

**THE ROLE OF THE RUSSIAN ORIENTALIST Y. E.  
BERTELS IN THE FORMATION OF THE AZERBAIJAN  
LITERARY SCENE IN MOSCOW**

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the origin of a favourable scientific and cultural atmosphere in Moscow to begin the formation of the Azerbaijani literary scene in the late 1940s. In fact, these conditions were created by Azerbaijani literary scholars with the enormous help of their colleagues – prominent Russian orientalists. In this work, special attention is paid to the extensive legacy of the famous Russian orientalist Y.E. Bertels, his main studies are chronologically (from 1920 to 1956) analysed, covering his life and career, including the era of the great Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi, their significance in the development of domestic study of Nizami is evaluated. The specific contribution of the great Russian scientist to the creation of the Azerbaijani literary scene in Moscow is identified.*

**Keywords:** Bertels research, legacy, study of Nizami, turkologist.

Despite the fact that fruitful relations existed between Azerbaijani and Russian literature since the beginning of the 19th century, “the most intensive study of literary relations between Russia and Azerbaijan dates back to the Soviet period”<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, during this period, such important factors as: mutual translations, conducting bilateral literary and cultural events in Moscow and Baku, the study of the interaction of specific literary facts and events, personal relationships of creative people and many other close contacts contributed to the rapid development of interconnections, including the convergence of Azerbaijani and Russian literature.

The poetic words of the famous Russian writer Alexander Fadeev (1901–1956), uttered at a gala evening of Azerbaijani literature and art in Moscow, perfectly describe the relationship between Russian-Azerbaijani culture of those years: “... The great power of the soul of this people gave rise to the greatest world classics – humanists Nizami, Fizuli, Vaqif, Sabir, M.F. Akhundov, whose names are dear to the heart of every thinking person in the world. One should not be surprised that with such a magnificent classical legacy, far from being exhausted by the mentioned

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<sup>1</sup> Sh. Kurbanov, *Azerbaijani-Russian literary relations*, Baku, Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, 1964.

names, the Soviet literature of Azerbaijan has become one of the leading literatures of the USSR”<sup>2</sup>.

With regard to the friendly relationship between the Azerbaijani and Russian peoples, the sincere words of the People's Poet of Azerbaijan Samed Vurgun (1906–1956) are a tuning fork not only of the Soviet period of our relations, but also of today, and, most probably, the future: “Thanks to the glorious ancestors who tied the fate of our people and the history of the Russian people with the knot of friendship. Thanks to Akhundov and his followers who left us the greatest spiritual conquest of our people – an ideological and creative community with a great Russian culture”<sup>3</sup>. Since the 1930s, Azerbaijani literary scholars Aziz Sharif (1895–1988), Feyzulla Gasimzade (1898–1976), Mamed Arif Dadashzade (1904–1975), Mikail Rafili (1905–1958), Hamid Arasli (1909–1983), Mamed Jafar Jafarov (1909–1992) actively participated in the study of Azerbaijani-Russian literary communication, began to work closely with Russian orientalists and Turkologists.

It should be noted that in the 1920s not only in Moscow, but also in Petrograd, a bright and deep school of oriental studies was formed. Back then, among the Russian intelligentsia there was a romantic relationship with the East, they considered Persia a “country of poets”, and at the beginning of the 20th century in St. Petersburg the poet Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949) organized a circle of “hafizites” for whom the personality of the legendary Persian poet Hafiz Shirazi (1326–1390) symbolized high, mystical poetry. The circle included such prominent figures of Russian culture as L.S. Bakst (1866–1924), N.A. Berdyaev (1874–1948), S.M. Gorodetsky (1884–1967), L.D. Zinovyev-Annibal (1866–1907), M.A. Kuzmin (1875–1936), S.A. Auslender (1866–1943), V.F. Nouvel (1871–1949) and K.A. Somov (1869–1939)<sup>4</sup>. Y.E. Bertels was also one of the activists of this cult circle.

As wrote the famous modern scholar, expert in Persian poetry, doctor of philological sciences, professor N.I. Prigarina (1934), in Hafiz’s poetry “the perfection of poetic thought, courage, freedom, irony and soulful sincerity were surprisingly combined with some mysterious illumination of each word, its multidimensionality, exciting unity of form and essence. It is not surprising that in the eyes of readers of Hafiz, and,

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<sup>2</sup> A. A. Fadeev, “Speech at a gala evening of literature and art of Azerbaijan in Moscow”, in *Literary Azerbaijan*, vol. 4, no. 5, 1940, p. 25-39.

<sup>3</sup> S. Vurgun, “Our teacher and friend”, in *Friendship of Peoples*, no. 3, 1949, p. 134-137.

<sup>4</sup> N. A. Bogomolov, “Petersburg hafizites”, in *The silver age in Russia*, Moscow, Radiks, 1993, p. 167-210.

above all, in the eyes of Sufis, ingenious possession of the word was nothing short of a divine gift, a sign of the poet's affinity for the world of secrets, and he himself was an instrument of the world of secrets, its mouthpiece"<sup>5</sup>.

Another medieval Persian poet was extremely popular with Russian intelligentsia in the first half of the 20th century – Saadi Shirazi (1203–1292), whose works, in particular, “Gulistan”, were translated by Y.E. Bertels in the 1920s (1890-1957). They also spoke of a “seven-star heaven of Persian-language poetry”, which included: Abulgasim Firdousi (935–1020) as a representative of the historical and heroic dastan, Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209) as an epic romantic, Ali Akhedaddin Anveri (1125–1191) – a panegyrist, Jalaladdin Rumi (1207–1273) – a mystic poet, Saadi Shirazi – a moralist, Hafiz Shirazi – a love lyricist, and Abdurrahman Jami (1414-1492) – an exceptionally great poet, combining all poetic genres and directions.

This poetic Seven came into literary life thanks to the author of the History of Persian Literature, Austrian Baron Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856). He formed his immortal Seven “in Heaven of Persian poetry”, considering the well-known mystical meaning of the number 7 in the East<sup>6</sup>. According to the traditions of the cultures of the Ancient East, 7 is the most significant of the sacred numbers. In particular, in the ancient East “seven immortal saints” were worshiped, the main spirits: good thought, truth, the long-awaited Kingdom come, pious humility, perfect health, immortal youth, vigilant obedience.

### **Yevgeny Bertels's study of the literary heritage of Sufi authors**

In the area of the study of Azerbaijani literature and its propaganda in the capital, including in the training of young oriental scholars who arrived from Baku to Moscow, an outstanding Iranian scholar, Turkologist, expert and researcher of Azerbaijani classical literature, a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences Yevgeny Eduardovich Bertels was particularly distinguished among the Russian Orientalists. He was the brightest representative of Soviet orientalism in the first half of the 20th century. In the 1920s, the early works of a scientist in the field of Iranian studies and Turkology

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<sup>5</sup> N. I. Prigarina, *Hafiz and the influence of Sufism on the formation of the language of Persian poetry. Sufism in the context of Muslim culture*, Moscow, Nauka, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschnichte der Shonen Redenunste Persiens, mit einor Blumenlese aurs zweithundert persichen*, Wien, Heubner und Volke, 1818.

appeared. Yevgeny Eduardovich entered orientalism as a researcher of Persian literature, but then became widely known as a researcher of Azerbaijani literature, in particular, the work of the greatest Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi. However, his scientific career began with the study of Iranian literature. In 1918, Yevgeny Bertels published Buddhist legends translated from Sanskrit in the journal *Snopy*<sup>7</sup>, and in 1922, Saadi's "Gulistan" in his translation saw the light in Berlin<sup>8</sup>.

In 1918–1920, Bertels completed the full course of the Faculty of Oriental Languages at Petrograd University and was left at the university to take master's exams. At the same time, he entered the Asian Museum of the Academy of Sciences as a researcher, now the Institute of Oriental Studies, where he worked for thirty-seven years. In 1921–1938 he taught Persian at the Petrograd Institute of Living Oriental Languages, and later at the Leningrad Oriental Institute, one of the oldest oriental centres in Russia. His scientific and teaching activities were directly related to Iranian studies and Turkology. After the Great Patriotic War – from 1946, Yevgeny Eduardovich moved to permanent residence in Moscow and began working at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

Since the late 1940s, a respected and prominent orientalist, Turkologist Bertels has actively helped young Azerbaijani scientists in the capital of the Soviet Union. He was the direct leader and patron of Akber Babayev (1924–1979), Rustam Aliyev (1929–1994), Gazanfar Aliyev (1930–1984) and Azade Rustamova (1932–2005) who later became leading Azerbaijani orientalists, Turkologists of the All-Union and, perhaps, in some degree, with a global reach. Yevgeny Eduardovich Bertels, the famous Russian scientist played an important part in the creative fate of the famous Azerbaijanis of Moscow – professors Aziz Sharif, Halig Koroglu and Chingiz Huseynov, providing them with all kinds of support.

Nowadays, the good name of the great orientalist is always remembered with great gratitude and appreciation in Azerbaijan, along with numerous, unforgettable merits to the domestic science, and especially for the outstanding scientific work in researching the creative heritage of the great Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi. This short review article on the studies of Nizami's life and poetic path by Y.E. Bertels is also written in an homage to the tireless Russian researcher of Nizami,

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<sup>7</sup> Y. E. Bertels, "Of Buddhist legends", in *Black Snake*, no. 1, 1918, p. 10-12.

<sup>8</sup> M. Sh. Saadi, *Gulistan*, Berlin, State Publishing House, 1922.

whose discoveries and scientific conclusions undoubtedly enriched and strengthened many years of Russian-Azerbaijani literary relations.

Furthermore, it should be noted that in fact the foundation of Russian Iranianism was laid by Peter I (1672–1725), who sent five students of Moscow Latin schools to Persia to study Oriental languages. In the first half of the 19th century, in addition to the Persian and Arabic languages, Russia studied Georgian, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Chinese, Hebrew, Manchu, and Turkish. At the University of St. Petersburg, the Department of the Persian language opened, which was taught by Orientalists-Azerbaijanis A.K. Kazembek (1802–1870) and professor Mirza Jafar Topchibashev (1790–1869), and where Y.E. Bertels eventually enrolled. In the first half of the 20th century, the Sufi tradition was one of the leading in Iranian studies, and in this context, Y. Bertels's appeal to the matters of Sufism and Sufi literature in Persian and Arabic looks quite natural. In total, 22 publications covering these matters are associated with the early, Petrograd period of scientific activity.

Many of these publications were the direct result of work in the manuscript funds of the Asian Museum and the M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library in Petrograd. In these manuscript funds, the scientist worked fruitfully until 1929. In publications of the 1920s, Y.E. Bertels for the first time in world orientalism raised the question of the connection of the Nishapur (Khorosan) school of Persian Sufism with the Iraqi school. During this period, the scholar was interested in the origin of Persian Sufism and the language of symbols characteristic of the Sufi literary tradition. Undoubtedly, without a deep study of the history and literature of Sufism, it is impossible to get an adequate idea of the medieval culture of the Front East. The work of prominent Sufi mystic poets had a direct impact on a number of oriental literatures, including Azerbaijani literature. All the more or less significant authors of the Muslim East, with rare exceptions, are associated with Sufism. Accordingly, their works cannot be adequately interpreted without acquaintance with the figurative and symbolic system of Sufi literature.

In a brief literary article entitled “The manuscript of Tafsir Salami in the State Public Library,” Y. Bertels confidently reflected on the emergence of Sufism: “The rudiments of mysticism in the holy book of Islam began to develop on this basis, and thus emerged the possibility of introducing a philosophical foundation to create that system of thinking, which later, under the name of Sufism, played such an important part in the spiritual culture of Islam”<sup>9</sup>. In the 1920s, such conclusions

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<sup>9</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *Sufism and sufi literature*, Moscow, Nauka, 1965.

represented a revolution in Sufi studies. Y. Bertels called Sufi mystical poetry a counterbalance to cold aristocratic poetry, where mastery prevailed over feeling. In fact, the poetry of Sufi mystics appealed to the “voice of the heart”, since it was the heart that was considered the receptacle of the Lord. The scientist also pointed out the democratic nature of Sufi poetry, its connection with the people, the people's spirit, a critical attitude to the feudal aristocracy of the Front East. Indeed, having arisen in urban artisan circles, Sufi poetry becomes a vivid example of creativity of the national elite, the national intelligentsia in the future.

Yevgeny Eduardovich Bertels emphasized yet another important merit of the Sufi authors: “When the hurricane of the Mongol invasion flew over Iran and Central Asia, when the thrones of almost all imaginary “world-owners” crumbled, court poetry fell silent. There was nobody to praise, for the Mongol khans could not care less about grating kassids speaking foreign language. (...) But Sufi poets did not fall silent during these difficult years. Their audience – the masses – remained, because you can destroy the dynasty, but you cannot destroy the people”<sup>10</sup>.

In the fair opinion of Bertels, it was the Sufi authors who saved the best traditions of Persian literature from oblivion, retained them safe and sound through the centuries. As a result, world literature was enriched by immortal ghazals, kassids and other works of many Sufi authors. A native of Baku, a famous orientalist, professor I.S. Braginsky (1905–1989) in the notes “Editor’s Preface” to the first volume of “Selected Works” of the great orientalist Y.E. Bertels wrote about his main line of research: “In his multifaceted oriental activity, Yevgeny Eduardovich Bertels focused on the study of Persian literature, especially the classical period. Yevgeny Eduardovich literally lived by the creations of the luminaries of Persian poetry, for many years he taught his many students how to understand it, acquainted wider Soviet and foreign audience with it”<sup>11</sup>.

One of the leading literary scholars of the Azerbaijani literary environment in Moscow, one of Bertels’s favorite students, doctor of philological sciences, professor Gazanfar Yusif oglu Aliyev (1930–1984) supplementing I.S. Braginsky's statements, clarifies the exact number of work done by his teacher: “Of the two hundred and ninety-five works of the scientist, at least one hundred and fifty are devoted to Persian

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *History of Persian-Tajik literature*, Vostochnaya Literatura, Moscow, 1960.

literature and the language of Farsi”<sup>12</sup>. And the study of the work of the greatest medieval poet of Azerbaijan Nizami Ganjavi became the centrepiece in the scientific activity of Y.E. Bertels in the second half of the 1930s. Being initially in the mainstream of the tradition of European study of Nizami of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the researcher nonetheless revised this tradition and proposed his own, in some aspects, revolutionary rendering of the creative and life path, an original interpretation of the figurative and symbolic series of poetic texts by Nizami Ganjavi.

It should be specified what exactly includes the subject of study of Nizami in the scientific work of Y.E. Bertels. Under the "subject of study of Nizami " the following works of an orientalist are meant: a critical text of the works of Nizami, compiled under the direct supervision of Y.E. Bertels and on the basis of the developed textual and interpretative principles, including three versions of the monograph dedicated to the great Azerbaijani poet ("The great Azerbaijani poet Nizami. Age – life – works" Baku, 1940; "Nizami", Moscow, "Young Guard", 1947; "Nizami. The creative path of the poet", Moscow, 1956). The monograph "A Novel about Alexander and Its Main Versions in the East" adjoins the subject of study of Nizami, wherein "Iskander-name" by Nizami Ganjavi is considered as an invariant of the myth about Iskander the Two-Horned, which is characteristic of Persian and Indian poetry, reinterpreted in specific dastan works. Y.E. Bertels managed to convincingly prove that the works of Nizami are deeply conceptual and based on his own philosophy of history. For Bertels, the historical and literary context of all Nizami's works and the historical and social issues of his poems were of paramount importance. The historiosophical motifs of Nizami's dastan poetry are adjacent to historical and social problematics, to which the scientist paid special exploratory attention. The orientalist fairly underlined the moralizing function of Nizami poems. "He was going to re-educate not only the masses, but also the bearers of power. They needed to be shown the "mirror" Nizami speaks of back in the first poem, purposefully reverting to the image of the mirror in "Iskander-name". (...) And it becomes quite clear that Nizami, who addressed the powers that be, at the same time did not strive to serve them and was most afraid of the "slave ring in the ear", because, having entered the service, he would thereby lose the ability to talk about

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<sup>12</sup> G. Yu. Aliev, "Bibliography of scientific works of corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences Y.E. Bertels", in *Soviet Orientalism*, no. 1, 1958, p. 114-124.

things he considered necessary to tirelessly repeat, becoming dependent and forced to be “a lamp that shines only for the moth of its house”<sup>13</sup>.

According to the researcher, Nizami adhered to Sufi views, but he focused on the early Sufi schools, and not the contemporary ones. “It is necessary to distinguish later Sufism from early Sufism of the 9th century. It was then, during the years of the transformation of the caliphate into a feudal state, when some early Sufis or, more correctly, Zahids (ascetics), rebelled against the powers that be in their sermons. (...) Apparently, Nizami also wanted to be such a Sufi, and therefore it was not by chance that he attacked the "hermits" of his time with fierce criticism, who, as he said, sold themselves out for a piece of bread. Such a "Sufi" as Nizami was, not only could, but also had to admonish the rulers”<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, according to Bertels's concept, Nizami was a Sufi, but ideologically closer to early Sufism, which had an acute social orientation. Inherent in early Sufism, according to the scientist, was not only the introduction to the divine and comprehension of the heights of the spirit and depths of the soul, but also a moralistic, mentoring word addressed to the rulers. Nizami believes that he has the right to instruct kings, and this exclusive right – the right of a poet and a Sufi – was granted to him from above. That is why his works acquire a social and even historiosophical tone. Bertels argued that Nizami belonged to the Sufi brotherhood of the Ahias, the secret guild society of the “knights of labour” that fought against tyrant rulers. The great Nizami, of course, fought only with the word, and therefore could only be the ideological inspirer of this secret society, but, nevertheless, the researcher provides convincing evidence of the poet's connection with such a Sufi brotherhood.

### **Coverage of poetic activity of Nizami in the works of Yevgeny Bertels**

The work of Y.E. Bertels "Poetics of Nizami" is of particular interest as well. In this work, the researcher analyses the views of Nizami on the nature of the poetic word, the purpose of poetry and poet. Bertels proceeds from the following thesis: Nizami's poetics cannot be

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<sup>13</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *Nizami and Fuzuli. Some tasks of studying the works of Nizami*, Moscow, Vostochnaya literature, 1962.

<sup>14</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *Some tasks of studying the works of Nizami. Prominent Russian writers and scholars on Nizami Ganjavi*, Baku, Yazychy, 1981.



approached exclusively from an aesthetic point of view. On the contrary, the historical and social categories are extremely important – in particular, the historiosophical aspect of the poet's works. Bertels fairly suggested that Nizami's poetics were by no means unchanged throughout the poet's work. "It is absolutely indisputable that the exceptionally complex style of the first Nizami poem differs sharply from the style of his next poem, and especially from the simple style of his last poem, "Iskander-name"<sup>15</sup>. If the early period of Nizami's creativity is characterized by the exceptional complexity of style, the richness of the verbal series, some pretentiousness, ornamental style, then the late period of the poet's creativity is characterized by simplicity and restraint, moderateness of expressive means.

The choice of plot is also extremely important in Nizami's works. Of the five poems included in "Khamse", three are written on the plots of ancient legends – "Khosrov and Shirin", "Leyli and Majnun", "Seven Beauties" – which traditionally became the material for dastan works. Moreover, the theme for the poem "Leyli and Majnun" was not chosen at the request of Nizami, but was the result of a poetic order. Bertels was one of the first to draw attention to the fact that Nizami carefully selected those elements of historical material that were necessary for his poems. This refers to a critical attitude towards historical texts, pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions and chronicles. The predecessors of Nizami – and even Ferdowsi – did not have such a critical treatment of historical and mythological material. Poets of the 11th century could not even dare to think that sacred tradition can be disputed. Nizami, on the contrary, for the first time managed to introduce an analytical beginning into a Persian poetic dastan.

The poetry of Nizami retained the features of a medieval worldview. Despite the elements of a scientific worldview, the poet's works contain the theme of divine predestination, the connection of human souls with a single "world soul". It is emphasized that the mystics that chose the path of enlightenment are accompanied by Khidr. Nizami drew inspiration for his works from the written chronicles and folk traditions. However, the ancient historical chronicles ultimately go back to folk traditions as well, therefore the figurative and symbolic series of works by Nizami Ganjavi are quite mythologized. Still, despite this considerable mythologization, the poet strove to individualize his heroes and deprive them of the statuary character inherent in the medieval

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<sup>15</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *Nizami and Fuzuli. Some tasks of studying the works of Nizami*, Moscow, Vostochnaya literature, 1962.

worldview. In the literature of the Middle Ages – both European and Persian – heroes symbolized certain vices or virtues, and the narrative itself was extremely allegorized.

In the development of the psychological appearance of the characters, Nizami embarked on a completely different path. As Y.E. Bertels fairly points out, the main creative idea of any N. Ganjavi's poem is to show the deep internal changes that, under the given conditions, should have occurred precisely in the persona of the hero. If Arab sources described the enamoured Majnun unchanged and seemingly statuesque from beginning to end of the plot, then Nizami shows the “inner laboratory” of the feelings of the young poet. In "The Poetics of Nizami", Bertels concludes that the poet perceived literature as an exceptionally effective tool of psychological influence on the reader and, above all, on those readers endowed with power. The ability to speak truth to the kings with a smile thus became the main virtue of Nizami and any poet of his rank.

Bertels considered the study of the interpretation of the poetic word in the poet's works to be one of the relevant objectives facing the study of Nizami. As the scientist proved, Nizami Ganjavi sought to extract from the word all the potential possibilities embedded in it, to revive the inner form of the word for the reader – “to resurrect a rose and then moan over this rose like a nightingale”. In the character image of the rose, which is traditional for the medieval poetry of the Near East, the poetic word, "the beautiful virgin Poetry", is encrypted, and in the character image of the nightingale is encrypted the poet. “Resurrection of the word”, the revitalization of its internal form immerses the poet into an ecstatic state, balancing between suffering and happiness, and extorts a groaning song from his heart.

Yevgeny Eduardovich first drew the attention of the literary community and connoisseurs of Nizami's poetry to the artistic device, which the poet often resorted to – building an image based on scientific terminology. A contemporary of Nizami Ganjavi – Khaqani Shirvani (1126-1199) also addressed this device. For example, Nizami used the mathematical term "dumb root" and stated that he would make this dumb root speak with his poems. As is known, the “dumb root” is the square root of the number minus one that cannot be found (in modern terminology – the imaginary root). In Nizami's works, the “dumb root” symbolizes a man whose heart has died, and, therefore, “one cannot find

lively, vivid love in such a heart, just as one cannot find the “dumb root”<sup>16</sup>.

As Bertels notes, for the first time this image appeared in Izzaddin Shirvani (1125–1197). Moreover, images based on the use of the term “dumb root” are characteristic of medieval Persian poetry and, in particular, of medieval poetry of Azerbaijan. Yevgeny Eduardovich Bertels specified that there are similarities between the Nizami and Khagani in terms of the application of images based on scientific terminology. Such a similarity could not but exist, since medieval Persian poetry, just as Arabic poetry, is built on traditional images (“nightingale and rose”, “face and curl”, etc.), which the poet master was supposed to “revive”, play with, originally interpret.

However, the medieval poet of the Near East could not completely abandon these traditional images – he was entrusted with the task of an interpreter, masterfully reviving stable figurative and symbolic series. Nor could Nizami refuse to interpret the traditional “migratory subject” of literature in the Near East. One of these plots was the story of the passionately enamoured poet-madman Majnun and his beautiful Leyli. Bertels saw the urgent tasks of study of Nizami not only in offering the most accurate interpretation of Nizami’s poetic texts, but also in compiling a grandiose dictionary that would cover the entire word stock of the poet. The said dictionary, according to Bertels, should indicate how many times each word is used in a given text. “It is impossible to make any assumptions regarding the Nizami language until we have this dictionary. We already have satisfactory texts of all five poems. When the “Sharaf-name” is published, it will be necessary to distribute all the words of the poem on the cards and do the same with the next poem”<sup>17</sup>.

Later Bertels began to seriously prepare this dictionary and saw it as a precise tool intended for a deep and complete interpretation of Nizami Ganjavi's works. In general, the scientist believed that it was necessary to study the poet's work diversely and using a variety of methodologies. To date, an analysis of Nizami's poetics is becoming one of the main directions in the study of his works, both in figuratively aesthetic and in comparative historical terms. It is also extremely important to study the stylistics of the poet's works, that rich literary phenomenon we call the “Nizami language”.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

The context of the era, on the understanding of which the depth and conceptual nature of the study of the corps of texts by Nizami Ganjavi depends, requires an exploratory interpretation. We cannot and should not discard the cultural, routine and civilizational aspects of the poet's works. Y.E. Bertels offered his students and followers a diverse literary toolkit, using which it was possible to conduct a multifaceted and conceptual analysis of the works of the "sage from Ganja". This refers to not just the figurative and aesthetic and comparative historical approach to the study of Nizami's works, but also to the application of the methods of intertextual, civilizational and contextual analysis.

However, Bertels was especially interested in the historical and social aspect of Nizami's works, the theme of wise and fair power, unfailingly present in his poems. Yevgeny Eduardovich analysed the development of this topic in the works of Nizami throughout his entire scientific career. Such an interest is quite justified, since the philosophy of power in the texts of Nizami smoothly flows into the philosophy of history. At the same time, the historiosophical aspect of the works of Nizami Ganjavi still remains understudied. Bertels only started the movement in this direction. Now it is up to his followers and students to continue the work.

The problem of the Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school was one of the most significant and, at the same time, the most debatable for orientalists of the 19th–20th centuries. The case is that Persian was used as a literary language by many peoples of the Near and Middle East, which included vast territories, namely Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, including Azerbaijan, Central Asia (Bukhara, Kharezm) and north-western India. As a result, as Y.E. Bertels fairly noted, "each poem written in Bukhara was understandable in Isfahan, and everything written in Shiraz soon became known in Samarkand"<sup>18</sup>. However, this does not mean that medieval literature in the Persian language is the exclusive property of Iran at all, and neither all Persianate poets should be considered Persian poets.

Tajiks, Iranians, Azerbaijanis, and other peoples who inhabited the Near East have equal rights to the huge literary legacy created in the Persian language – Dari and Farsi. Moreover, this legacy is the result of a rich cultural exchange, interweaving of cultures and the mutual influence of different ethnic groups using the Persian language. However, many orientalists of the 19th – early 20th centuries called Persian literature Persian and did not pay due attention to other peoples who created a

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<sup>18</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *History of Persian-Tajik literature*, Moscow, Vostochnaya Literatura, 1960.

valuable literary heritage in the Persian language. Moreover, some orientalists of the 19th century completely unreasonably considered Azerbaijan, including the territories of Central Asia, to be merely Iranian provinces, and not independent territories and ethnic groups.

Y.E. Bertels was one of the first in Russian orientalism who drew attention to the fact that the political history of these countries does not provide grounds to consider any of them leading, does not provide an opportunity to develop ethnocentric theories. As Yevgeny Eduardovich Bertels fairly pointed out, “Persian literature was formed not only in the territory of modern Iran; dozens of different peoples took part in its creation. If we try to limit Persian literature only to the names of those authors who lived on the territory of present-day Iran, then all this abundance will crumble and almost nothing will remain in our hands”<sup>19</sup>. Y.E. Bertels strongly disagreed with the fact that Persian and, moreover, Persianate literature is exhausted by Iranian literature. In the Persianate literature of the Seljuk era, the researcher identified the Central Asian, Khorasan, Azerbaijani and other literary schools.

In the era of Samanid rule, the best poets of Central Asia and Khorasan shone in Bukhara, where a new Persianate literature was formed. The head of the Persianate Bukhara poetry school was Abu Abdullah Jafar ibn Muhammad Rudaki (858–941) – the founder of Tajik literature. At the beginning of the 11th century, the countries of the Near East were subjugated by the Seljuk Turks. Sultan Mahmud Ghaznevi (971–1030) imitated the traditions of the Samanids and retained Persian as a literary language. At the beginning of the 11th century, the great master of the Persian verse, Qatran Tabrizi (1012–1091), appeared in the central city of South Azerbaijan – Tabriz. In the next, XIIth century, the poetic tradition of Qatran Tabrizi was continued by a galaxy of poets from Shirvan – Khaqani Shirvani, Izzaddin Shirvani, Feleki Shirvani, Mohammed Shirvani (1108–1146), etc.

Persianate poetry, which appeared in Azerbaijan in the 10th–11th centuries are closely connected with Bukhara and Ghaznavid court and city poetry. The Persianate poetry school is characterized by increased attention to the internal form of the word, the intensive play with figurative and symbolic images, and a complicated poetic technique. Persianate poets often used Arabisms and, as Y. Bertels pointed out, were prone to use Arabic dictionaries as against old Persian dictionaries. At the same time, the requirements of court etiquette imposed certain restrictions on the use of proverbs, sayings, and also on the appeal to

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<sup>19</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *The great Azerbaijani poet Nizami*, Baku, AzFAN Publishing House, 1940.

archaic folklore genres. However, as Y.E. Bertels notes, “Nizami, having fully assimilated all the necessary verbal mastery of his time, managed to remain independent of the courtyard whims, introduced poetry and rich content, eliminating the theory of necessity for literature to escape life, created by the harsh conditions of the time”<sup>20</sup>.

The originality of the literary position of Nizami Ganjavi was that the poet did not subordinate his work to a panegyric court tradition. Nizami dared to teach the powers that be, addressed them with a sermon on peace and mercy to the afflicted, and if he did not completely step away from the panegyric “notes”, he at least stepped away from the “mother's womb” of panegyric poetry. In this aspect, Nizami’s works contradict many of the fundamental positions of the Persianate court poetry school and, on the contrary, correspond to the Sufi critical attitude towards temporality. Understanding the Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school as an independent literary phenomenon, a cultural paradigm is one of the scientific achievements of Y.E. Bertels. The researcher considered the works of Nizami Ganjavi, Khaqani Shirvani, Qivami Mutarrizi (1118–1190), Feleki Shirvani (1126–1160) and other poets in the context of the Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school, which had its own artistic and aesthetic program, certain ideological principles.

The Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school was formed over the course of the 11th–12th centuries in such cities as Ganja, Tabriz, Nakhchivan, Barda, Maraga, Baku, etc. It should be noted that the genres of medieval Persianate Azerbaijani poetry were mixed – Arab-Persian. “Aruz” (an Arabic versification based on the alternation of long and short syllables) was used as a system of classical metrics. Naturally, “Aruz” engrained itself in Azerbaijani Persianate poetry since the time of the Arab conquest. This system of versification was adopted by the great Iranian-Tajik poets as well.

For the Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school, it was characteristic to play with traditional character images (“nightingale”, “rose”, “candle”, “moth”, etc.). By “nightingale” they usually meant a lover or a poet (often an enamored poet like Majnun), and a rose means a beauty, the Divine Beloved. The images of the candle and the moth flying to the fire were interpreted by analogy, when by the candlelight was meant the fire of Divine love, in which the mystic burns and is reborn.

The epic works of the Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school were based on the interpretation of such historical and legendary images as

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<sup>20</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *Nizami*, Moscow, Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, 1956.

Joseph the Beautiful of Canaan, Majnun, Farhad, Rustam and others, symbolizing beauty, obsession, selflessness, invincible strength, despotism (Zahhak) or wealth and wisdom (Suleiman-Solomon). Y.E. Bertels connected the Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school with the phenomenon of the Eastern Renaissance and emphasized that the traditions of this school were inherited by Amir Khosrov Dekhlevi (1253–1325), Abdurrahman Jami, Alisher Navoi (1441–1501) and Muhammad Fizuli (1494–1556).

### **The specifics of the translation of Nizami poems into Russian**

The analysis of the Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school occupies one of the central places in the “subject of study of Nizami” of the scientific legacy of Y.E. Bertels. The study of this school became a kind of prologue in Bertels' work to grasp the artistic legacy of Nizami Ganjavi and other great Persianate poets of medieval Azerbaijan. Moreover, Bertels quite often considered Nizami's works through the lens of the art program of the Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school, its main literary positions. An analysis of the poetic personality of Nizami Ganjavi is always accompanied by a study of the cultural paradigm of the Persianate Middle Ages.

According to Y.E. Bertels, language, just as the spirit of the era, is that lens through which the works of Nizami are to be looked at. The poet's language is not the canned conditional language of the court dastan tradition, but the living literary language that back in the era of Nizami Ganjavi became dominant. The poet stepped away from the court dastan culture and was in line with the culture of the city, which was the undoubted advantage of his texts. However, it was the liveliness and nationality of the language, along with the aesthetic value of the figurative and symbolic series and the depth of worldview that immortalized Nizami.

Yevgeny Eduardovich Bertels also pointed to another feature of the poetic language of Nizami – its ability to increase the significance of each word, making it self-sufficient, and making the poetic text surprisingly rich and concise. The deliberate complexity of the language, characteristic of Nizami poems, keeps readers' attention on every line, every poetic turn. As a result, the reader unravels, decrypts each line, character and image. Nizami, in the fair opinion of Bertels, provides the reader initiated into the secrets of scholastic poetics with material for reflection and thereby justifies his actions.

After the death of Nizami Ganjavi, all of his five poems – “The Treasury of Mysteries” (1178), “Khosrow and Shirin” (1180), “Leyli and Majnun” (1188), “Seven Beauties” (1196) and “Iskander-name” (1203), consisting of two parts – “Sharaf-name” (“Book of Glory”) and “Iqbal-name” (“Book of Fate”) – were combined into “Quinary” (“Khamsa”). Furthermore, the entire “Quinary” consists of 30,000 (thirty thousand) double-rhymed verses. Subsequently, the genre form of “Khamsa” became universal for the literature of the Near East. Dozens of Khamsa appeared, repeating the basic genre and ideological and aesthetic features of the corps of poems by Nizami Ganjavi. With that, the final part of any quinary cycle should be especially bright, representing a successful completion of the corps of poems. From the bibliographic reference of the monograph by Professor Gazanfar Aliyev, it is clear that the theme and plots of the poem were used by 287 authors of different nationalities who lived from Tibet to Asia Minor: “The Treasury of Mysteries” – 99; “Khosrow and Shirin” – 98; “Leyli and Majnun” – 123; “Seven Beauties” – 55; “Iskander-name” – 34<sup>21</sup>.

Such a union was caused not only by the desire to create a universal corpus of dastan texts of the poet, in which it would be possible to trace the cyclic connections, common motives, images and plots. It was motivated by the symbolism of the number “five” in the culture of Islam. Five sacred principles of Islam are known: confession of faith, prayer, alms, fasting, travel to Mecca. Finally, the number “five” corresponds with the five petals of the sacred plant – the lotus, moreover, it is this number in Islamic cultures that symbolizes the First Man.

However, Nizami did not conceive his five poems as part of a unified whole. However, cycle-forming connections, general motives, plots and images can be found in them. Still, all five poems are written in various meters, of which one was first used by the poet for a dastan narrative. In the preface to the literary translation of “Khamsa”, Y.E. Bertels wrote the following in this regard: “With all the diversity of subjects, the main thoughts promoted by Nizami are interconnected and, as we attempted to demonstrate here, with each next step of the poet, they crystallize more and more distinctly”<sup>22</sup>.

The Khamsa presents all types of poems known to medieval literature of the Near East: didactic (The Treasury of Mysteries),

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<sup>21</sup> G. Yu. Aliev, *Themes and plots of Nizami in the literature of the peoples of the East*, Moscow, Nauka, 1985.

<sup>22</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *Nizami*, Moscow, Sovetsky Pisatel, 1947.



romantic-heroic (Khosrow and Shirin), romantic-sentimental (Leyli and Majnun), adventurous (Seven Beauties), heroic (Iskander-name). Moreover, the meters chosen by Nizami for his poems, to this day remain associated with the types of lyric-dastan works he created. However, the poet himself predicted that he would be translated into many languages, but nobody would be able to accurately reproduce the lexical and stylistic richness of poems, since an ideal poetic translation is impossible in principle. indeed, in the case of any, even the most successful translation, we are dealing with an independent poetic text, using a foreign language, and sometimes foreign-culture original only as reference<sup>23</sup>.

However, even the most unsuccessful imitations provided an indirect service to Nizami's poems: translators, followers, and interpreters of the great poet, as much as possible, contributed to the immortality of his works. Undoubtedly, the accurate and figurative translation of Nizami's works is inevitably connected with many difficulties. Firstly, this requires proficiency in Farsi. Secondly, the adequacy of the translation is complicated by the fact that many comparisons and metaphors were drawn by Nizami from various scientific disciplines. Finally, it is necessary to thoroughly study the spirit and style of the era in which the poet created, the specific features of life and perception of the world, ideology and philosophy. Furthermore, the translator should be deeply familiar with the culture of Islam and Zoroastrianism, be able to interpret the mythological images present in the poems of Nizami.

Accordingly, only an orientalist with an unusually subtle gift of interpretation could be such a translator. It is this function that Y.E. Bertels performed, combining the efforts of orientalists and scientists of various specialties in the noble work of translating "Quinary" into Russian. The quality of translations made by a group of specialists under the supervision of Y.E. Bertels was ensured by the thoroughness of the pre-made word by word translation, as well as by the high skill of the poets involved in the work. However, as Yevgeny Eduardovich wrote, "of course, we are still far away from the full coverage of all of Nizami's wealth"<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> T. V. Portnova, "Historical aspects of project technologies development and opportunities for their use in scenic arts", in *Space and Culture, India*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2018, p. 48-56.

<sup>24</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *Nizami*, Moscow, Sovetsky Pisatel, 1947.

The scientist fairly believed that the translation of Nizami's works into Russian is a task of exceptional difficulty. Of course, it is possible, with varying degrees of accuracy, to convey the basic thoughts of Nizami, to reproduce the ideological and worldview aspects of his works. It is much more difficult to convey all the richness of the poet's language, the shades of the finest verbal game, the figurative and symbolic ranks of the *Khamsa*. Finally, according to Bertels, even a successful translation requires a detailed literary commentary. What did not require explanation for the readers of Nizami, eight centuries later evidenced the necessity of a detailed literary commentary. Thus, as Bertels summed up, to take a complete delight from the works of Nizami Ganjavi, they should be studied as against just being read. It was the very task, both of translation and commentary, that the scientist assumed himself and entrusted to the team of orientalists he led.

The translation efforts of a team of specialists led by Bertels were due to the preparation of the anniversary of Nizami Ganjavi. They were originally planning to celebrate the anniversary in 1941, but the Great Patriotic War thwarted the commemoration of the greatest Azerbaijani poet. The anniversary was celebrated later in 1947, and then the Soviet orientalists were entrusted with the difficult and multifaceted task of preparing a critical text for the works of Nizami for publication. The management of this work was entrusted to Y.E. Bertels. Especially for the anniversary, orientalists led by Yevgeny Eduardovich, collected the oldest and most valuable lists of Nizami Ganjavi's works, manuscripts, and compiled a critical text that allowed to discard later interpolations, managed to properly read a number of damaged lines. The first word by word translation of the body of texts of Nizami into the Russian language was performed, later becoming the basis for further poetic adaptation.

Undoubtedly, the original creative manner inherent in the poets-translators who worked on the texts of Nizami, has somewhat modernized and altered the "Quinary". However, as Yevgeny Eduardovich fairly remarked, "the variety of individual creative styles, inherent in poets-translators, did not obstruct the specific features that distinguish the poetic speech of the Azerbaijani classic for the reader"<sup>25</sup>. The main thing was done – the poetic legacy of the sage from Ganja has found its Russian reader. A group of specialists from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences managed to complete the first full philological translation of Nizami's works into Russian. The

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

basis for this translation included the text of the Tehran publication of "Quinary", prepared in 1935 by the outstanding poet and philologist, publisher of the *Armagan* magazine ("Gift"), professor Wahid Dastgirdi of an ethnic Azerbaijani from Tabriz. Dastgirdi not only completed the full publication of the "Quinary", but also introduced Iranian readers to Nizami's lyrical *divan*, which had not previously been fully published.

In 1940, Dastgirdi published a consolidated text of the Nizami *divan* in the *Armagan* magazine, entitled as "Ganja Treasury." The publication was based on eight manuscripts: two from the Bodleian library in Oxford, one from Berlin, three from India, a manuscript discovered in Tabriz, including a combined text prepared by the Indian scholar Akhtermeyan Junakedei. However, all these manuscripts differ insignificantly from each other and go back to one later original, which, of course, belittles their significance, since not only the great Azerbaijani poet, but also several of his later imitators used the poetic pseudonym (*tahallus*) Nizami. Therefore, it is unusually difficult to separate the original lyric texts of Nizami Ganjavi from later build-ups. "We know at least seven other Nizami, and during the Sevefid era this *tahallus* was used very often. The compilers of the *divan* required only one thing: to have Nizami's *tahallus* in the verses. They did not care which Nizami it was. And thus the collection currently known under the name of the *Divan* of Nizami was created"<sup>26</sup>.

Despite the recognition of the merits of Dastgirdi as a publisher and connoisseur of medieval literature in Farsi, Bertels noted his textological miscalculations and errors. The main of such miscalculations was that Dastgirdi did not provide any inconsistencies and options, as a result of which it was impossible to trace the panorama of the text change, to see the body of Nizami texts in a historical perspective. Wahid Dastgirdi proceeded from thirty manuscripts, copied in the 14th-17th centuries, and stored in Iranian libraries, including on the Berlin manuscript, two manuscripts of the Bodleian library, Rampur, Laknau and Calcutta. Among the obvious shortcomings of the Tehran publication, Y.E. Bertels also noted the fact that Wahid Dastgirdi included in his edition of the *Divan* of Nizami poems that were not written by the poet himself, but rather by various imitators and falsifiers (*mullahs* of the Nizami of the Safavid era in Iran and India). A philological translation of the body of texts by Nizami Ganjavi,

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<sup>26</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *Nizami*, Moscow, Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, 1956.

performed under immediate guidance of Y.E. Bertels, is free from these shortcomings.

Specialists from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences used not only the Tehran publication, but also manuscript material, and the critical text of the works of Nizami Ganjavi, of course, was verified in accordance with manuscripts. The main criterion for Russian translators was the accuracy and adequacy of the reproduction of the figurative and symbolic series of Nizami's works, the preservation of the poet's refined metaphors, the ability to convey the richness and diversity of the Khamsa language and the lyrical divan. As Y.E. Bertels subsequently specified, "translators avoided literalism and calque of obscure Persian expressions for the reader"<sup>27</sup>. Along with the Russian translation in Baku, a complete prosaic translation of the poems and lyrics of Nizami Ganjavi into the Azerbaijani language was performed. Both translations served as the basis for further poetic adaptation of Nizami's works. In both cases, Y.E. Bertels acted as a kind of arbiter of the translation efforts of scientists.

Thus, Y.E. Bertels analysed the aesthetics and poetics of Nizami's works, including his life and career within the framework of the historical and literary categories, such as "poet's era", "poet's ideological program", "poet's art program" and "poet's language as a verbal embodiment of the spirit of the people". Bertels managed to prove that the element of the national language possessed Nizami, and largely thanks to this, he managed to succeed as a poet, philosopher and an outstanding figure in medieval Azerbaijani culture. Folk culture nourished the spirit of the poet, leading him to thorough understanding of the historical fate of Azerbaijan and ponderings on the historical destinies of mankind. That is why the name of Nizami Ganjavi will live forever, not only for the culture of Azerbaijan, but also for world culture at large.

The people paid tribute to Nizami in the way common for the Near East: his grave became a favourite place of pilgrimage. When and who built the tomb of Sheikh Nizami remains unknown. However, this anonymity does not detract from the greatness of popular passion for the poet. Even when the tomb fell into decay, the memory of the poet remained immutable. Y.E. Bertels repeatedly emphasized that for Nizami, the subject of social significance of the word and the responsibility of the "master of the word" of the poet before the people,

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<sup>27</sup> Y. E. Bertels, *Nizami and Fuzuli. Some tasks of studying the works of Nizami*, Moscow, Vostochnaya literature, 1962.

the readership, is key. In “Quinary” the poet’s teaching function is repeatedly emphasized, and the poet acts as a mentor not only in relation to the people, but also in relation to those in power. This high mentorship became the leitmotif of not only the works of Nizami, but also his life purpose and destiny.

Thus, it is Y.E. Bertels who managed to refute the notion that was firmly established in European orientalism that Nizami did not set specific poetic goals for himself and was not interested merely in historiosophical and socio-political issues. On the contrary, as the researcher convincingly proved, the poet was in a constant, painful search for a truly significant subject. Among these topics are topics of ideal power, genuine love, the social significance of poetry, its influence on the souls of people, the divine origin of the word and poetic speech, the language possessing the poet.

It should also be noted that it was Bertels who was the first in Russian orientalism to prove the existence of the Persianate Azerbaijani poetry school, reconstructed the poetics and aesthetics of this school, and revealed the main points of its art program. Accordingly, the work of Nizami was considered by scientists as one of the brightest literary achievements of medieval Persianate Azerbaijan. The scientist analysed the works of Nizami Ganjavi in the context of the literary traditions of the Persianate Middle Ages.

Thus, Y. Bertels laid the foundation for further research of Nizami's poetry, contributed to the formation of a literary school that studied the works of Nizami Ganjavi and Persianate poets of medieval Azerbaijan. Bertels' part in promoting the work of Nizami Ganjavi and stimulating the interpretative efforts of orientalists and literary critics is extremely great. His scientific works on the study of Nizami's poetry to this day remain the pride of Azerbaijani, Russian and world orientalism.