

Saggi

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EARLY JOURNEY OF AZERBAIJANI TRADITIONAL POETRY INTO ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

LA POESIA TRADIZIONALE AZERA NELLE TRADUZIONI INGLESI. UNA PANORAMICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of translation in shaping intercultural understanding and the transmission of literary heritage, focusing specifically on the translation of Azerbaijani classical poetry into English. Drawing on key theoretical perspectives in translation studies and historical examples of literary transmission, the study situates Azerbaijani literature within a global context. It traces early encounters with Azerbaijani poets such as Seyyid Imadaddin Nasimi and highlights the contributions of Orientalist scholars in bringing figures like Nizami Ganjavi, Muhammad Fuzuli, and Gazi Burhanaddin to English-speaking audiences. The paper discusses the challenges posed by the multilingual character of Azerbaijani literary production, especially the use of Arabic and Persian, and debates around the representativeness of translated works. Through analysis of key translations and scholarly efforts, the article underscores the pivotal role of translation in elevating Azerbaijani literary aesthetics.

Keywords: English Translation; World Literature; Nizami Ganjavi; Azerbaijani Literature; Persian Language; Translation; Medieval Literature; Translation and Culture.

L'articolo esplora il ruolo della traduzione nel plasmare la comprensione interculturale e nella trasmissione del patrimonio letterario, focalizzandosi in particolare sulla traduzione in inglese della poesia tradizionale azera. A partire dalle prospettive teoriche degli studi sulla traduzione e da esempi storici di trasmissione letteraria, l'articolo situa la letteratura azera in un contesto globale. Ripercorre i primi incontri inglesi con poeti azerbaigiani come Seyyid Imadaddin Nasimi, e sottolinea il contributo degli studiosi orientalisti nel far conoscere al pubblico anglofono figure quali Nizami Ganjavi, Muhammad Fuzuli e Gazi Burhanaddin. L'articolo affronta le sfide poste dal carattere multilingue della produzione letteraria azera, in particolare dall'uso dell'arabo e del persiano, e discute la rappresentatività delle opere tradotte. Attraverso l'analisi di traduzioni significative e di iniziative accademiche, l'articolo sottolinea infine il ruolo centrale della traduzione nel valorizzare l'estetica letteraria azerbaigiana.

Parole chiave: Traduzione inglese; World Literature; Nizami Ganjavi; Letteratura azera; Lingua persiana; Traduzione; Letteratura medievale; Traduzione e cultura.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Translation is a process that originates from fundamental human needs of which communication is undeniably the most crucial. For centuries, translators have played an indispensable role in expanding the channels of human communication through their works of translation in varied domains of life. The renowned Russian poet, Pushkin once aptly likened translators to “relay horses, meaning post-horses of civilization” (Delisle 17). Post-horses or draft horses were work horses kept at a post station to be used by mail carriers or hired out to travellers. By the end of the 19th century their service was vital in transporting mail and passengers over rough and dangerous terrains. Like these horses, civilization would not have grown and survived without translators, the carriers and transporters of language and meaning between peoples.

Translation scholars like Toury, Venuti, Bassnett, Reiss and Vermeer and Lefevere view the translator as a transmitter of cultures; the translator’s art and craft of translation serves to bridge cultures by fostering understanding and introducing worlds unfamiliar to diverse communities residing in disparate geographical regions, each with its own unique way of life, cuisine, attire, and customs. The role of translation in fostering cultural connections, a vital aspect of our interconnected and globalized world, is multifaceted. In today’s turbulent global landscape, translation serves as a cornerstone for building friendly and fraternal relations between different peoples, contributing significantly to the establishment of peace through an understanding of diversities. It acts as a guarantor of literary ties among diverse cultures, underlying the context of mutual cultural influences.

The history of translation as an art form can be traced back to as early as the 3rd to 2nd centuries BC. Homer’s renowned *Odyssey* (written sometime between the 7th and 8th century BC) in Greek and translated into Latin by Lucius Livius Andronicus in the 3rd century BC stands as a prominent example of artistic translation in the annals of world literature (Clinton 555-57). The history of literary translation has thus had its firm roots since ancient times, and experts often associate its emergence of as an art form with Andronicus’s seminal work. As with the ancient forerunners of epic translations like Homer’s *Odyssey*, it is important to acknowledge the various forms of literary influences and contributions from neighbouring nations that have significantly shaped the literary thought, and development of cultures within those nations. Literary influence itself can be regarded as examples of the broader impacts of literary translation. In essence, when local literary works are influenced by the translated writings – and so the ideologies – of other cultures, these ideologies become part of the spiritual and cultural wealth of the receiving nation, enriching its cultural tapestry.

Azerbaijan, one of the oldest seats of civilization, has a rich literary heritage. In the last century, Azerbaijani literature was often viewed as a part of the broader Soviet literary landscape, constrained by ideological limitations that hindered the full expression of its potential. However, today, Azerbaijani literature has emerged from the shadows of these restrictions and is directly

engaging with world culture. In this context, the translation of Azerbaijani literary works into foreign languages and the academic understanding of this process hold significant importance for understanding the influence of Azerbaijani culture on others through translations, and vice versa.

This article offers an overview of several canonical works of Azerbaijani classical poetry that have found recognition among English-speaking audiences through translation. It highlights the essential role played by Orientalists in introducing Azerbaijani poetry to global literary discourse, discusses some of the earliest translations of Turkic poetic works, and underscores how these efforts laid the foundation for the international appreciation of Azerbaijani literary aesthetics.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The translation of selected works of Azerbaijani literature into foreign languages has a rich history spanning several centuries. An early example can be traced back to 1551 when Nikolas Nikolay, a French ambassador traveling in Istanbul, mentioned the notable Azerbaijani poet Seyyid Imadaddin Nasimi while describing various religious sects in Turkey, including Hurufism (Bartold). It is worth noting that while the ambassador's interest was primarily focused on religious sects, his encounter with Nasimi's work did not necessarily lead to a full appreciation of the poet's literary artistry with profound expressions of mystical selfhood and poetic paradox. Nevertheless, the fact that Nasimi's name found its way into his notes indicates an awareness and genuine interest in Azerbaijani culture from the Western perspective. This historical connection marks the start of an enduring curiosity and appreciation for Azerbaijani literature presently in the global context.

In the exploration of Azerbaijani literature, the study of the poet Muhammad Fuzuli for example, in English Oriental Studies has seen significant contributions over the years. Leyli Aliyeva, the author of some of these studies, highlights the valuable service provided by Nikolay in this regard. She points out that the comprehensive translation of Azerbaijani literature into Western European languages gained momentum in the 17th century and reached new heights in the 18th century. During this latter period, classical poets from the region such as Khagani Shrivani, Nizami Ganjavi, Seyyid Imadaddin Nasimi and Mahammad Fuzuli began to receive increased attention in Europe, and their works were translated into the languages of European nations (Aliyeva, *Füzuli və ingilis şərqünaslığı* 13).

It is important, however, to note that not all scholars share the same perspective on how Azerbaijani literature in translation has developed through the ages. Sahin Khalilli, a well-known research scientist argues that because many of Azerbaijan's classical literary masterpieces were originally composed in the common literary languages of the greater region, Arabic or Persian, English Oriental Studies have privileged and primarily focused on translating texts produced in these languages, rather than works written originally in Azerbaijani. Khalilli contends that for

this reason the study of Azerbaijani literature through translations conducted by English Oriental Studies may not be as extensive, and it may not accurately represent the full history of Azerbaijani artistic existence.

This divergence of opinions among scholars regarding the relative significance to understanding of Azerbaijani literary history of which works get translated from which originary languages highlights the complexity of tracing the history of Azerbaijani literature and emphasizes the need for continued research and exploration in this field.

Between the 17th and 18th century, both European and native English-speaking researchers began to study the works of individual Azerbaijani poets and showed an inclination towards translating them. However, a more substantial effort in translating Azerbaijani literary works occurred during the 19th and early 20th century. Azerbaijani literary works encompass an expansive variety of genres, but by and large, the region's classical poetry represents the lion's share of translations into foreign languages. This paper therefore focuses specifically on the journey of a selection of Azerbaijani classical poetry translated into English. The list of Azerbaijani classical poets is a relatively long one; just four of the most prominent are selected for discussion here based on their impactful contribution both to Azerbaijani literature and for the early attention their works have received in English translation. These poets are: Nizami Ganjavi, who has been named the national poet of Azerbaijan; Muhammad Fuzuli, a poet who wrote elegantly in Turkish, Persian and Arabic; Gazi Burhanaddin, a Sufi Muslim poet and statesman who wrote poetry in the mother tongue, Azerbaijani Turkic; and Sayyad Imadadin Nasimi, a skilled Hurufi poet of the 14th and 15th century who composed in his native Azerbaijani. Apart from discussing the journeys of the poetical works of these four poets into English, this paper will also briefly look at the early efforts of orientalists in translating the iconic literary representative of the Turkic people, that is, *Kitabi Dada Gorgud*/ *The Book of Dada Gorgud* into English. According to Vassileva Eleonora, *The Book of Dada Gorgud* "combines poetry with prose," with "the narration largely in prose" and "most of the dialogue in verse" (136). The rich verse form in this heroic epic reflects the poetical dexterity of Turkic authors of tales and songs alongside other more classically formal poets.

3. NIZAMI GANJAVI (C.1141-1209)

NIZAMI GANJAVI IN BRITISH ORIENTALIST DISCOURSE AND TRANSLATION

Amongst the treasures in the trove of Azerbaijani literature, Nizami Ganjavi's poetry has exerted a strong appeal to orientalists; Nizami's 12th century poetry holds a central position not only in the literature of European countries but also in English literature. His epic romantic and devotional Sufi poems are prominently featured in studies authored by orientalists and in translation efforts (Ibrahimov 35-36). An interesting example of a translation endeavor of Nizami's work occurred in 1786 when William Jones translated the Persian poem *Makhzan al Asrar* as *Treasury of Secrets*.

This translation was rendered into English and subsequently published in London in 1804 after Jones had passed away (Xəlilov, “Azərbaycan-ingilis əlaqələri”). Such historical landmarks in translational activity demonstrate the growing interest and engagement with Azerbaijani literature in the English-speaking world during the 18th-19th centuries.

The interest in Nizami’s literary works amongst scholars working with literatures in English has been remarkable. Special studies and articles in English have been dedicated to documenting the history of this renowned Azerbaijani poet’s works. Most of the manuscripts, criticisms, translations, miniatures, and illustrations related to Nizami’s works are recorded in Kamran Talatov’s book chapter entitled “International Recognition of Nizami’s work: A Bibliography” (2000). Talatov’s words below reveal the extent of Nizami’s work that goes beyond the confines of his bibliography:

This bibliography is by no means complete. It excludes bibliographic entries for Nizami in the remaining languages and the citation of articles is not extensive. It does, however, illustrate a few important points. The translation of Nizami’s poetry into many Western and non-Western languages and the number of scholarly works on the subject published in these languages attest to his significance in the tradition of Persian poetry.

Over the years, numerous researchers, including A. Krymski, Y. Bertels, A. Seyidzade, A. Aghayev, S. Devek, V. Destgerdi and, S. Nafisi have delved into the history of Nizami’s presence in English literature and have scrutinized the translation quality of his works into English. The consensus among experts is that Nizami stands as the most prominent figure in Azerbaijani literature with wide recognition in the United States and several other English-speaking countries.

An English translator who contributed significantly to the elevation of Nizami to the forefront of literary excellence is James Atkinson. Atkinson translated Nizami’s poem *Leyli and Majnun* (which was composed in 1188) directly from Persian into English. This delicate, romantic masterpiece of Azerbaijani poetry first published in English translation by Atkinson in 1836, during the heyday of the Romantic movement in Europe and America, captured the Romantic era imagination of numerous readers in those regions. The enduring interest in this work led to the republication of Atkinson’s translation in 1894, further strengthening Nizami’s place in the domain of world literatures in English translation.

Huseynov discusses the significant contributions of English scholars in the systematic study of Nizami’s works during the 19th century. He mentions the English scientist N. Bland who made a pivotal contribution in 1844 by laying the foundation for a new direction of research through the preparation of a scientific-critical text of *Treasure of Secrets* (Hüseynov 29). *Leyli and Majnun* had served as a notable introduction to Nizami’s creativity in the Western world, and subsequently, other poems by the genius poet were also translated into English.

In 1881, another of Nizami’s poems, *Iskandarnama* was translated into English and published in London. This translation was accompanied by explanations and a critical commentary on the

text. Yet, despite the introduction of other works, the interest in *Leyli and Majnun* remained steadfast, leading to another reprint in 1966 with the new translation and editing efforts of the Swiss scholar, Dr. R. Gelpke. In an effort to convey Nizami's philosophical world more comprehensively, Gelpke opted for a prose translation, considering it the most suitable approach for English readers. Since translation works should align with the target audience's preferences, the name "Leyli" underwent transliterative changes in this third translation, becoming "Leyla" to sound more natural to the ears of target language speakers. The English prose version of the poem is divided into fifty-three chapters, each bearing a concise and intriguing title derived from the content of the work, such as "Geys and Leyli Meet," "Geys Turns to Majnun," "Ibn Salam Seeks Leyli's Approval," and "Chohra and Ruband" among others. According to Aghayev, the language of the prose version is straightforward and easily readable by an English-speaking audience, while effectively capturing the essence and spirit of the original work (35-36). This effort exemplifies the ongoing interest and commitment to making Nizami's poetry accessible and appreciated in English-speaking circles. Dr. Gelpke's closing words in the book provide a profound insight into the long-lasting fame of *Leyli and Majnun*. He notes that this legendary love story remains one of the most well-known and cherished tales in the Islamic East. The theme of an impassioned lover pining for his beloved resonates in the poems, songs, and epics of numerous peoples and ethnic groups, spanning regions from the Caucasus to Africa, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean, and from Europe to the Americas. Z. Aghayev emphasizes that this enduring presence attests to the timeless appeal and universality of the tale upon which Nizami's epic narrative is based, alongside similar narratives by writers around the world (33-34).

Arab scholar M.G. Hilal's book, *Development of Majnun-Leyla Theme in Eastern Literature* (1954), accentuates Nizami's transformative role in elevating an ordinary legend to a literary masterpiece with universal appeal. Hilal highlights how Nizami's interpretation of this classic tale breathed new life into the existing narrative, making it relevant and resonant across cultures and generations. Furthermore, A.A. Hekmat, who published the prose version of Nizami's poem in Tehran in 1941, draws parallels between *Leyli and Majnun* and William Shakespeare's tragic masterpiece, *Romeo and Juliet*. This comparison reinforces the depth and emotional power of Nizami's work, which taps into what appears to be an enduring and perhaps universal human narrative of love, longing, and loss.

In support of Nizami's literary genius, Aghayev cites the opinion of the renowned Czech literary critic Jan Rypka, as found in his book, *History of Iranian Literature*. Rypka's assessment, which Aghayev fully agrees with, is that the work is a testament to the creative brilliance of a great genius (Aghayev 33-34). This collective recognition confirms the significance of Nizami's *Leyli and Majnun* in world literature and culture.

Dr. Gelpke's dedication to the systematic study of Nizami's works is also reflected in his keen interest in earlier translations of *Leyli and Majnun*. He notes that the epic love poem was translat-

ed by a prominent Azerbaijani literary scholar, translator, and philologist Mammadagha Tarlan into Turkish and published in Istanbul in 1943. In Moscow, the epic was translated by Pavel Antokolsky, a renowned Soviet poet and translator into Russian in 1957. Gelpke also mentions Atkinson's 1836 translation, acknowledging that the British were ahead of even Nizami's close Russian neighbors by more than a hundred years in efforts to introduce his work to world audiences.

In discussing his own translation of *Leyli and Majnun*, Dr. Gelpke admits to the challenges of capturing the essence of the original work. Aghayev reports that Gelpke had stated, "I started working on the prose translation of this work in Iran in 1958. I am well aware of the fact that despite all my efforts, my translation does not fully capture the original. I can only say that I tried to study every word of Nizami's poem with great attention" (qtd. In Ağayev 35).

The continued interest of scholars and translators in bringing Nizami's literary treasures to a broader audience underscores the artistic appeal and cultural significance of his works beyond his native region of Azerbaijan. In the early 20th century, another of Nizami's poems, *Haft Peykar* (literally *Seven Portraits*) which can also be translated as *Seven Beauties*, was introduced to English-speaking readers. According to Aghayev, the translators who undertook Nizami's works were generally well-known Orientalist scholars; this expertise in the region's history and culture was particularly fortunate in regard to *Seven Beauties*.

S. E. Wilson, the translator of Nizami Ganjavi's *Seven Beauties*, is recognized as one of the foremost specialists in Persian literature in the 20th century. At the time of working on this translation, Wilson had already been serving as a professor of Persian language and literature at University College London for fourteen years; his awareness of the culture and history of the greater Azerbaijan region undoubtedly contributed to the success of his translation. Furthermore, Nizami's poem *Treasure of Secrets* was then translated and published in English in London in 1945, further expanding English readership for the poet's work.

The period spanning from the late 18th century to the 1960s witnessed significant developments in systematic studies of Azerbaijani literature in English, with contributions and insights from various researchers such as N.V. Clark, Y. Brown, V. Modig, M. Houtsuman, S. Wilson, G. Dorab, A. I. Arberri, Y. Ripka, M. V. McDonald, C. Charles, and others. Notably, Nizami's *Leyli and Majnun* was re-translated into English several times during this period by James Atkinson, Rudolf Gelpke and others (Məmmədov).

4. MAHAMMAD FUZULI (C.1483 – 1556)

BRIDGING CULTURES: THE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF FUZULI'S POETRY

Another similarly significant poet from the region of Azerbaijan who received attention from English researchers was Muhammad Fuzuli. The history of Fuzuli's study in English Oriental Studies was initially discussed by the eminent Russian scholar, Krymsky. These early efforts served as a

trajectory for broader recognition and appreciation of Azerbaijani literature in the English-speaking world. In subsequent years, several scholars and researchers, including B. Chobanzade, H. Arasli (Arif), I. Babayev (Babayev), R. Azada (Ismailov), M. Guluzade (Mammadova), F. Gasimzade (Mammadov), and L. Aliyeva (*Füzuli və ingilis şərqünaslığı*), addressed the challenges and achievements related to translating Fuzuli's works into English.

Furthermore, the renowned English Orientalist Elias J. W. Gibb's translations of several of Fuzuli's works into English were subsequently included in *The History of Ottoman Literature* in *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Literature*. R. Rzayev notes that these translations are widely regarded as some of the best scholarly and artistic renditions of Fuzuli's poetry into English. Likewise, the translation of Fuzuli's version of *Leyli and Majnun* (written in 1536) by the Turkish poet Sofi Nuri's 1970 translation garnered significant attention from researchers, who appreciated its literary and artistic qualities because it:

- preserved the lyrical richness and emotional depth of the original text;
- demonstrated a deep understanding of classical Eastern poetic forms and metaphors; and
- balanced scholarly precision with literary elegance.

Sofi Nuri's translation is recognized as the first complete edition of Fuzuli's *Leyli and Majnun* in English (Rzayev). These collective efforts in skilled literary translation once again aided in the dissemination of Fuzuli's literary legacy in the English-speaking world and enriched readers' understanding of Azerbaijani literature.

5. TRANSLATING MYSTICISM: THE ENGLISH RECEPTION OF GAZI BURHANADDIN (C.1345-1398) & SEYYID IMADADIN NASIMI (C.1369-1417)

Concurrently with the growing recognition of Fuzuli's literary artistry, the works of the Azerbaijani poet Gazi Burhanaddin also entered the sphere of English translation. In the first volume of his *History of Ottoman Poetry*, published in 1900, Elias J. W. Gibb not only mentioned Gazi Burhanaddin but also undertook a detailed analysis of his divan. Gibb based his study on the most reliable sources available at the time, including original Ottoman Turkish manuscripts and classical bibliographical works such as Kâtip Çelebi's *Kashf al-Zunūn* and Mustafa b. Abdullah (Kâtip Çelebi)'s *Sullam al-Wuṣūl*, as well as Hajji Khalifa's bibliographic contributions and the Tadhkirahs of early Ottoman literature. These foundational sources provided Gibb with both historical and stylistic insight into Gazi's poetic oeuvre (Gibb 74-79).

Additionally, Gibb translated a notable selection of Gazi's works into English, which included six ghazals (a poem or ode of Arabic origin on spiritual or romantic love), eight rubais (a verse form of Persian origin consisting of quatrains), and nine tuyugs (lyric poetry developed from ancient Turkic folk lyrics).

The renowned Azerbaijani mystic poet of the Hurufism movement, Imadadin Nasimi likewise caught the attention of English scholars. Adilov informs us that Gibb presented a complete analysis of Nasimi's *Divan*, that is, his collection of poems which consisted of two hundred and fifty-three gazals and approximately one hundred and fifty rubais. Kathleen Burill authored a valuable monograph on Nasimi's rubai and undertook its translation. Her doctoral thesis, focusing on Nasimi's rubai, was defended at Cambridge University in 1964 and later published in book form in 1972. This publication is regarded as the first English translation of Nasimi's works.

6. ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE HEROIC EPIC POEM, *KITABI DADA GORGUD* (*THE BOOK OF DADA GORGUD*)

The first Turkic manuscript *The Book of Dede Gorgud* (*Kitabi-Dada Gorgud*) also known as *Dede Korkut* is a heroic epic poem of the nomadic Oghuz – a Turkic tribal group who were the ancestors of the Azerbaijanis, Turks, Turkmens, and the Gaga. The manuscript dates to the 16th century and consists of 12 stories (songs). This manuscript was found in a Dresden library by German orientalist H.F. von Diez, who published a translation in 1815 of the Turkic legendary one-eyed ogre, 'Tepegöz' or 'Tapagoz' which has similarities with the Greek literary figure of Polyphemus, the most popular of the Cyclopes or one-eyed-giants. Seyfaddin states that the origins of the Oghuz saga which reaches to mythological heights was given literary shape in the 11th century under the title of *Kitabi Dadam Gorgud*, but copies which have come down to the present generation are based on manuscripts written in the 16th century.

Damirchizada names scholars such as H. Arasli, M.H. Tahmasib, and A. Damirchizade while Khalilov lists other scholars – A. Sultanli, M. Seyidov, F. Zeynalov, S. Alizadah, Sh. Jamshidov, T. Hajiyeu, P. Khalilov, K. Valiyev, K. Abdullayev – who have devoted extensive efforts to the production of numerous monographs and articles studying and exploring the epic and its merits. Presently, the world of academia recognizes the authenticity of two manuscript copies of *Kitabi-Dada Gorgud*: one is housed in Dresden and the other in the Vatican library.

The journey of translating *Kitabi-Dada Gorgud* into English commenced in the 1960s. However, it was not until 1972 that the epic, which was translated into English by Faruk Sumer, Ahmet Uysal, and Warren Walker, was published by the University of Texas Press, USA. A monument to Azerbaijani regional culture is crystallized in *The Book of Dada Gorgud*, which is exquisitely rich in its poetic expressions. The finest points of the Azerbaijani language, which includes proverbs, sayings and idiomatic expressions are integrated and skillfully employed in the stories (Embassy of Azerbaijan in Moldova). The translators, mindful of the significance of translating such a monumental work into English, ensured that their rendition was detailed and respectful, recognizing the importance of preserving the artistic and historical essence of the Middle Ages. A second complete English translation of the saga was undertaken by Geoffrey Lewis. Scholars note that a

comparison between Lewis's translation, published by Penguin Books in London in 1974, and the original reveals meticulous attention to detail (Xəlilov, *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud*). Lewis demonstrated a profound understanding of the language and style of the epics, delved into the medieval history depicted within the work, and engaged in extensive scholarly research on the epic. He approached the translation process with meticulous care and dedication. Like his contemporaries, Lewis also provided a preface and explanatory notes to accompany his translation, offering context for the reader's experience and understanding of the epic.

According to Sahin Khalilli, Lewis's poetic translation holds distinct value for its fidelity to the original text and the depth of its ideas, surpassing the earlier translation by F. Sumer, A.E. Uysal, and U.S. Walker. Khalilli specifically highlights the success of Lewis's poetic renderings of the saga's verses (qtd. in Xəlilov, *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud* 135). In the 1990s, another English edition of *Kitabi-Dada Gorgud* was published, featuring a 64-page commentary by P. Mirabile at the beginning of the book (Lewis). This commentary extensively analyzes Dada Gorgud's origins, the history of the saga, and Turkic-Oghuz legends it draws on. The book, however, does not include the saga itself. The author clarifies that his work serves as a philological attempt at analysis and background study rather than attempting another translation. Mirabile (192) informs us that his work draws from three Turkish texts of the epic and includes a conclusion, detailed notes and explanations, and a bibliography at the end. While Mirabile's introduction references Lewis's translation, the author indicates a desire to create a hybrid text and suggests additional modifications to Lewis's rendition.

7. THE EVOLUTION OF AZERBAIJANI LITERARY TRANSLATION: PAST EFFORTS AND CONTEMPORARY ADVANCEMENTS

English translations of classical Azerbaijani poets' works or portions thereof have steadily drawn attention from world literature scholars and readers over the years. Apart from Nizami, Fuzuli, Gazi and Nasimi who have been discussed here, other renowned poets such as Saib Tabrizi, Falaqi Shirvani, M.P. Vagif, M. Sh. Vazeh have also had their works introduced to English-speaking audiences, contributing to the broader awareness and appreciation of Azerbaijani poetry and literature in the English-speaking world.

During the Soviet era (1922–1991), efforts were made to publicize modern Azerbaijani poetry – by poets such as Ashiq Alasgar, S. Vurghun, and R. Rza – as part of Soviet literature, and their works began to be translated into English. As for the *The Book of Dada Gorgud* which is, according to one scholar “a masterpiece in the world's treasury of epic poems in terms of its artistic content, its poetic and linguistic features, and for its humanity and humanitarian ideas” (Amina), its appeal did not start with von Diez, the German translator in 1815 and end with Lewis's faithful and scintillating English translation in 1974, but has continued to engage world readers; the liter-

ary work has been translated into Estonian, Persian, Dutch, French, Italian, Japanese, Letonian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian and Serbian. Since the initial transit of Azerbaijani traditional poetry into English, much has happened in the awareness of Azerbaijani literary heritage, as a whole. A significant milestone in the study and appreciation of Azerbaijani literature during the 1960s was the December 1969 issue of the magazine *Soviet Literature*, which was published in four languages, including English, in Moscow. This can be seen as a modest step, albeit likely designed for the service of the Soviet project, in the direction of studying and introducing Azerbaijani literature to a wider foreign audience. Another noteworthy development was the publication of the *Azerbaijani Poetry Anthology* in English by the Progress Publishing House in Moscow in the early 1970s. This anthology, while again, a Soviet government-sponsored effort, provided ample space for the works of both classical Azerbaijani poets and samples of contemporary poetry, marking another effort to make Azerbaijani literature more accessible to English-speaking readers. On the English-speaking publishers side, the publication of Azerbaijani literary examples translated from Azerbaijani to English in the *Edebiyyat* magazine published by the University of Pennsylvania in the United States also demonstrates the continued interest in Azerbaijani literature in English-speaking academic circles.

Following Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, significant strides were made in the translation of Azerbaijani literary works into foreign languages, including English. These efforts, aligned with broader developments in various fields, led to the production of new and improved translations as examples of Azerbaijani literature. Unlike in the Soviet era, when texts often transited Russian before reaching a target language, many of these English translations were done directly from the original Azerbaijani or Persian texts. The Azerbaijani state's commitment to translation activities, as evidenced by governmental decrees and orders focused on re-translating and publishing the best examples of world literature into Azerbaijani, along with an emphasis on training translators to meet the demands of the modern era, underscores the importance attached to translation work in Azerbaijan, and a desire to share the region's literature more broadly.

In this post-Soviet period, a generation of professional translators have emerged specializing in translating world literature from foreign languages such as English, Russian, German, French, etc. into Azerbaijani, and vice versa. Amongst the notable Azerbaijani translators include Zeydulla Aghayev, Charkaz Gurbanli, Vilayat Hajiyeve, Sabir Mustafa, Alakbar Gubatov, and Yusif Savalan. Sabir Mustafa, for example, has translated several of Shakespeare's plays and his 154 sonnets from English into Azerbaijani.

Also, after Azerbaijan gained independence, nearly all translations have been carried out directly from English rather than through the intermediary language-Russian language.

An article titled "Past, Present, Future, and Postcolonial Discourse in Modern Azerbaijan Literature" by Shouleh Vatanabadi was published in *World Literature Today* (493). Based on analysis of English translations of Azerbaijani poetry and practical experience, the translators built a new,

more effective translation model to ensure high-quality translation through collaboration between native speakers of the original language and specialists in the target language. Key figures such as Zeydulla Aghayev contributed to these efforts, as reflected in the English publication of poems by Samad Vurghun, translated by Aghayev and edited by Walter May (May). However, as Shouleh Vatanabadi notes in the article “Past, Present, Future, and Postcolonial Discourse in Modern Azerbaijani Literature,” the post-independence period in Azerbaijan ushered in a critical shift in literary translation and cultural representation (493). This transition was marked by efforts to reclaim literary identity from the shadow of colonial mediation and to present Azerbaijani voices more authentically to global audiences through translation.

The Summer 1996 issue of *World Literature Today* became a landmark publication, featuring a cluster of Azerbaijani literary translations that reflected both the cultural richness and political complexity of the post-Soviet era. In the 2000s and 2010s, Azerbaijani literature in English translation became increasingly dynamic, nuanced, and professionally curated. A new generation of scholars and translators contributed to building bridges between cultures through literary translation. The article “Five Younger Women Poets from Azerbaijan: Introduction,” published in *World Literature Today*, offered an overview of selected poems by contemporary Azerbaijani women poets (Mandaville and Naghiyeva 96). The featured poets included:

- Rabiqe Nazim qizi – “I Scatter Bread Crumbs to the Sparrows,” “New Boots”;
- Feyziyye – “To the Children of War,” “You Were Right”;
- Elnaz Eyvaz – “The Desk,” “A Man’s Confession”;
- Jale Ismayil – “We Shall Manage,” “Such a Destiny”;
- Aysel (Nino) Novruz – “I Have Broken a Cup,” “Contacts”.

Similarly, the article “Ashik Basti: My Saz Wails for My Beloved,” together with English translations of numerous poems by Ashik Basti, was published in *Southeast Asian Review of English* (Naghiyeva et al.).

As a continuation of these series of articles on Azerbaijani folk literature reflecting the pure sentiments of the Azerbaijani people- experts and translators from Azerbaijan and Malaysia have collaborated on the article titled “An English Translation of” Tahir and Zohra,” an Azerbaijani love dastan which also included full translation of the dastan (Shunmugam et al.)

In 1989, under the leadership of writer Afaq Masud, the Azerbaijan Literary Translation and Literary Relations Center began publishing the *Khazar* world literature magazine. This publication featured Azerbaijani translations of some of the most popular and widely read works by renowned figures of world literature. Accomplished poets, writers, and talented translators worked together to render these works into Azerbaijani.

Then in 2005, under the guidance of writer-translator Salim Babullaoglu, the *World Literature Magazine* was established primarily to showcase the talents of young and middle-generation translators who prioritized creating translations from the original texts. The magazine contin-

ues to present translated examples of world literature as well as scholarly studies on translation practice and theory in Azerbaijani.

Azerbaijan International began publication in 1993, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union and during the early years of Azerbaijan's independence. It was launched as an independent quarterly magazine dedicated to discussions concerning the global Azerbaijani community. Since its founding, the magazine has been published quarterly and maintains offices in both Los Angeles and Baku. The founding editor is Betty Blair, and the founding publisher is Firuz Khanoglu. Each issue of *Azerbaijan International* places a strong emphasis on cultural and social topics.

Furthermore, the establishment of the Translation Center in Baku, as decreed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on May 16, 2014, along with the approval of the regulation of the Translation Center under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its organizational structure, has not only incentivized the efforts of specialists engaged in artistic translation within the country but has also laid the groundwork for higher-quality translations of Azerbaijani literary works into foreign languages.

In addition to these initiatives, Sonmaz Mashall Cultural Relations Public Union, founded in 2004, aims to contribute to the advancement of translation efforts within Azerbaijan (Sonmaz Mashall Cultural Relations Public Union). The project team of this non-governmental organization has published four anthologies of literary works by female writers from the region of Greater Azerbaijan, spanning the period from the ninth century to the contemporary era: *Buta: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Azerbaijani Women* ("Buta"), which also includes works by American and Turkish co-participants; *Buta 2: Women Writing from the Regions* ("Buta 2"); *Anthology of Poetry by Azerbaijani Women Writers Over the Centuries* ("Anthology"); and *Women Create! Creative Conversations on Gender Equity and Women's Achievements in Azerbaijan* ("Women Create!").

Additionally, the website *translit.az*, created by the Sonmaz Mashall team and financed by UNESCO, includes a bibliographical database of literary works translated from and into Azerbaijani – including Russian, English, French, German, Persian, and Arabic – as well as an electronic library containing many of these works. The website offers a valuable contribution to readers interested in both Azerbaijani and world literatures. These recent increased efforts by the Azerbaijani government and NGOs committed to preserving and advancing Azerbaijan's literary heritage, have resulted in a steady increase in the number of literary translations both from Azerbaijani into foreign languages and from foreign languages into Azerbaijani.

Such growth has been accompanied and supported by the emergence of a new generation of professionals in the field of translation, both Azerbaijani native speakers and global literary translators who reflect a sustained commitment to a robust exchange of Azerbaijani literature and culture with other world literatures and linguistic traditions. While these current concerted efforts by both Azerbaijan and speakers of other languages are certainly laudable, it is impor-

tant not to forget the initial efforts of native English-speaking “orientalists” (as they were earlier called) who took Azerbaijan’s poetry beyond its shores helped lay important groundwork for this region’s literatures to be shared across languages and cultures today. The increasing translation of Azerbaijani poetry and prose into English over the years has significantly contributed to raising global awareness and appreciation of Azerbaijani literature. From classical poets like Nizami, Fuzuli, Gazi, and Nasimi to contemporary voices, these efforts have played a crucial role in bridging cultural and literary gaps.

The Soviet era provided initial momentum for the translation of Azerbaijani literature, especially through state-supported anthologies and literary journals. Following Azerbaijan’s independence in 1991, there was a marked shift towards more direct and accurate translations, free from the mediation of Russian, emphasizing the authentic voice of Azerbaijani authors.

Translators such as Zeydulla Aghayev, Cherkaz Gurbanli, and others have made significant contributions to the literary exchange, ensuring that Azerbaijani works reached global audiences through high-quality translations. This collective effort reflects the importance of translation in the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage. The establishment of institutions such as the Translation Center in Baku and initiatives by NGOs like Sonmaz Mashall Cultural Relations Public Union have bolstered translation activities. These efforts, both governmental and non-governmental, have enabled the creation of platforms and resources for preserving and promoting Azerbaijani literature in foreign languages. The current efforts by Azerbaijan’s government and NGOs to promote Azerbaijani literature through translation reflect a sustained commitment to preserving and advancing its literary heritage. This ongoing work ensures that Azerbaijani culture continues to engage with global literary traditions, enriching cross-cultural dialogue.

In conclusion, the translation of Azerbaijani literature into English and other languages has evolved significantly, from early Orientalist efforts to contemporary, direct translations. This progression, supported by both institutional and individual efforts, has facilitated the global dissemination of Azerbaijani literary treasures and has made significant strides in fostering a global appreciation of Azerbaijani culture and literature. The international collaborations and publications in journals like *World Literature Today* and *Azerbaijan International* have further helped showcase Azerbaijani literature to global audiences. These outlets, along with academic and cultural exchange programs, have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of Azerbaijani literary traditions. The pioneering work of early English-speaking orientalists laid the foundation for the spread of Azerbaijani literature beyond its borders. Their translations and scholarly efforts were instrumental in introducing Azerbaijani literary works to the wider world, creating a legacy that continues to influence contemporary translations.

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