.⁷³ Similarly, Jabir Ismailzade, a moderator actively involved in Ashiq performances, highlights instances in which the ministry rejected licenses due to lyrical content.⁷⁴ In Iran, *ashiqs* face significant hurdles in public performances: "It is not easy for an *ashiq* to go on stage and sing ..., there are many restrictions,"⁷⁵ as they must obtain a license, with strict pre-approval of songs and texts. This type of restriction, along with censorship on television and limitations on promotion,⁷⁶ have severely restricted *ashiqs'* cultural expression and public engagement in Iran.⁷⁷ These constraints also overlap with the broader cultural policy surrounding "regional" and minority music in the Iranian context, where

visibility is structured through controlled festival and institutional frameworks. As ethnomusicologist Ameneh Youssefzadeh observes, “the integration of various regional musics of Iran within festivals and other cultural arenas ... responds to the aim of the central power to reinforce the unity of the Iranian nation ... while allowing ethnic groups to enjoy a certain official ‘recognition.’”⁷⁸ From this perspective, limited public visibility should be understood as a form of regulated inclusion whereby regional performances are permitted primarily within authorized and institutionally legible formats.

Under this regime of regulated visibility and restricted performance space, institutional music education emerged as a state-legible framework for sustaining musical practice. While musical activity, including education, had already been prohibited by the Islamic regime in the early post-revolutionary era, the first music school was established in 1988 in the Iranian Azerbaijan region by the Azerbaijani *tar* master Mahmud Shaterian. It was later followed by other Azerbaijani *tar* masters, including Ali Salimi—who had received formal training in Baku—and Hasan Hargoli (known as Hasan Azerbaijan), as well as the *kamança* master Ali Farshbaf, whose training and aesthetic backgrounds were grounded in the Azerbaijani *mugham* tradition. Mehdipour’s subsequently established first Ashiq music school in 1993 thus emerged within this already *mugham*-oriented pedagogical and performative landscape.

While Ashiq art faces restrictions, censorship, and limited public visibility in Iran, it encounters a different set of challenges in the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan. The contemporary landscape of Ashiq music is profoundly shaped by *mugham*’s institutional dominance in the Republic of Azerbaijan, which contrasts with the more traditional practices maintained in Iranian Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan, *mugham* exerts hegemony across classical, jazz, and even folk genres, overshadowing Ashiq music. Elements of *mugham* improvisation appear even in Ashiq performances, where ensemble structure integrates *saz* into a *mugham* framework. This dominance extends beyond musical spheres into social realms: most Mugham *xanəndə* (Mugham singers) and *strada* music performers receive official artistic titles⁷⁹ from the Azerbaijan Ministry of Culture, whereas *ashiqs* are notably excluded.⁸⁰ Mehdipour recalls an incident where a prominent Mugham *xanəndə* dismissed Ashiq music as lacking formal education or written materials, stating, “music without books or scientific education must be discarded.”⁸¹ It is common to confront the general view of “Ashiq art as rural, second hand, and out of modernity.”⁸²

Niftali observes that Ashiq music, its attire and performance style are often seen as incompatible with modern sensibilities.⁸³

The cultural hierarchy privileging *mugham* and classical music is also evident in educational settings. Samir Asadov, a violinist and conductor of the contemporary ensemble Cadenza in Baku and originating from Qazax, recalls being encouraged to focus on traditional instruments like the *saz* rather than violin when he moved to Baku.⁸⁴ He sees this as emblematic of classical and *Mugham* music's dominance in Baku's musical milieu. This hierarchy is not simply an urban-rural divide, but a system of cultural valuation that elevates *mugham* as national art while marginalizing Ashiq practice. When asked about this issue, Niftali explained the general absence of Ashiq performances abroad in similar terms: "[When] someone thinks about their art or culture, which they can organize quickly, [they have to choose from] other [artistic performance] areas that are dominant [in Azerbaijan]."⁸⁵

In conclusion, the comparative study of the two micro-regions shows that while Ashiq art in Iranian Azerbaijan was able to preserve its originality and traditional performance features until approximately the 1970s, it experienced more layered adaptation and change as a result of Soviet state ideology and institutional frameworks in Soviet Azerbaijan during the 1930s. Even with different historical paths between the two micro-regions, we can locate *mugham's* hegemony within the meso-regional context of Azerbaijan. Here, *mugham's* canon is not simply an aesthetic choice but the result of historically contingent processes that restructured hierarchies in musical performance. The institutionalized form of *mugham* under Soviet cultural policy reshaped and marginalized Ashiq art at multiple levels, which influenced the evolution of the musical instruments used by *ashiqs*, particularly the fret arrangement of the *saz*. The following section examines these transformations through historical and archival perspectives.

The Early Fret Arrangement: Historical and Comparative Perspectives

This section examines all major available sources on the early fret arrangement of the *saz* by drawing on written documentations, interviews, and the earliest known Ashiq music recordings from the Azerbaijan meso-region. The analysis focuses on comparative fret arrangement configurations rather than

tone systems through materials ranging from oral recollections to printed pedagogical works. The discussion begins with the Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq art in Iran, with Changiz Mehdipour, whose publications played a central role in formalizing the modern pedagogy of the *saz*. His two-volume *The School of Saz* provides transcription of various Ashiq music songs in five-line staff notation for solo *saz* performance, along with observations on fret arrangement and tonal structure.⁸⁶

The book begins with an overview of Ashiq art and its history, followed by two sections titled “General Music Theory” and “Fret Structure and Tone System.” The music-theoretical discussion is based entirely on Western music theory, while his perspective on the Ashiq music’s tone system shares general subjective opinions rather than scholarly findings. However, the section on fret arrangement provides valuable information. Drawing on his childhood recollections, Mehdipour presents the fret arrangement of *saz* used by his uncle and various *ashiqs* of Qaradağ. According to his memory from the period between approximately 1965 and 1975, the *saz* used by Azerbaijan-Turkish *ashiqs* in the Qaradağ region in Iran had a total of six frets, with the notes⁸⁷ E, F, G, A, B-flat, and C (figure 3)⁸⁸.

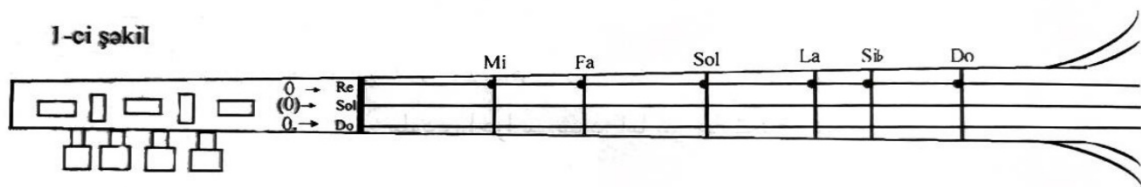


Figure 3: The first fret arrangement of the *saz* in Iran, recorded by Mehdipour between 1965 and 1975

The *saz* in the Qaradağ region of Iranian Azerbaijan—one of the most significant regions for Ashiq art activity—retained only six frets about fifty years ago. Mehdipour recalls that the first change in fret arrangement involved adding four frets, F-sharp, A-flat, B natural, and D, marking the earliest stage in the gradual expansion of the instrument’s tonal range. He then mentions the second change, involving the addition of the first octave’s E-flat, a fret between the first octave’s E and F, and the second octave’s E-flat, E, F, G, and A. Finally, three more frets, the second octave’s D-flat, G-flat, and A-flat, were added by Mehdipour himself (figure 1). While Mehdipour’s book provides valuable information regarding how additional frets were introduced to the *saz* played by *ashiqs* in the Qaradağ region of Iranian Azerbaijan, it is significant

to examine other sources and recordings regarding the submission of early fret arrangements in the Azerbaijan meso-region.

Although audio recordings of the Congress of Azerbaijani Ashiqs from 1928 are known to exist in state archives, access to these materials remains restricted. Consequently, the audiovisual recording of the Second Ashiq Congress in Ganja in 1938⁸⁹ constitutes the earliest available source that permits aural identification of specific frets in Ashiq performance. The film was recorded by the director Niyazi Bədəlov in 1938, during the second meeting of *ashiqs* held in honor of Stalin. The recording includes five Ashiq performances. Although the video quality does not provide the opportunity for visual recognition of fret arrangement on the *saz*, in the second performance, *Stalin Song* by Aşıq Mirzə, the use of the first octave's B-natural fret and the second octave's D-natural fret is audibly identifiable.⁹⁰ This indicates that by 1938, the B-natural fret and D-natural fret had already been established on the *saz* of *ashiqs* in Soviet Azerbaijan. However, according to Mehdipour's memory, these frets did not appear on the *saz* used by *ashiqs* in Iran until four decades later. The fret arrangement of *saz* documented by musicologist Tariyel Məmmədov closely resembles Mehdipour's "third stage" of fret expansion, one step before Mehdipour made the last revisions (figure 1).⁹¹ My first encounter with the fret arrangement similar to the one noted by Mehdipour was in a publication by Quluzadə,⁹² where excepting the second octave D fret, all other frets were written as Mehdipour remembered them from his childhood. A subsequent source documenting the same fret arrangement is Eldarova's *The Ashiq Art of Azerbaijan*, one of the most significant scholarly references on Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq art (figure 4).⁹³

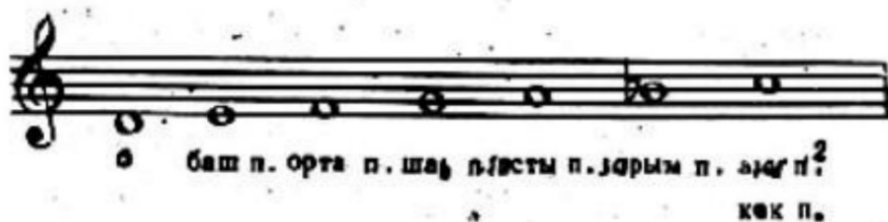


Figure 4: The fret arrangement of the *saz* in the Republic of Azerbaijan, noted by Eldarova

Eldarova, who conducted her research in Soviet Azerbaijan and, as a student, was motivated by Hajibeyli to study Ashiq art, describes the same process of fret expansion that Mehdipour outlined in his book, yet she situates it in an earlier historical period. Mehdipour recalls the early fret arrangement visible

on the *saz* of Azerbaijan-Turkish *ashiqs* in Iran around 1965, and he personally witnessed the subsequent additions. Although Eldarova does not mention the date of early fret arrangement in the Republic of Azerbaijan, she refers to the year 1930 for the next step of fret expansion,⁹⁴ mirroring Mehdipour's second phase. This indicates that the second step of fret expansion noted by Mehdipour was already established on the *saz* of *ashiqs* in Ganja by 1930, the only difference being the A-flat fret. Additionally, Mehdipour's early fret arrangement is visible on the *saz* of Ashiq Fətullah from Nakhchivan in 1938 (figure 5: No. 6)⁹⁵ and Ashiq Mirzə Bayramov from Tovuz in 1945 (figure 5: No. 13) noted by Eldarova.

In sum, all of these factors bring me to the conclusion that the fret arrangement of the *saz* of Azerbaijan-Turkish *ashiqs* in Iran was capable of retaining its six-fret arrangement structure (figure 3) until approximately 1965, whereas it was the same in the *saz* of *ashiqs* in the Republic of Azerbaijan before 1930 (figure 4). Thus, the earliest documented fret arrangement of *saz* in both regions included a total of six frets: E, F, G, A, B-flat, and C. According to Eldarova, it is probable that the early fret arrangement of the *saz* consisted only of three frets, E, F, and G, after which the A fret and then the B-flat fret were added.⁹⁶ However, since Eldarova does not provide any primary sources for this claim and I have not encountered this configuration in other written or recorded materials, Mehdipour's description remains the most reliable evidence of the early fret arrangement in both micro-regions, as it was also documented by Eldarova in 1930. Through the addition of the open strings (first, middle, and last) with these frets, the final sounds produced by the *saz* with early fret arrangement can be represented as shown in figure 6.⁹⁷

The comparable early fret arrangement of the Azerbaijan-Turkish *saz* is observed on Ashiq Nesimi Çimen's *saz*, as recorded by Reinhard and Pinto in Turkey,⁹⁸ suggesting a shared historical practice across the wider Turkic region (figure 7).⁹⁹

Although many Turkey-Turkish *saz* display a fifteen- to twenty-fret microtonal arrangement, instruments documented in the same book in 1963 and 1970 show fret arrangements closely resembling those used in Azerbaijan. Similarly, Picken's description of the fret arrangement of *saz* recorded in 1962 in Izmir reflects this continuity: the early Azerbaijani fret arrangement is clearly visible, with an additional F-sharp (in D-G-C tuning), for a total of eight frets.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Picken's next examples of fret arrangements from other

1. Ashiq's name is not readable (1936)
(according to Krivosova)
1936

2. İslam Yüsifov (1938)
(according to Krivosova)

3. İslam yusifov (1945)

4. İbrahim Qaraçı oğlu Öliyev
Qara Movlayev (1945)

5. Əsəd Rzayev (1938)

6. Mirzə Bayramov (1945)

7. Şəmşir Qocayev (1961)

8. Talıb Ələcgər oğlu (1961)

9. Sadiq Cultanov (1938)

10. Əmrəh, hüseyn Saraçlı (1957)

11. Ədalət Nəşibov (1961)

12. Hüseyn Bayramov (1961)

13. Fətullah (1938)

14. Abbas Abbasov (1961)

15. Qurbanxan (1961)

Gəncə

Tovuz

Kəlbəcər

Gəncə

Borçalı

Qazax

Qarabağ

Naxçıvan

Salyan

Figure 5: The saz fret arrangement of the fifteen *ashaqs* from various regions within the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan between 1938 and 1963



Figure 6: The sounds that can be produced by a saz with an early fret arrangement

a h c' d' e' f' g' a' h' c'' d''

Müsel Sınan

Yalut (S. 22)

Saz (Samudra Reinhard)

Picken (S. 290)

Yalut (S. 22)

Uzeyir

Instrument aus Sines

Mevimi Çimen

Figure 7: The fret arrangement of the eight Turkey-Turkish *ashiqs'* saz

regions of Turkey on the same page illustrate the similar gradual expansion process—from approximately fifteen frets in an intermediate stage to about nineteen in the modern form—some five frets fewer than the twenty-four quarter-tone frets of the Iranian *setar*.¹⁰¹ Taken together, these sources show that *saz* in both Azerbaijan and Turkey regions originated from a shared six- to eight- fret prototype, to which additional frets were gradually added over time. According to Reinhard and Pinto, the *saz* in urban centers of Turkey had more frets (12–24) than those in rural areas,¹⁰² which implies that the expansion of fret arrangement likely emerged in urban centers, where artistic innovation and cultural exchange were more intense.

In conclusion, the organological and historical evidence indicates a broadly consistent early fret arrangement across the wider Turkic cultural sphere, including both the Azerbaijan meso-region and Turkey, which underwent a gradual process of fret addition over time. However, the temporal disparity of approximately four decades between the two Azerbaijan micro-regions distinguishes the development of fret arrangement between the Azerbaijan-Turkish *ashiqs* in Iran and those in the Republic of Azerbaijan. This discrepancy suggests that it was the sociopolitical and cultural contexts rather than purely musical or technical factors that played a crucial role in shaping these developments. To gain insight on these contexts, the following section discusses the historical and ideological transformations that influenced this evolution of the *saz* and its fret arrangement across both regions.

The Rise of *Mugham*: Cultural Reconfiguration and the Soviet Legacy

Understanding the evolution of fret arrangements on the *saz* requires situating it within the sociopolitical and cultural dynamics that shaped musical life across the Azerbaijan meso-region. These dynamics not only shaped musical practices but also played a pivotal role in defining regional variations in the instruments themselves. While the previous section traced the technical evolution of the *saz*, this section examines the cultural forces that shaped that process. Until the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq art maintained a robust presence across diverse settings—from rural villages to urban centers, spanning ceremonies such as funerals, weddings, and café performances. Ethnomusicologist İlhan Başgöz conducted extensive

fieldwork in 1970 at *Aşıqlar Qəfəsi*, documenting the lively participation of *ashiqs* and their *dastan* narration and engaging with audiences. Memories shared by Ashiq Hasan Eskandari and Behruz Heschmat¹⁰³ underscore the prominence of *ashiqs* during this pre-revolutionary era, symbolizing sociopolitical movements as exemplified by Heschmat's *Aşıqlar* sculptor (figure 8).¹⁰⁴



Figure 8: *Aşıqlar* sculpture by Behruz Heschmat in Şahgölü park of Tabriz, before it was removed by the Pahlavi regime in 1976

Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq art flourished widely, encompassing a range of venues and events, not only weddings but even certain funeral rites at villages around the city of Urmia and the Qaradağ region.¹⁰⁵ This phenomenon has particular significance due to its departure from Islamic norms, exemplifying the revered historical status of *ashiqs* in Azerbaijan-Turkish culture. Akbarpouran's interviews further illustrate their esteemed role as ritual specialists, sometime even invoked for blessing for rain and healing through song.¹⁰⁶ Ashiq art's enduring prominence in both rural and urban areas of Iran reflects cultural continuity and relative autonomy under successive Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties until the 1979 revolution. The Republic of Azerbaijan experienced a different trajectory under Russian rule, where new sociopolitical conditions encouraged the ascent of urban musical forms. By contrast, in the territories incorporated into the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, Ashiq art followed a markedly different trajectory. In

the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Şuşa in Qarabağ—where Uzeyir Hajibeyli grew up—emerged as a center of Maqam-Dastgah music.¹⁰⁷ Although *xanəndələr* and *sazəndələr*¹⁰⁸ were active among the nobility and ruling class in regions of present-day Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia after the 1828 separation from Iranian Azerbaijan, they only began to influence the ordinary population after the Russian Revolution of 1905.¹⁰⁹ In parallel with the rise of Azerbaijan-Turkish cultural nationalism after the mid-nineteenth century, key musical developments took place, such as Mirzə Sadiq Əsədöglü's modification of the *tar*—producing the present-day Azerbaijani *tar*—and Cabbar Qarayağdioğlu's use of *ghazals* in the Azerbaijan-Turkish language rather than Farsi.¹¹⁰

In parallel with the rise of Azerbaijan-Turkish nationalism, *ashiqs* once again attracted the attention of the elite class and political leaders such as M. Rasulzadə (Rəsulzadə)—the founder of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) in 1918. In a 1922 article, Rasulzadə explains the Azerbaijan-Turks' identity crisis between the people and the Russian-Iranian-oriented elites in the early twentieth century, noting that “[Azerbaijan-]Turks, sensing that they were being cast out of their own national essence while the elite ignored it, rose up against this estrangement.”¹¹¹ In this sense, Rasulzadə describes the *ashiqs* as “heroes of the uprising,” who were able to “penetrate so deeply into the heart of the Azerbaijan-Turkish masses” through *dastans* such as *Koroğlu*, *Əsli və Kərəm*, and *Aşıq Qərib*, performed “under heart-piercing, soul-soothing melodies,” where “neither the Farsi Nuşə-i Fərin, Fərhad and Şirin, nor even Ferdowsi or Hafez could compete with them.”¹¹² Rasulzadə's claim shows Ashiq art's strong association with Azerbaijan-Turkish nationalism, in which the political significance of *ashiqs* emerges through *dastan* as a ritual-narrative function alongside music.

After the collapse of the ADR in 1920, the popular Ashiq genre among the working class was potentially useful for USSR cultural organizations in promoting socialist ideals,¹¹³ but its “dastan performance was infused with elements [such as Islamic mysticism and historical connections to Iranian and Turkish cultures] that the USSR wanted Azerbaijanis to forget.”¹¹⁴ Beyond mysticism, however, the *ashiqs'* ritual-narrative function was also the carrier of a recent ADR-era nationalist project that conflicted directly with the engineering of a Soviet nationality. Although Maqam-Dastgah music also came under USSR attack, as “many individuals in the 1920s and the 1930s tried to completely get rid of *mugham* [maqam-dastgah] and *tar* because of their links

to Persian [Iranian] culture,”¹¹⁵ it did not encode a competing local nationalist project and did not occupy Ashiq art’s social and ritualistic-narrative position. Here, the main concern for Soviet cultural authorities was the redefinition of cultural traditions within the newly emergent socialist nation-building process, and it was precisely at this point that “folk music” assumed a significant role.

One of the major intellectual trends during the nineteenth century that sparked the revival phenomenon of the twentieth century was “romantic nationalism.” According to the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, folk poetry and customs reflect the national soul.¹¹⁶ Additionally, ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman argues that “folk music” serves as a means of “museumizing” a nation-state,¹¹⁷ indicating a strong relationship between “nationalism” and “revival.” These ideas—connecting national identity to folk culture—resonated strongly within Soviet ideology.

In the early twentieth century, Ashiq art was considered the folk music of Azerbaijan-Turks. This understanding is clearly reflected on the cover of *Azərbaycan Türk El Nəğmələri* (*Azerbaijan-Turkish land songs*) by Hacıbəyli and M. Maqomayev (1927), which depicts an *ashiq* performing with a *saz*, symbolizing the earlier association between “folk music” and the Ashiq tradition prior to Soviet redefinition (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Cover of *Azərbaycan Türk El Nəğmələri* (*Azerbaijan-Turkish land songs*) (Baku: Azərənəşr, 1927), compiled and notated by Hacıbəyli and M. Maqomayev

This issue coincides with Ashiq art’s gradual marginalization in urban musical life and the rise of *maqam-dastgah* musicians in the post-ADR period, after

1920. Uzeyir Hajibeyli observed this shift in his 1928 article “Ashiq Art,”¹¹⁸ noting the rise of *sazəndələr* and *xanəndələr* in cities and wealthy villages, which led to a gradual decline in *ashiqs’* activity. During this period, the first “revitalization movement” in Ashiq art culminated in the First Congress of Azerbaijani Ashiqs in 1928. Although Hajibeyli later claimed the congress was successful, it is noteworthy that the revitalization ultimately transformed Ashiq art into concertized “Ashiq music,” emphasizing musical performance over narrative and ritual. The video recording of the Second Congress of Azerbaijani Ashiqs in 1938 highlights this transition: *ashiqs* performed staged music omitting *dastan* narration, with the mention of an “Ashiq choir” being formed for the first time in history. The lyrics changed to praise and admiration for Stalin and the Soviet Union, while performance formats adopted features of Soviet concert organization.

The transformation of Ashiq art into collective staged performance must be understood as part of a broader Soviet reorganization of musical life, in which traditional genres were reclassified based on their social and ideological functions within the USSR. As Marina Frolova-Walker and Jonathan Walker discuss in *Music and Soviet Power, 1917–1932*, music was increasingly oriented toward collective performance, institutional dissemination, and ideological legibility.¹¹⁹ This tendency became particularly evident after the late 1920s and early 1930s with the rise of organizations such as RAPM (Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians) and was later continued under “Socialist realism” through processes of standardization. This process coincided with Ashiq art, which was gradually detached from its ritual-narrative structure and reformulated into staged, standardized cultural forms compatible with congresses, state ensembles, and concert institutions. Thus, the transition from “Ashiq art” to “Ashiq music” during the USSR period—clearly evident in the 1938 video recording—reflects a broader Soviet tendency to redefine folk culture itself in the service of socialist nation-building.

This shift is also clearly visible in terminological changes. For example, in comparison to the 1927 volume *Azərbaycan Türk El Nəğmələri* (Azerbaijan-Turkish land songs) by Hajibeyli, the Soviet-period publication *Azərbaycan Xalq Mahnıları* (Azerbaijani folk songs),¹²⁰ issued under Hajibeyli’s name in 1954, reflects a terminological shift in which *el* changed to *xalq* (*narod*) and a move toward a more nationalized understanding of folk culture through the removal of “Turk,” retaining only “Azerbaijan.” Hajibeyli’s seminal book *Azərbaycan Xalq Musiqisinin Əsasları* (Principles of Azerbaijani folk music) (1945)¹²¹ provides

another significant example of this historical shift. While “Turk” is removed and *xalq* is used to denote the “Azerbaijani” people, the book contains no reference to Ashiq music and focuses exclusively on the *maqam-dastgah* tradition.

Thus, we can see all these changes as part of a “revitalization” movement led by “mediators” such as Hajibeyli, who sought “to preserve the ‘tradition’ in the music of the Azerbaijan-Turkish community by incorporating it into a new structure and form compatible with USSR policies and restrictions,”¹²² which resulted in the creation of *mugham* as the legitimized national folk framework, where Ashiq art could survive only as subcultural music by losing its ritual-narrative and sociopolitical function.

Approximately four decades after Hajibeyli’s death, the Azerbaijan-Turkish musicologist Firudin Şuşinski noted the deep-rooted significance of *mugham* within Azerbaijan-Turkish society, emphasizing its preservation as a “national treasure.”¹²³ Notably, while Hajibeyli uses the term *maqam* (макам) in the seminal 1945 book and in the later Russian publication of 1957,¹²⁴ the post-1962 editions in Russian, Azerbaijan-Turkish, and English replace it with *mugham* (muğam or myzam),¹²⁵ which indicates that the terminological shift itself formed as part of a broader Soviet nationalization and consolidation of the modal tradition. By this time, the Soviet-endorsed version of *mugham*, detached from its *ashiq* roots, had already become institutionalized as both a “folk” and “national” cultural symbol of Soviet “Azerbaijani” people. The reclassification of *mugham* as “folk music” is significant, as in “the European context ... [this term] is largely synonymous with ‘traditional music.’”¹²⁶ While Ashiq art historically fulfilled the role of folk music, *mugham* came to occupy this symbolic position—despite its courtly and composite origins. In this regard, *mugham* as defined by the Soviet era may be understood as a modernized and institutionalized form of modal practice, distinct from the earlier *maqam-dastgah* tradition both socially and structurally.

Here, the elevation of *mugham* to the status of national folk music goes beyond cultural classification and extends into the gradual normalization of a specific modal system, which provides a lens through which to understand the addition of frets on the *saz*. A reading of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century musicological sources, such as Mir Mohsun Navvab’s (Nəvvab) seminal book, demonstrates the common usage of six *dastgahs* in Azerbaijan: *rast*, *mahur*, *şahnaz*, *rəhavi*, *çargah*, and *nəva*.¹²⁷ This modal landscape does not correspond, either in name or in number, to Hajibeyli’s later formulation of a standardized

system of seven principal lads: *rast*, *şur*, *segah*, *şuştar*, *bayatı-şiraz*, *çargah*, and *hümayun*, defined as the basic principles of Soviet Azerbaijani “folk music” and subsequently accepted as the concept of the “seven main *mughams*” in Azerbaijani musicology and artistic practice (figure 10).¹²⁸

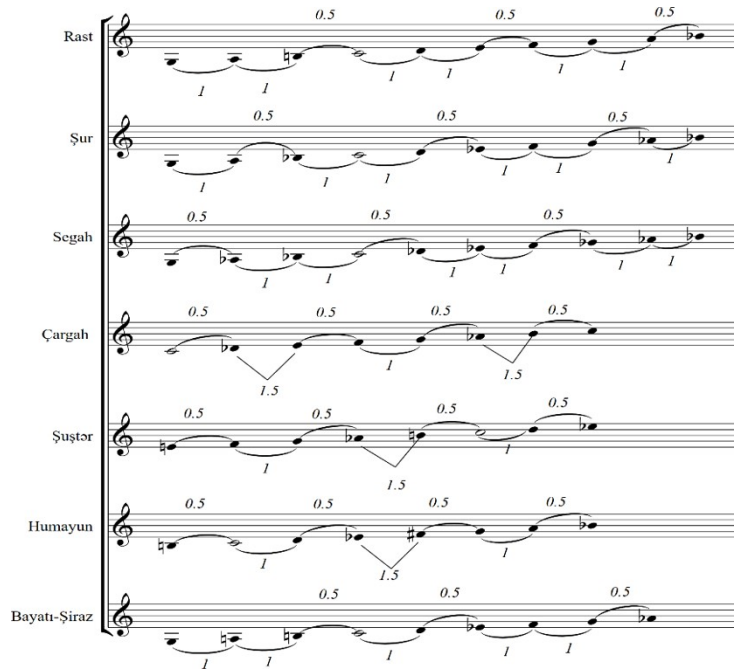


Figure 10: Seven *lads/mughams* defined by Hajibeyli in his *Principles of Azerbaijani Folk Music* (1945)

Through a careful analysis of the seven *lads/mughams*, we observe that only three—*rast*, *şur*, and *segah*—can be performed using the early fret arrangement of the *saz*. The absence of the one-and-a-half-tone interval, a vital component of *şuştar*, *çargah*, and *hümayun*, in the early fret arrangement of the *saz* renders these modes unperformable on the instrument. Although *bayatı-şiraz* does not include a one-and-a-half-tone interval in its fundamental structure, performing its cadence on the *maye* requires a half-tone leading tone. In the early fret arrangement, only two positions—either D or G—with a minor third allow *bayatı-şiraz* to be formulated, where both C-sharp and F-sharp are absent. Significantly, this observation overlaps with the comparatively less frequent appearance of *şuştar*, *çargah*, *hümayun*, and *bayatı-şiraz* in the historical Ashiq repertoire, unlike modal frameworks designated as *rast*, *şur*, and *segah*, which form its core modal basis. This supports the idea that the early fret arrangement was structurally sufficient for Ashiq modal practice but became insufficient only in relation to the later canonization of the Soviet seven *lads/mughams*, which appears to have made the gradual addition of further frets necessary.

In sum, the gradual expansion of frets on the *saz* can be understood as a material adaptation to *mugham's* modal canonization as the “national folk music” of the Soviet Azerbaijani people, which allowed *ashiqs* to participate in standardized practices and ensemble-oriented performance settings under Soviet policies.

Conclusion

The journey of Ashiq art spans epochs and cultures, evolving from its origins in the pre-Islamic era to its institutionalized contemporary forms. This evolution has been shaped by profound sociopolitical and cultural changes, which influenced the development of Ashiq art and its music. As Ashiq tradition transitioned over long historical periods to modern Ashiq music, the *saz* emerged as a vital instrument accompanying *ashiqs*, undergoing a transformation from its historical roots to its modern forms alongside the changing dynamics of Ashiq culture.

My ethnomusicological fieldwork in both regions reveals a pronounced transformation in the role of *ashiqs*. *Dastan* narration has largely disappeared, leading to a redefinition of their traditional social role as ritual performers to stage musicians or occasionally wedding entertainers. Simultaneously, *mugham's* dominance and its hegemony within the Azerbaijan-Turkish musical environment has shaped Ashiq performance and overshadowed it in cultural estimation. As a result, Ashiq art, once central to Azerbaijan-Turkish communal life, is now often regarded as “uncivilised” or “outdated,” a perspective that further marginalizes it within the hierarchy of national arts. This shift from ritual leadership to staged performance exemplifies how modernization and ideology reshape both artistic form and social meaning.

Through analysis of written sources, interviews, and historical recordings, this study identified the early six-fret arrangement of the *saz*, which challenges conventional perspectives. This configuration persisted into the 1930s in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the 1970s in Iranian Azerbaijan, and the mid-twentieth century in Turkey, reflecting regional variations and the gradual process of fret addition. The early six-fret arrangement of the *saz* exhibits a structure with fewer fixed numbers of frets and smaller microtonal deviations, differing from both Iranian and Ottoman art music instruments historically developed within the *maqam* theoretical framework—particularly associated with Urmawi and Maraghi—which articulated the octave through a seventeen-step division.

In conclusion, the approximately four-decade temporal discrepancy between fret expansion in Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan appears closely linked to broader sociopolitical shifts, particularly the integration of court *Maqam-Dastgah* music into public life and the musical exchanges between *xanəndə* and *ashiq* after the Russian Revolution of 1905. In particular, new policy goals during the Soviet era aimed at altering the structure of Ashiq art, such as the removal of its basic elements like *dastan* narration, and the “nationalization” of *mugham* as the “folk music” of the “Soviet Azerbaijani” people institutionalized a cultural hierarchy in which Ashiq art was framed as subordinate. In this context, *mugham*'s contemporary dominance is not simply an aesthetic preference but the outcome of historical reconfiguration. By positioning *mugham* as the legitimate heir to the *maqam-dastgah* legacy together with its institutional canonization and terminological stabilization, Soviet frameworks reframed the hierarchy of genres in ways that remain visible today. From a post-revival theory perspective, *mugham* has solidified its status as a central national genre in the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan, prominently represented in state-sponsored festivals, international cultural events, and official discourse, highlighting its enduring role following its “revitalization” during the Soviet era. Conversely, there is a notable absence of similar recognition for Ashiq art and its music in these contexts in different layers. This framing continues to influence both public discourse and scholarly terminology today, where *mugham* and *maqam-dastgah* are often used interchangeably—obscuring the genre's hybrid origins and reinforcing the marginalization of Ashiq art.

The modal canonization of *mugham* as a standardized system of seven principal *lads/mughams* within Soviet Azerbaijani “national folk music” appears to have created new pressures regarding the addition of new frets, coinciding with Soviet cultural policies of standardization and collective ensemble-oriented performance from the late 1920s and early 1930s onward, which required *ashiqs* to adapt to a defined modal framework. As shown in the modal analysis above, the early six-fret arrangement of the *saz* was structurally incapable of performing four of the seven canonized *lads/mughams* due to the absence of one-and-a-half-tone intervals between frets and the lack of specific leading tones, which constituted a practical precondition for participation in the newly standardized modal system and thereby made gradual fret addition desirable.

Although Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq art in Iran retained its originality in terms of social position, performance form, and the early fret arrangement of the *saz* until the 1970s, subsequent changes driven by policies influenced

by Islamization and censorship precipitated a notable decline in *dastan* performance and a transition from “Ashiq art” to “Ashiq music.” This parallel transition coincided with the emergence of new methods of *saz* instruction and forms of modern instrumental education, now positioned as a subculture within the already canonized and institutionally consolidated *mugham* modal framework of Soviet Azerbaijan. Thus, the addition of frets may be understood as an adaptation process that enabled the *saz* to approximate the intervallic and modal structure of other *mugham*-oriented instruments, such as the *tar*, within both pedagogical and performance environments. Similarly, signs of a comparable process of fret addition appear in the contemporary Republic of Turkey between the early and mid-twentieth century, though this remains a subject for future investigation from a comparative perspective. Ultimately, the evolving fret structure of the *saz* offers more than an organological record—it embodies the ways cultural policy, ideology, and identity politics become inscribed into the very materiality of musical instruments.

Notes

1. The term *ashiq* is used in italics, except when used adjectivally, such as in Ashiq music and Ashiq song, or as a title for individuals such as Ashiq Maharrami and Ashiq Eskandari. The term *mugham* is subject to the same rules. Azerbaijan-Turkish terms follow contemporary Azerbaijan-Turkish Latin orthography. Persian and Arabic-derived terms (e.g., *maqam*, *dastgah*) are rendered in simplified transliteration without diacritics. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Azerbaijan-Turkish, Turkey-Turkish, Persian, and German are my own.
2. Aria Torkanbouri, "The Congress of Azerbaijani Ashiqs in Ganja, 1938," YouTube video, posted September 21, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEIMFGeQbew>.
3. Changiz Mehdipour, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, Tabriz, December 8, 2020, conducted in Azerbaijan-Turkish. Torkanbouri's personal archive.
4. Charlotte Albright, "The Aşiq and His Music in Northwest Iran (Azerbaijan)," *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, vol. 6 (New York: Routledge, 2002), 843–52; Anna Oldfield and Behrang Nikaeen, "The Azerbaijani Ashiq: Musical Change, Transmission, and the Future of a Bardic Art," *Journal of Folklore Research* 57, no. 3 (2020): 1–26; Anna Oldfield and Behrang Nikaeen, "The Azeri Aşiq in Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan: Towards a Transnational Comparison of a Diverging Tradition," *Musicologist* 2, no. 2 (2018): 166–82; Aria E. Torkanbouri, "The Sociopolitical and Music-Theoretical Reasons for the Decline of Azerbaijan-Turkish Ashiq Art Activity in the Last Century" (master's thesis, University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Department of Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology, 2023); İlhan Başgöz, "Turkish Hikaye-Telling Tradition in Azerbaijan, Iran," *The Journal of American Folklore* 83, no. 330 (1970): 391–405; Jean During, "Azerbaijan," *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, 2001, accessed July 13, 2025, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.0001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000053092>; Azad Nəbiyev, "Azərbaycanda aşiq sənəti" [Ashiq poetry in Azerbaijan], *Journal of Azerbaijani Studies* 7, no. 3–4 (2004): 126–52; Ursula Reinhard and Tiago de Oliveira Pinto, *Sänger und Poeten mit der Laute: türkische âşık und ozan*, no. 1 (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1990); Mahmud Allahmanli, *Shaman, Ozan and Ashiq* (Bakı: Ağrıdağ, 2002); Tariyel Məmmədov, "Azərbaycan Xalq Musiqisinin Əsasları," Bakı Musiqi Akademiyası, accessed July 13, 2025, <https://www.musicacademy.edu.az/az/tarikh/virtual-muzeyi/130-yaradiciligi/xalq-musiqisinin-aseslari>; and Elxan Babayev, *Şifahi Ənənəli Azərbaycan Musiqisində İntonasiya Problemləri* [Intonation problems in oral traditional Azerbaijani music] (Baku: Elm, 1998).
5. Üzeyir Hacıbəyli/Hacıbəyov/Hajibeyov/Gadjibekov.
6. *Maqam-dastgah* refers to a modal music system rooted in fourteenth-century *maqam* theory, later reorganized into structured *dastgah* suites in the nineteenth century. The hyphenated form "*maqam-dastgah*" is used here to indicate historical and conceptual continuity between related modal traditions, without presuming structural uniformity or uninterrupted development. This practice was performed in Azerbaijani and Iranian contexts until the 1920s, when it was gradually replaced by the term *mugham* in Azerbaijan and *radif* in Iran. While *mugham* is conventionally treated as a continuation of the *maqam-dastgah* tradition, recent perspectives highlight that the Soviet-era construction of *mugham* selectively merged Maqam-Dastgah and Ashiq structures—ultimately marginalizing Ashiq art in official narratives.
7. Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Principles of Azerbaijan Folk Music* (Baku: Yazıçı, 1985).
8. Polina Dessiatnitchenko, *Musical and Ontological Possibilities of Mugham Creativity in Pre-Soviet*,

Soviet, and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2017); Aida Huseynova, *Music of Azerbaijan: From Mugham to Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016); Inna Naroditskaya, *Song from the Land of Fire: Continuity and Change in Azerbaijanian Mugham* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002); Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 2013); and Torkanbouri, *The Sociopolitical*.

9. Oldfield and Nikaeen, "The Azerbaijani Ashiq"; Oldfield and Nikaeen, "The Azeri Aşiq."
10. Torkanbouri, *The Sociopolitical*; Oldfield and Nikaeen, "The Azeri Aşiq."
11. Although "revival" and "revitalization" are often synonymous in ethnomusicology, "revitalization" refers to music still active in society, while "revival" pertains to music that has been out of use for many years. See Ulrich Morgenstern, "Zehn populäre Vorurteile über Volksmusik" [Ten popular prejudices about folk music], *Volkskundliche Nachrichten* 41, no. 2 (2014): 11.
12. Owe Ronström, "Revival Reconsidered," *The World of Music* 38, no. 3 (1996): 18.
13. Tamara E. Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory," *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (1999): 66.
14. Livingston, "Music Revivals," 66; and Ronström, "Revival Reconsidered," 8.
15. Huseynova, *Music of Azerbaijan*; Naroditskaya, *Song from the Land of Fire*; Dessiatnitchenko, *Musical and Ontological Possibilities of Mugham Creativity*; During, "Azerbaijan"; Firdun Şuşinski, *Azərbaycan xalq musiqiçiləri* [The musicians of Azerbaijani people] (Bakı: Yazıçı, 1985); and Məmməd Saleh İsmailov, *Azərbaycan xalq musiqisinin məqam və muğam nəzəriyyəsinə dair elmi-metodik oçerklər* [Scientific-methodical essays on the theory of maqam and mugham of Azerbaijani folk music] (Baku: Elm, 1991).
16. Oldfield and Nikaeen, "The Azerbaijani Ashiq"; Oldfield and Nikaeen, "The Azeri Aşiq"; Albright, "The Aşiq and His Music in Northwest Iran"; Eldarova, *Azərbaycan Aşiq Sənəti*; Allahmanli, *Shaman, Ozan and Ashiq*; Məmmədov, *Azərbaycan Aşiq Yaradıcılığı*; Başgöz, "Turkish Hikaye-Telling"; Nəbiyev, "Azərbaycanda aşiq sənəti"; and Reinhard and Pinto, *Sänger und Poeten mit der Laute*.
17. Nəbiyev, "Azərbaycanda aşiq sənəti."
18. Reinhard and Pinto, *Sänger und Poeten mit der Laute*, 9.
19. Allahmanli, *Shaman, Ozan and Ashiq*, 53; and Reinhard and Pinto, *Sänger und Poeten mit der Laute*.
20. Hikmet Dizdaroğlu, *Halk şiiirinde türler*, vol. 7 (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1969), 14.
21. Aslan, "Şamanizm ve şamandan âşığa intikal eden trans olgusu," 23–25. According to the Turkologist Fuat Köprülü, Ashiq literature was formed after the Turks accepted Islam, particularly under the influence of the Bektashi order; see M. Fuat Köprülü, *Edebiyat Araştırmaları I* [Literary studies I] (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1989), 195. For a critical discussion of modern historiographical constructions of pre-Islamic continuity in Alevi and related traditions, see Markus Dressler, *Writing Religion: The Making of Turkish Alevi Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

22. Allahmanli, *Shaman, Ozan and Ashiq*, 178.
23. Reinhard and Pinto, *Sänger und Poeten mit der Laute*.
24. Aslan, "Şamanizm"; and Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatında*.
25. Reinhard and Pinto, *Sänger und Poeten mit der Laute*, 14.
26. Torkanbouri, *The Sociopolitical*, 42–44.
27. Anna C. Oldfield, *Azerbaijani Women Poet-Minstrels: Women Ashiqs from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).
28. References to the *qopuz* appear in tenth-century Uyghur manuscripts and even earlier wall paintings from the sixth and seventh centuries, and it later occupies central role in the poetry of Dede Korkut/Qorqud and Yunus Emre throughout the fourteenth century, all of which show its historical roots in Turkic culture. See Emin Soydaş, "Historical Facts, Recent Myths, and Current Connections: The Case of the Ancient Turkish Kopuz," in *Plucked Lutes of the Silk Road: The Interaction of Theory and Practice from Antiquity to Contemporary Performance*, ed. J. Lawrence Witzleben and Xiao Mei (Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2019), 93–99; Roger Finch, "Musical Instruments in Uigur Literature and Art," *Surugadai University Studies* 24 (2002): 23–53; and Reinhard and Pinto, *Sänger und Poeten mit der Laute*, 171.
29. Soydaş, "Historical Facts," 99.
30. Murat Bardakçı, *Magalı Abdülkadir* [Abdul Qadir of Maragha] (Istanbul: Pan Yayıncılık, 1986), 104.
31. Laurence Picken, *Folk Musical Instruments of Turkey*, 266; and Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, vol. 1 [The book of travels of Evliya Çelebi] (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1996), 304.
32. Henry George Farmer, *An Old Moorish Lute Tutor* (Glasgow: Civic Press, 1933), 35; Soydaş, "Historical Facts," 101–3; and Picken, *Folk Musical Instruments of Turkey*, 268–70.
33. Ibid., 98; Nəbiyev, "Azərbaycanda aşiq sənəti," 136; and Bayram Akdoğan, "The Rise of Turkish Religious Music in Anatolia," *Euro Agenda / Avrupa Günlüğü* 4, no. 7–2 (2005): 415–30.
34. Other names include *orta saz* (middle *saz*), *xakabənd saz*, *əsa saz*, *tavar saz*, and *cifti saz*. Male *ashiqs* typically use larger *ana saz*, while female *ashiqs* prefer lighter *cürə saz*. See Nəcəfzadə, *İzah Lüğəti*.
35. Məmmədov. "Azərbaycan Xalqı," 80; and Changiz Mahdipour, *The School of Saz (Qopuz)*, vol. 1 (Tabriz: Aydin, 2018), 43. In Urmia, Azerbaijan, some *ashiqs* remove two middle strings to facilitate melody playing on the first string simultaneously by dampening the third string with their thumbs. See Albright, "The Aşiq and His Music," 847.
36. Mehdipour, interview, 2020.
37. Ursula Reinhard and Tiago de Oliveira Pinto, "Zwei Liedgattungen der Âşık/Ozan im Osten der Türkei" [Two song genres of the Âşık/Ozan in Eastern Turkey], in *Probleme der*

Volksmusikforschung: Bericht über die 10. Arbeitstagung der 'Study Group for Analysis and Systematization of Folk Music' im 'International Council for Traditional Music' vom 17. bis 22. Mai 1987 in Freiburg i. Br., ed. Hartmut Braun (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 171, 250–63; and Picken, *Folk Musical Instruments of Turkey*, 210–11, and 230.

38. Ibid., 230.

39. Ibid., 230.

40. Mahdipour, *The School*, 44.

41. The term *mugham* is used here to refer to the currently institutionalized modal genre performed with *tar*, *kamança*, and voice.

42. Elgün Niftali, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, January 20, 2023, Vienna, conducted in German. Torkanbouri's personal archive.

43. Ibid., 00:41:25.

44. Aserbaidshisches Kulturzentrum, "Anlässlich der Novruz fand in Wien ein Konzert statt," March 11, 2022, accessed July 13, 2025, <https://azculture.at/de/event/anlaesslich-der-novruz-fand-in-wien-ein-konzert-statt-86e38a8d>.

45. Including *tar*, *kamança*, *qaval*, *nağara*, and *piano*.

46. Traditional Azerbaijan-Turkish hat.

47. Torkanbouri's personal observations.

48. Torkanbouri's personal observations.

49. Aşiq Nəbi Nağıyev, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, January 28, 2023, Baku, conducted in Azerbaijan-Turkish. Torkanbouri's personal archive.

50. "*Bayağı* music" in Turkish (Az) means "ordinary music."

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Mehdipour, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, March 5, 2023, Baku, conducted in Azerbaijan-Turkish. Torkanbouri's personal archive.

54. Qəsəbova, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, January 30, 2023, Baku, conducted in Azerbaijan-Turkish. Torkanbouri's personal archive.

55. Morgenstern, "Zehn populäre," 12.

56. Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-Three Discussions* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 382.

57. Eliot Bates, "The Social Life of Musical Instruments," *Ethnomusicology* 56, no. 3 (2012): 386.
58. As recently seen in Azerbaijan's entry in the Eurovision Song Contest 2025, where the *saz* appeared as a visual emblem of national identity rather than as a primary instrument.
59. According to Mehdipour, Dalğa group drew approximately 3,500 attendees at events such as those held in the capital city, Tehran (Mehdipour, interview, 2023).
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ashiq Javad Maharrami attends nearly one hundred weddings annually, mostly in rural areas across Iranian Azerbaijan, including provinces like West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjan, Hamadan, Qazvin, and Alborz, as well as some in Tehran. Javad Maharrami, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, March 5, 2023, Tabriz, conducted in Azerbaijan-Turkish. Torkanbouri's personal archive.
65. *Xanəndə* is a traditional *mugham* singer specializing in Maqam-Dastgah art music, often trained in the classical vocal repertoire. Plural: *xanəndələr*.
66. Ibid.
67. Monireh Akbarpouran, *Aşıqlar və Danışmalar: 21-ci əsrdə aşılıq təcrübəsi* [Ashiqs and negotiations: Ashiqs' experiences in the 21st century], vol. 4, no. 24 (Tehran: Ozan Cultural and Social Periodical Journal, 2021), 28.
68. Akbarpouran, *Aşıqlar və Danışmalar*, vol. 4, no. 25, 68.
69. Ibid., 200–1.
70. Maharrami, interview.
71. Ibid.
72. Laudan Nooshin, "Subversion and Countersubversion: Power, Control and Meaning in the New Iranian Pop Music," in *Music, Power, and Politics*, ed. Annie J. Randall (New York: Routledge, 2005), 231–72.
73. Akbarpouran, *Aşıqlar və Danışmalar*, 55.
74. *Burası Təbriz* بۇراسی تبریزی [Here is Tabriz] Club, "آشیق اولوب دیردی ارگزنه نین / ازل باشدا" [A poet from Ashiq art: Being Ashiq and wander around, it took a lot of effort, since beginning], Clubhouse audio event, January 7, 2023, 02:03:40, accessed July 13, 2025, https://www.clubhouse.com/room/ma8jAbWM?utm_medium=ch_room_xerc&utm_campaign=BEKICHGSGz7Lapeo3lrjg-535072.

75. Hamid Saneiy, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, August 19, 2022, Berlin, conducted in German. Torkanbouri's personal archive.
76. Akbarpouran, *Aşıqlar və Danışıqlar*, vol. 4, no. 24, 33–34.
77. In contrast to the situation in Iran, a performance by Hamid Saneiy I attended in Berlin offered a simplified yet engaging version of traditional Ashiq art. The diverse audience, many of whom had never experienced such a performance, found the combination of music and storytelling, as well as the mix of the Azerbaijan-Turkish and German languages, to be an intriguing experience. Interview with audience members of Hamid Saneiy's event, conducted by Aria Torkanbouri, August 19, 2022, Berlin, conducted in German. Torkanbouri's personal archive.
78. Ameneh Youssefzadeh. "The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations". *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 2000, vol. 9, no. 2 (2000): 35–61, 42.
79. The concept of giving artistic titles originates from the Soviet period, during which the system granted titles and official positions to musicians and scholars valued by the regime. See Naroditskaya, *Song from*, 99.
80. Nağıyev, interview.
81. Mehdipour, interview, 2023.
82. Saneiy, interview.
83. Niftali, interview.
84. Samir Asadov, "3. Samir Əsədov – Kəman və Azərbaycan Müasir Musiqi Sənəti" [13. Samir Asadov – violin and Azerbaijan contemporary music], in the 13th number of the *Azerbaijan Artists Union Interview Series*, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, 2022, Baku, conducted in Azerbaijan-Turkish. Torkanbouri's personal archive.
85. Niftali, interview.
86. Mahdipour, *The School*.
87. The pitch labels (C, D, E, etc.) function as relative positional markers and do not imply standardized absolute tuning. Historical recordings indicate variation in overall pitch level between *ashiqs*. However, the intervallic proportions of the fret arrangement and the tuning relationships between string courses remain structurally stable.
88. Ibid., 41.
89. Torkanbouri, "The Congress."
90. Ibid., 00:06:25.
91. Məmmədov, "Azərbaycan Xalq", 86.

92. Tutuxanım Quluzadə, *Üzeyir Hacıbəyli və Qara Qarayevin yaradıcılığında Aşıq musiqisinin təzahür xüsusiyyətləri* [Manifestations of Ashiq music in the works of Uzeyir Hajibeyli and Gara Garayev] (Baku: Mütərcim, 2012), 25.
93. Eldarova, *Azərbaycan Aşıq*, 70.
94. Əminə Eldarova, *Azərbaycan Aşıq Sənəti* [The art of the Azerbaijani Ashiq] (Baku: Elm, 1996), 73.
95. The table is reconstructed by Aria Torkanbouri based on the original. See Eldarova, *Azərbaycan Aşıq*, 78.
96. Eldarova, *Azərbaycan Aşıq Sənəti*, 70–71.
97. Pitch measurements conducted on the 1938 recording using Melodyne software indicate that several frets—particularly E, A, and B-flat—are consistently positioned approximately 13–29 cents lower relative to equal-tempered reference values (Torkanbouri’s analysis), which also coincides with the intervals documented by Mehdipour in post-1970s Iranian Azerbaijan. See Mehdipour, *The School*.
98. Reinhard and Pinto, “Zwei Liedgattungen,” 175.
99. *Ibid.*, 175: Ex. 83.
100. Picken, *Folk Musical Instruments of Turkey*, 290.
101. *Ibid.*, 290. Earlier historical accounts, such as the French geographer Nicolas de Nicolai’s claim of ten frets on the *Tambora* during his travels in Turkey in the sixteenth century, support this developmental trajectory. See Nicolas de Nicolai, *Vier Bücher von der Reiß und Schiffart in die Türrkey, beschrieben durch Hrn. N./Nicolai, bürtig auß dem Delphinat, Kammerling und Geograff Kgl. Mt. in Franckreich* (Antwerp: Wilhelm Silvium, 1577), 140.
102. Reinhard and Pinto, “Zwei Liedgattungen,” 174.
103. Hasan Eskandari, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, January 1, 2021, Tabriz, conducted in Azerbaijan-Turkish. Torkanbouri’s personal archive; and Behruz Heschmat, interview by Aria Torkanbouri, January 9, 2021, Vienna, conducted in Azerbaijan-Turkish. Torkanbouri’s personal archive.
104. Behruz Heschmat’s personal archives, Vienna.
105. Mehdipour, interview, 2022; and Heschmat, interview.
106. Akbarpouran, *Aşıqlar və Danışıqlar*, vol. 4, no. 24, 21–22.
107. *Ibid.*, 18.
108. *Sazəndə* is a traditional instrument performer specializing in Maqam-Dastgah art music, often trained in instruments such as *tar* and *kamança*.
109. Şuşinski, *Azərbaycan xalq musiqiçiləri*, 9.

110. Dessiatnitchenko, *Musical and Ontological*, 71–72.
111. Məhəmməd Əmin Rəsulzadə, *Azərbaycan Cümhuriyyəti* [The Republic of Azerbaijan] (Bakı: Elm, 1990), 13.
112. Ibid.
113. Huseynova, *Music of Azerbaijan*, 56.
114. Oldfield and Nikaeen, “The Azerbaijani Ashiq,” 8.
115. Dessiatnitchenko, *Musical and Ontological*, 114.
116. Juniper Hill and Caroline Bithell, “An Introduction to Music Revival as Concept, Cultural Process, and Medium of Change,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, ed. Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3–42, 6.
117. Philip V. Bohlman, *Focus: Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 17.
118. Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Aşıq Sənəti* [Ashiq art], in *Musiqi Dunyasi: Articles* (online archive, submitted 2005), accessed July 13, 2025, <http://uzeyir.musiqi-dunya.az/az/article5.html>. Originally published in *Bakinski Rabochi*, May 7, 1928, and translated from Russian.
119. Marina Frolova-Walker and Jonathan Walker, *Music and Soviet Power, 1917–1932* (Boydell and Brewer, 2012).
120. Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Azərbaycan Xalq Mahnıları* [Azerbaijani folk songs] (Baku: Azərbaycan Dövlət Music Nəşriyyatı, 1954).
121. Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Основы Азербайджанской Народной Музыки* [Principles of Azerbaijani folk music] (Baku: Azerbaijan SSR Academy of Sciences, 1945).
122. Torkanbouri, *The Sociopolitical*, 91.
123. Şuşinski, *Azərbaycan xalq*, 7.
124. Hajibeyov, *Основы Азербайджанской*, 1945, 10; and Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Основы Азербайджанской Народной Музыки* [Principles of Azerbaijani folk music]. 2nd ed. (Baku: Azerbaijan State Music Publishing House, 1957), 10.
125. Üzeyir Hacıbəyov, *Azərbaycan Xalq Musiqisinin Əsasları* (Baku: Azərbaycan Dövlət Musiqi Nəşriyyatı, 1962), 15; Üzeyir Hacıbəyov, *Azərbaycan Xalq Musiqisinin Əsasları* (Baku: Azərbaycan SSR Elmlər Akademiyası Nəşriyyatı, 1985), 18; Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Principles of Azerbaijan Folk Music* (Baku: Yazichi, 1985), 18; Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Основы Азербайджанской Народной Музыки*. (Baku: Yazichi, 1985), 18.
126. Morgenstern, “Zehn populäre,” 178.
127. Mir Mohsun Ibn Haji Seyyed Ahmad Qarabaghi Navvab. *در علم موسیقی: وضوح الارقام* [Regarding musicology: Clarity of numbers] (Baku: Orucov Qardaşlarının Mətbəəsi, 1913),

23-24.

128. Prepared in Sibelius by Aria Torkanbouri.