



‘ĀŠEQ

‘ĀŠEQ, in Azarbaijan (both in Iran and Azarbaijan SSR) a poet and minstrel who accompanies his singing on a long-necked, fretted, plucked chordophone known as a *sāz* (q.v.). These poet-minstrels have lived and performed among Turkic peoples since before the advent of Islam. Each group has its own name for the musician, and the musical instrument changes from region to region as well. *‘Āšeq* comes from Arabic and means “in love.” The term *‘āšeq* referring to the poet-minstrel appears in literature for the first time in the fifteenth century. Before that time similar minstrels were called *ozān* (Başgöz, “Turkish Folk Stories,” pp. 331-39).

Suggestions have been made as to why the name *‘āšeq* has been given to these musicians. According to Chodzko (*Popular Poetry of Persia*, pp. 12-13), the term referred to a musician who traveled with acrobats and jugglers to nomad encampments and to weddings. Slobin reports (*Instrumental Music in Northern Afghanistan*, p. 199) that the terms *‘āšeq*, *majnūn* (mad), and *mast* (drunk) were all used to describe musicians. He feels that such terms indicate definite cultural attitudes about the personality of the professional musician.

In the years before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, *‘āšeqs* frequently performed in coffee houses in all the major cities of east and west Azarbaijan in Iran. Tabrīz was the eastern center for the *‘āšeqs* and Urmia the western center. In Tabrīz *‘āšeqs* most often performed with two other musicians, a *bālābān* player and a *gāvāl* player; in Urmia the *‘āšeq* was always a solo performer.

In eastern Azarbaijan, the *‘āšeq* and his troupe usually performed a genre of



lyrical poem which they called ‘*āšeqhawāsī* (q.v.). These poems were cast in quatrain form, usually eleven syllables per line and three to five stanzas a poem. (In Azarbaijan SSR and Turkey, this form is one of many and is called *qošmā* or *kosma*.) In Iranian Azarbaijan, ‘*āšeqs* perform other short poems as well. The *bayātī* is one of these and is often improvised.

In western Azarbaijan, while the ‘*āšeqs* do perform ‘*āšeqhawāsī* and other short poem forms, their genre of preference is the *dāstān*. The *dāstāns* can be divided roughly into two main types: the heroic epic, such as *Kuroḡlū*, and the romantic tale, such as *Aṣḡlī o Karam*. The *dāstāns* are lengthy, some running up to fifteen hours, and are recited serially over a period of several days. The performer tells the story in a speaking voice, but when the main characters speak, their parts are sung.

In addition to performances in coffee houses, the ‘*āšeq* also performs at weddings and on other festive occasions. Before the revolution, these men appeared regularly on radio and television in the provinces of Azarbaijan as well.

The ‘*āšeqs* seem to continue the tradition of the *gōsāns*, the minstrels of pre-Islamic times.

See also ‘[Āšeq Hawāsī](#).

For a music sample, see ‘[Āšeq Jonun](#).

For a music sample, see [Tajnis](#).

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