



## Research Article

# The examination of the musical and cultural characteristics of Yalli dance<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

One of the dances that is widely spread and performed collectively in the folklore of the Turkish world is the Yalli. The Yalli dances, which are widespread in Western Azerbaijan—especially in Sharur-Deralayaz, Vedi, Agbaba, and other regions—are very well known. Yalli are dances performed by Azerbaijanis in ancient Iravan and several of its districts with specific sequences of movements. The first person to collect and record Western Azerbaijan Yallis was Rauf Bahmanli. The purpose of the presented research is to analyze the Yallis belonging to the musical folklore of the Agbaba district in Western Azerbaijan, one of the oldest and richest regions of Azerbaijan in terms of climate. The folklore samples of the Agbaba district have been formed as a result of long-term historical development, and studying these samples constitutes an important stage in identifying the ethnic characteristics of the area. This research is significant for those working in relevant fields such as folklorists, musicologists, and music literature experts, and it can also serve as an additional resource in music education institutions. The Yalli of the Agbaba district were analyzed in this article. In this research, Yalli samples from Agbaba were recorded by researchers for the first time and included in the study. Additionally, the Yalli recorded by R. Bahmanli was also incorporated into the research. Among the Yallis included are “Agbaba Yalli,” recorded by the Azerbaijan State Dance Ensemble at the “Khari Bulbul” Festival held in Shusha in 2024; the “Agbaba Yalli” performed at the wedding ceremony of Amasians in 2019; and Gasham Ismayilov's Yalli performance, notated by R. Bahmanli in 2015. The notation of the first three Yallis was prepared by researchers. The main time signatures found are 6/8, 2/4, 5/8, and others. Document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used as the research model. Based on the findings, Yallis were examined in terms of fret-intonation, formal structure, time signature variations, and performance characteristics. It should also be noted that Yalli often reflects life and historical events.

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## Introduction

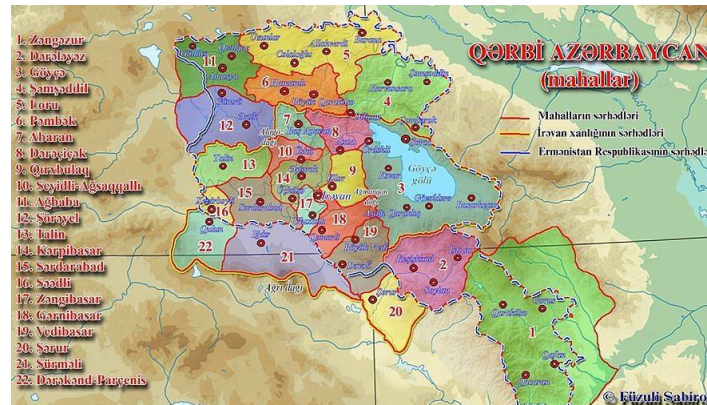
Western Azerbaijan, a painful part of the glorious history of azerbaijan, was the birthplace of dede gorgud, who gave name to the brave, and koroghlu, who made the enemy bleed. At the same time, the land of western azerbaijan gave azerbaijani science outstanding figures - public figures, people who left their mark on world science, culture, literature and art (Bayramov, 2017: 568). If we look at the geographical position of the lands of western azerbaijan, we can see that it is located in the southern part of transcaucasia, bordering the republic of georgia in the north, modern northern

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azerbaijan in the east and southeast, the republic of turkey in the west and iran in the south. the territory of western azerbaijan, populated mainly by oghuz-turk tribe tribes, includes 16 large regions - agbaba, shorail, lori, pamlek, daralayaz, zangibasar, garnibasar, vedibasar, talyn, zardarabad, karbibasar, darachichek, ataren, zangazur, garagoyunlu and goycha.



**Figure 1.** Western Azerbaijan provinces (web 1)

If we look back at history, we will see that the original inhabitants of western azerbaijan were azerbaijani turks. as a result, by 1991, more than 90% of the toponyms of the territory were of turkish origin (bayramov, 2017: 568). however, considering that not a single azerbaijani lives in western azerbaijan today, we can understand how rich a source the folklore examples in the memories of older people from that region are. The historical roots of the material culture of western azerbaijan, which is a branch of azerbaijani culture, are connected with the ancestors of all azerbaijanis. its folklore is formed on the basis of certain rules and norms, as a creative field of all strata of the people, and acquires national content. it is based on artistic thinking and mythological sources of thought.

### Music folklore of Agbaba

Among the folklore samples of the peoples of the world, azerbaijani folklore stands out for its richness and originality. here, azerbaijani folklore is presented, based mainly on cosmogonic and seasonal myths, as well as ethnogonic myths, based mainly on azerbaijani literature. here we can mention the azerbaijani musical folklore, which was formed on the basis of labor, epic, lyrical songs created by the people since ancient times, as well as the creativity of ashugs, khanende, and folk singers. A. Isazade especially notes that the singers played an important role in the development of azerbaijani musical folklore: “their azerbaijani folk song art - ritual, labor, everyday, lyrical, heroic, humorous, satirical, etc. it made a great contribution to the preservation and dissemination of various samples among the masses. many folk singers, in addition to performing folk songs and enriching them in an ideological and artistic sense, also created new beautiful songs dedicated to communist labor in everyday life, factories and plants, agriculture, and cotton growing. all these songs are distinguished, first of all, by their ideological and emotional content and imagery, cheerful mood, and optimistic outlook on the future. here the lively attitude of the masses to contemporary events and their high creative activity find their expression” (Isazade, 1984:125).

When examining the folklore of the aghbaba province of the amasya region, it becomes clear that the ethnocultural environment of aghbaba was an environment that played the role of a “bridge” in the context of the anadolu-azerbaijani culture, which had a regionally specific musical folklore and was distinguished by a special manner of performance and musical dialect (Azizova, 2022: 69). A number of scientific studies have been conducted in this region. as an example, we can cite scientific studies devoted to the literary and cultural, as well as the ashug environment of this region, such as “ashug environment of agbaba” by tajir gurbanov and “ashug environment of agbaba-chyldyr” by avtandil agbaba. however, it would not be wrong to say that this area has been somewhat neglected in terms of ethnomusicology. research in the field of ethnomusicology includes gulchin mirzayeva's research on “music-theoretical principles “tiringi” and “nanaies (based on agbaba's materials)”.

## Yallis

speaking of "yalli", it should be noted that "yalli" dances can be found in various regions of azerbaijan. for example, this type of dance is widespread in the southern region, sheki and nakhchivan regions. thus, in the nakhchivan region there are more than a hundred "yalli", and in the sheki region - more than eighty. "yalli" are mainly dedicated to various life and everyday events, which is due to their names and wide distribution among the population. these characteristics are most often associated with work, play, humor, etc. can be found in the content. According to their choreographic content, "yalli" are divided into two groups:

- Gameable "yalli"
- Anceable "yalli"

The names of the playing yalli are "kochari", "gaz-gazi", "chop-chopyu", and the names of the dancing yalli are "dene yalli", "siyagutu", "tanzara", "urfany", and etc. "yalli" are also divided into two types according to musical accompaniment:

- Yalli dances are performed to song accompaniment.
- Yalli is performed with musical accompaniment.

## Method

It is impossible to give a specific number of yallis as examples of folklore in the aghbaba district of western azerbaijan. most of these yallis are still remembered today by both the older generation and the younger aghbaba residents. the authors conducted a study of the performance characteristics, fret-intonation, and form structure of the notated yallis. the article examines the features of the musical language of yalla, recorded from videotapes, their form-content characteristics, melodic, metro-rhythmic and modal structure using typological and comparative methods. in developing the topic, the theoretical foundations of modern folklore and musicology were creatively used.

## Results and Discussion

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, it provides information about the musical folklore of the agbaba region, in particular the yalli, which is native to the region and is performed with great enthusiasm by both the older and younger residents of the region. according to the analysis of the notational variants of the yalli dances, which constitute the main line of musical folklore of the agbaba region, it can be noted that the agbaba yalli are based on the intonations of segah and shur. There are different versions of the yalla of the aghbaba region of western azerbaijan, and these yallas were formed during folk festivals and festive ceremonies held in a number of villages and districts of this region, and have undergone various versions and variations, which led to the creation of unique melodies. sometimes the expansion of the motives and sub-motives of many yallis from which these melodies originated led to the creation of new yallis in the works of different ashugs, especially zurna (azerbaijan national instrument) players .

Although the majority of aghbaba yalli are performed instrumentally, there are also vocal yallis. these vocal yallis often derive from the fact that yallis, which are often performed instrumentally, are danced over a long period of time. thus, during a long dance it often happens that one of the performers or singers participating in the celebration becomes even more inspired and eventually pass to vocal performance. this principle is fully consistent with the vocal and instrumental yallis of the turkish-speaking peoples, preserving traces of a great culture. in general, the performance of yalli and halai originates from the themes of life, everyday life and heroism of the overwhelming majority of turkish-speaking peoples.

When performing aghbaba yalli, yalli performers try to create a new period each time, including symmetrical and asymmetrical periods in their performance. these periods, in the form of variants and variations of each other, embody the mastery of the ashug (zurna player), his playing skills, his ability to compose melodies and the purpose of these melodies - to entertain the audience. One of the "agbaba yalli" [web 2], is noted from the performance of the azerbaijan state dance ensemble at the "kharı bulbul" festival held in shusha in 2024, consists of 2 parts. the first part of the yalli has a simple two-part form with the structure a+b+a1+b1. yalli, performed in allegro tempo and 2/4 measure, and this

period based on segah intonation, which corresponds to d segah makham. the performer prefers to play variations of motifs and submotifs during the performance to make the yalli sound even more cheerful. this is from this point of view that the interrogative and response sentences in section b seem to be developed simultaneously. Here, the interrogative sentence consists of 14 bars, and the response sentence consists of 12 bars. the interrogative sentence is based on the shikastayi-fars intonations and begins with the f shikastayi-fars step of the re segah. at the end of the interrogative sentence of the period, there is a transition to the shur intonation. the interrogative sentence is on the shur intonation and corresponds to the c shur moment. after this, the a and b periods are repeated. here, the a period is again sounded, and the b period is sounded in the form of a cutted reprise.

**Agbaba yallı**  
I

musical notation: Telman Ganiyev

**Allegro** ♩ = 70

interrogative sentence      response sentence

interrogative sentence

response sentence

**Figure 1.** Agbaba Yalli-I

The second part of the yalli is in presto tempo, 6\8 measure. the yalli is in a simple 2-part form and uses 2 periods. the periods are expanded and asymmetrical. here, the interrogative and response sentences of the 1st period are repeated 2 times as a variant. the performances in the 1st period of the yalli are based on the segah intonation and correspond to the re segah makham. the shikastayi-fars intonations are appropriate in the response sentence. Then, a variant repetition of the interrogative and response sentences of the 2nd period is heard here. during the variant repetition of the interrogative sentence of the 2nd period, the culmination is heard in the irak step that belonging to the segah. the end of the interrogative sentence refers to the upper leading tone of the d segah. the performance of the response sentence of the period is based on the shur intonation. here, the response sentence, together with the variant repetition consist of 13 bars and corresponds to the c shur makham.

**Agbaba yallı**  
**II**

**Presto ♩ = 140**

I period

interrogative sentence

response sentence

interrogative sentence

response sentence

II period

interrogative sentence

response sentence

**Figure 2.** Agbaba Yalli-II

The another “ağbaba yallı” [web 3] performed at the wedding ceremony of amasyans in 2014 differs from the previous yalli analyzed earlier in some features. unlike the previous yalli, this yalli begins with an instrumental introduction in the form of an 11-bar period. these introductory bars are presented in andante tempo, in 2\4 measure. the sounds here are on the shur intonation and correspond to the g shur makham. this yalli has the following structure: introduction+a+closing bar+b+a1+a2 (vocal).

After the introductory part, the rest of the yalli is played in presto tempo, in 6\8 measure. in the introductory part, 1 period is repeated 2 times. this part is on the shikastayi-fars (segah) intonation and corresponds to the e segah makham. in section a, which follows the introduction, the interrogative sentence is repeated 9 times. here, the interrogative and response sentences are repeated in an expanded and variant form. in this section, the repetition of phrases 1 and 2 in particular leads to the creation and expansion of variant forms of the interrogative sentence.



Agbaba yallı  
Yan-yana, yan-yana  
Amasiya

Andante  $\text{♩} = 70$  musical notation: Telman Ganiyev

Presto  $\text{♩} = 140$

interrogative sentence

response sentence

vocal part

Çal - san a - gır zur-na lar, yan - ya na

yan - ya na. Oy-na-sın gül - sün dost-lar, yan - ya - na yan-ya-na.

linking bars

Figure 3. Agbaba Yallı-III

The performances in the interrogative sentence of section a are on the seğah intonation and correspond to the g shikastayi-fars step of the e seğah position. In the response sentence, the first phrase is on the shikastayi-fars step of the e seğah. The second phrase ends on the maya (basic) step of the e seğah. After the connecting bars are sounded 3 times, the interrogative and response sentences of section b are repeated 2 times. After this section, section a1 is sounded and here, the interrogative and response sentences of this section are played differently in terms of intonation. Here, the interrogative sentences are on the g shikastayi-fars step belonging to the e seğah position, and the answer sentence is on the shur intonations, corresponding to the d shur position. After that, the variant sounds of the a section are based on the vocal performance. Then the zurna instrument repeats the vocal performance instrumentally and the yallı ends.

### Conclusion

During the analysis, study has revealed the deep cultural and musical characteristics of Western Azerbaijan. Works of this kind also include yallı dances which are seen intensively in the Ağbaba region of Western Azerbaijan. This article is devoted to Yallı dances, which are performed in daily life and historical events in Azerbaijani music culture, reflect the rich folklore and reflect the ethnic and cultural heritage of the Azerbaijani people. It can also be noted that yallı dances have become widespread in the regions of Azerbaijan and have become one of the main routines of people's lives and livelihoods. These dances are especially popular in the southern region, in Sheki and Nakhchivan. From the conducted research it is clear that the role of singers in the development of Azerbaijani musical folklore was noted by A. Isazade. Singers have rendered great services in the dissemination of various examples of folk art among the people.

The article also examines the musical language, tone and form structure of Yallı dances are seen as the unique identity of regional variations and Ağbaba's musical culture. Along with this, fret-intonation features are diverse and different mugham intonations follow each other.

This study has shaped the evolving forms of Yallı, as seen in its vocal and instrumental variations. It is recommended that research on the musical structure of Yallı dance be conducted in different dimensions.

As a result of the analysis of ghazal-romances, the following results were obtained.

- Yallı dances are very popular in all regions of Western Azerbaijan.
- There are various versions of yallis from the Ağbaba district of Western Azerbaijan.

- Although the yallis of the Aghbaba district are mainly performed instrumentally, there are also spoken yallis.
- Symmetrical and asymmetrical periods are encountered during the performance of Agbaba yalli.
- The periods are characterized by the variant repetition of question and answer sentences.

### Biodata of authors



Telman Ganiyev was born in 1970 in the city of Sumgait. In 1985-89, he graduated from the Sumgayit Music College, then from the Baku Music Academy named after U. Hajibeyli with honors diplomas. While BMA was a student, he worked as an artist in the choir chapel of the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic named after M. Magomayev. In 1994, he was appointed a teacher in the choir conducting department of Sumgayit Music College, and during his work there, the students he trained in his specialty were repeatedly awarded the highest places in republican competitions. He worked as a teacher at the music colleges of Baku and Sumgayit cities, and worked as a conductor in concerts of national and international importance together with the choral collectives he created in these institutions. For these activities, he received honorary degrees from local organizations and the Ministry of Education of the Republic. In 1997, he received the assistant-internship qualification at the Graduate School of BMA, and in 2004, he defended his dissertation to receive a candidate of art studies degree. In 2010, he received the title of associate professor of general sciences. In 2001-2012, he worked as a senior teacher and associate professor at the Sumgait branch of the Azerbaijan Teachers' Institute, in 2010-2011 as a senior researcher at the Institute of Culture and Art of ANAS, and since 2011 as an associate professor at the Azerbaijan National Conservatory. Currently, he works as an associate professor at Sumgayit State University. In 2007, he published the classifications created by the People's Artist of the Republic, singer Alibaba Mammadov, together with the Honored Worker of Art, Professor G. Abdullazadeh as a teaching aid. In 2012, he recorded the songs composed by A. Mammadov and published them as textbooks. In 2015, by the order of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, all the songs and classifications composed by A. Mammadov were recorded by T. Ganiyev, compiled in the form of an anthology called "Songs" and "Tasnifs" and included in the Golden Fund. He is the author of up to 50 scientific articles, subject programs and books.

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**Afaq Ganiyeva** was born in 1979 in the city of Sumgait. After graduating from Sumgayit Music College in 1998, she completed her bachelor's degree in 2002 and master's degree in 2004 in the piano department of Baku Music Academy in the class of Professor Elmira Aliyeva. During her studies, in 2002, she participated in the competition of pianists "The Best Performer of Classical Sonata and Classical Concert" held at the Baku Academy of Music and received a diploma. She also performed at more than 20 concerts and competitions held throughout the country. In 2011, she got her PhD thesis on art studies. Since 2000, she has worked as a teacher at Sumgayit Music College, since 2015 as a senior lecturer at Sumgayit State University, and currently works as an associate professor. The book "Arias and Romances written to odes and ghazals of Nizami Ganjavi by Azerbaijani composers" dedicated to the 870th anniversary of Nizami Ganjavi's birth in 2012, "Musical world of Nizami Ganjavi" dedicated to the 880th anniversary of N. Ganjavi's birth in 2021, in 2023, teaching materials called "Tarzan Kamil Ahmadov's Mugham Performance School" were published. She is the author of up to 30 scientific articles, subject programs and books. Sumqait State University, Azerbaijan. E-mail: afa7gani9@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-0489-7420

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**Web sites**

Web 1 <https://sia.az/az/news/politics/1011570.html>

Web 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ug0gcjvqiw>

Web 3 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kpx\\_y6\\_ekq](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kpx_y6_ekq)