

## FROM THE HISTORY OF TRANSLATIONS OF KAZAKH LITERATURE INTO ARMENIAN

ALEXANDER SAFARYAN\*

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2250-4877>

YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

NAIRA POGHOSYAN\*\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3682-328X>

YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

ARMAN SAFARYAN\*\*\*

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2094-0538>

RUSSIAN-ARMENIAN UNIVERSITY

**Abstract:** The article examines the history of the translation of works by Kazakh authors (both classics and contemporaries) and examples of oral folklore into Armenian across the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. During the Soviet era, works by Makhambet Utemisov (1804-1846), Ybrai Altynsarin (1841-1889), Abai Kunanbayev (1845-1904), Jambyl Jabayev (1846–1945), Gabit Musrepov (1902–1985), Anuar Alimzhanov (1930–1993), Ilyas Yesenberlin (1915–1983) and Mukhtar Auevov (1897–1961) were translated, as well as works by other Kazakh poets and prose writers representing the then-dominant artistic movement of socialist realism. The initiators of these translations into Armenian were the celebrated classics of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Armenian literature: Silva Kaputikyan, Gevorg Emin, and Paruyr Sevak. Following the declaration of independence by Armenia and Kazakhstan, the centuries-old Armenian-Kazakh cultural ties entered a new stage of development. It then became possible to translate and publish in Armenian works that were censored during the Soviet era, including the poetry of Kazakh *zhyraus* (folk bards) and the works of Shakarim, Magzhan Zhumabayev, and Akhmet Baitursynov. Significant publications include the fundamental *Anthology of Kazakh Literature* (2019), a new edition of Mukhtar Auevov’s epic novel *The Path of Abai*, the first translation of Abai’s philosophical prose, *Kara Sozder (The Book of Words, 2020)*, and the first collection of *Kazakh Folk Tales* (2023) in the Armenian language. Furthermore, through comparative textual analysis and an examination of literary-critical approaches to the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the article elucidates the methodological aspects of selecting themes (reflecting a shift away from the predominance of translations of Socialist Realist works aimed exclusively at glorifying

---

\* alexander-safarian@ysu.am

\*\* nairapoghosyan@ysu.am

\*\*\* arman.safaryan1@rau.am



the Soviet system toward introducing Armenian readers to the works of authors repressed during the Stalinist period) and texts for translation, as well as the nuances involved in the accurate transmission of the national values and Eastern figurative system crystallized in the Kazakh originals to Armenian readers through literary translation.

**Keywords:** Kazakh literature; translation traditions; Abai; Magzhan Zhumabaev; Akhmet Baitursynov; Mukhtar Auezov; Armenian-Kazakh cultural and humanitarian cooperation

## 1. Introduction

Armenian-Kazakh cultural ties have a rich history dating back to the era of *Dasht-i Qipchaq* (the Kipchak Steppe), when Armenians began migrating to the vast steppes of Northern Eurasia. Multilateral Armenian-Turkic contacts, naturally, have an even more ancient history. Unique evidence of the linguistic, historical, and cultural ties between Armenians and the Turkic-Kipchak world can be found in the Armeno-Kipchak manuscripts — texts written in the Kipchak language using the Armenian alphabet (Safaryan et al. 2016: 168-176; Simonyan et al. 2022: 213-235).

Historically, Armenians and Kazakhs were integrated into the system of the Russian Empire and, subsequently, the Soviet Union. During the Soviet period, on the one hand, comprehensive cultural exchanges between the union republics were encouraged at a high state level (including introducing readers across the various republics to classical literary heritage and contemporary literary developments through translation). On the other hand, it must be emphasized that the ideological clichés of the Soviet communist system erected insurmountable barriers not only to the translation but also to the publication of the original works of many great writers whose worldviews were regarded as nationalist and “hostile.”

A new phase of translation activity, incorporating medieval literature, the once strictly prohibited works of previously repressed writers, and examples of contemporary Kazakh literature, began following the dissolution of the USSR and the declaration of independence by both Armenia and Kazakhstan.

The purpose of this article is to examine the translation of Kazakh literature into the Armenian language and its connection to the historical and socio-cultural transformations within the post-Soviet space. The specific objectives are: 1) to provide a description and periodization of the aforementioned translations; and 2) to identify correlations between methodological approaches used in the process of literary translation under varying historical and political conditions.

Despite their historical significance, Armenian-Kazakh literary relations during the Soviet period have not been systematically examined. Although the authors have previously published studies in Armenian, Russian, and Kazakh addressing individual aspects of Armenian-Kazakh cultural and historical ties, those studies considered the subject only fragmentarily and in different contexts. The present article addresses this gap by providing the first comprehensive and systematic account of the translation of Kazakh literature into Armenian and, in doing so, presents the most complete picture to date of these literary interactions.

## 2. Soviet Period: (Un)veiling Ideological-Methodological Clichés of Translations

Predictably, during the Soviet period, the works of Kazakh and other authors translated into Armenian were primarily those that glorified the Soviet system, socialist construction, the communist future, and the figure of Stalin (until the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, when Stalin’s cult of personality was officially condemned), as well as the works that interpreted the history of the Kazakh people (and other peoples of the former USSR) and their national cultural traditions only in forms sanctioned by Moscow. As a rule, translators did not master the original languages, and Russian served as an ‘intermediary’ for them.

Works by Jambyl Jabayev (Jabayev 1938), Mukhtar Auezov’s epic novel *The Path of Abai* (Auezov 1952; Auezov 1988), as well as books by Gabit Musrepov (Musrepov 1980), Anuar Alimzhanov (Alimzhanov 1982), and Ilyas Yesenberlin (Yesenberlin 1984; Yesenberlin 1989) were published in Armenian (translated from Russian). Anthologies representing Kazakh prose and poetry by various authors (Kazakh poets 1968; Khachatryan 2018: 299-314) were also released. Khazakh prose was translated by Harutyun Harutyunyan, Olga Sanahyan, Dora Yesayan, and Arpik Vardapetyan, while the poetry was rendered by Lyudvig Duryan (a well-known songwriter), Henrik Tumanyan, Vahe Hovakimyan, Artashes Poghosyan, Vardges Babayan, Gevorg Virapyan, Vagharshak Norents, Nansen Mikaelyan (a prominent children’s writer) etc. Several generations of Armenian children grew fond of the Kazakh folk tale *The Magic Fur Coat of Aldar-Kose*, which was artfully “strung onto the pearl necklace” of a collection of folk tales from diverse peoples of the USSR compiled by Khachik Hrachyan (Hrachyan 1952: 28-30). It is noteworthy that the role of folklore — particularly fairy tales — in Soviet literature during the Stalin era is explored in an insightful and multifaceted manner in the works of Western authors (Miller 1990; Zemskova 2017). Regarding Kazakh reality and translations into Armenian, the work of Jambyl Jabayev is a striking example where folkloric traditions and extreme ideological commitment — a truly “epic” glorification of Stalin and the Soviet system — are interwoven. In 1938, the State Publishing House of Armenia released a mass-circulation edition of Jambul’s *Songs and Poems*, which for many years remained the only book by a Kazakh author in the Armenian language. The publication is prefaced by *The Life of an Akyn* (Jambyl’s autobiography), which concludes with the author’s exhortation to dedicate “the finest songs of our hearts to the leader of the peoples, *STALIN*” and the declaration: “Long live *STALIN* — the great master of human happiness” (in both instances, the name *Stalin* is emphasized typographically in all capital letters) (Jambul 1938: 11). This collection, in particular, includes the lyrics to Jambyl’s songs *Listening to Stalin’s Speech*, *Greetings to You*, *Supreme Soviet*, *Klim Batyr*, as well as excerpts from *The Poem About Voroshilov*, dedicated to Stalin’s comrade-in-arms Kliment Voroshilov (1881–1969). It also features the *Poem on the Brotherhood of Peoples*, which exemplifies the intertwining of folklore motifs with the broader ideological celebration of the Soviet system and hyperbolized glorification of Stalin’s “genius.”

It must be acknowledged that while the Communist publishing industry was highly ideologized, it nonetheless encouraged the publication and translation of classical

literature and folklore from the union and autonomous republics into Russian and other languages. Moreover, during the period known as the “Khrushchev Thaw”<sup>1</sup> a significant turning point occurred, leading to an expansion of the thematic scope of both published and translated works. For instance, representatives of the Union of Writers of Armenia asked one of the USSR’s most prominent leaders Anastas Mikoyan during his visit to Armenia: “Why is it possible to publish the works by the ‘White Guard’ author Ivan Bunin in Moscow, but not those of Levon Shant in Armenia?” Mikoyan responded that such prohibitions were no longer in effect (Archive No 510, File 128).

Kazakh newsreels have preserved unique footage of the June 1968 visit of the Armenian delegation, headed by Robert Khachatryan, the Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia to Almaty, then the capital of Kazakhstan. Three canonical figures of Soviet-era Armenian poetry: Silva Kaputikyan (1919–2006), Gevorg Emin (1921–1998), and Paruyr Sevak (1924–1971) were among the members of the delegation. These poets made a truly singular contribution to the strengthening of Armenian-Kazakh literary ties. This event was followed six months later by a visit from a delegation of Kazakh cultural figures to Yerevan, which included meetings at the studio of the world-renowned Armenian painter Martiros Saryan and an unforgettable performance of the Armenian song *Tsitsernak* (*A Swallow*) by the eminent Kazakh opera singer Bibigul Tulegenova.

It was during this period that a cooperation project, unrivaled for decades in its pragmatism and specificity, crystallized and came to fruition: the reciprocal publication of translations of Armenian literary works into Kazakh and vice versa. This memorable initiative was successfully brought to life, allowing readers to access, in the Kazakh language, not only the works of the classics of Armenian literature: St. Grigor Narekatsi, Nahapet Kuchak, Sayat-Nova, Hovhannes Tumanyan, Avetik Isahakyan, Daniel Varoujan, Vahan Teryan, Yeghishe Charents, Hovhannes Shiraz, Hamo Sahyan, Silva Kaputikyan, Gevorg Emin, and Paruyr Sevak, but also contemporary Armenian authors.

The epic novel *The Path of Abai*, which holds a prominent position within the literary and scholarly legacy of Mukhtar Auevov, was first translated into Armenian during the Stalinist era (1952). Sixty-eight years later, in 2020, as part of the commemorations for the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great Abai in Armenia, it was decided to republish Auevov’s novel. This edition featured minor editorial refinements to Hrant Borozanyan’s translation, based on a comparative study of the Armenian and Russian translations against the original text. For instance, at the very beginning of the novel (in the opening paragraph), the Kazakh original employs the term *shakird* (denoting a student of a *madrasah* — a Muslim religious school). It is widely known that Abai received both an Islamic religious and a Russian education. In the Russian translation,

---

<sup>1</sup> The “Thaw” refers to a period in Soviet history characterized by the partial liberalization of political and public life, widespread de-Stalinization, the rehabilitation of victims of the Stalinist regime, the relaxation of censorship, and the emergence of a certain degree of creative freedom. The onset of the “Thaw” is dated to Nikita Khrushchev’s speech on “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences”, delivered at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU on February 25, 1956 (Ustinkin 2012: 129-133; Tian 2011: 139-142)

which functioned as the ‘intermediary’ for both the Armenian translation and the 1952 edition, the word *shakird* was omitted. By contrast, in the 2020 edition the term has been explicitly restored, thereby more fully conveying the linguistic and historical-cultural dimensions of the author’s intent.

Special recognition is due to the graphic illustrations created by the contemporary Kazakh artist Nurlan Buranbayev specifically for the Armenian editions of Auezov’s novel and Abai’s own *Words of Edification*.

The Armenian republication was necessitated by the prominent role of Mukhtar Auezov and his epic novel in the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Kazakh literature. It is well known that in preparation for writing the novel, Auezov undertook extensive and painstaking research that went far beyond merely gathering biographical facts about Abai. Given the lack of formalized history, historiography, and documentary evidence in late-1930s Soviet Kazakhstan, he was compelled to research and document the system of Kazakh customary (precedent-based) law, ethnographic data (including funeral rites, weddings, and folk customs), details of the Kazakh calendar and cosmogonic concepts, as well as various historical issues of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Kazakhstan (Auezova 1997: 18-21)<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, Auezov’s role as a scholar of source studies in the preparation of scholarly editions of Abai’s heritage cannot be overstated. Given its panoramic portrayal of history and the role of the individual, Auezov’s work can be aptly compared to Mikhail Sholokhov’s *And Quiet Flows the Don* (Safaryan 2020: 162-173)<sup>3</sup>. As Kyrgyz author Chinghiz Aitmatov, one of the most prominent prose writers of the Turkic Muslim world, captured the essence of Auezov’s groundbreaking idea: “Mukhtar Auezov became the eyes of the nation. The fortunate alignment of the spiritual aspirations of the artist and the people became a single, full-flowing current of the Kazakh national epic under Auezov’s pen, much as it did in the Russian novel *And Quiet Flows the Don* (Auezova 1972: 19). This comparison made by Aitmatov highlights both the authentic historicism and the epic scope of *The Path of Abai*, as well as the dialectical unity of historical and artistic elements within the novel (Auezova 1997: 304-305). Considering Mukhtar Auezov his mentor and the greatest artist among those he personally knew, Chinghiz Aitmatov wrote: “...This is the contribution of all Turkic-speaking peoples, including those who were nomadic in the past. The *Abai* epic is our artistic and social encyclopedia. It is our shared mandate. It is our account for the eras already lived across the vast Eurasian expanse. It stands for everything we had to endure throughout our long-suffering history, and for everything

---

<sup>2</sup> Mukhtar Auezov described his creative methodology in such a vivid and well-substantiated manner: “While gathering material, I interviewed Abai’s friends and admirers, as well as his former enemies and rivals - either his contemporaries themselves or their sons and grandsons. As a result of these efforts, I accumulated such a wealth of information about my future protagonist that I often recalled one of Gorky’s great maxims: ‘Write about that which you have no right to remain silent about.’ Even now, with the novel on Abai’s youth and early years completed, I find that I still possess such a vast amount of material not included in this work that it would be possible to write another entire book of the same scale on this very period of my hero’s life” (Auezova 1997: 410).

<sup>3</sup> Chingiz Aitmatov so aptly elucidated Auezov’s monumental conception: “Mukhtar Auezov became the eyes of the nation. Under Auezov’s pen, the fortuitous convergence of the spiritual needs of both the artist and the people flowed, much as it did in the Russian *And Quiet Flows the Don* into a single, full-flowing channel of the Kazakh national epic” (Auezova 1972: 19).

we managed to grasp while creating our own system of values, our artistic and moral world, and our great poetic word. In this sense, Mukhtar Auezov elevated us to a global level of universally significant artistic and historical thinking. To survey the world, to be visible to others, and to engage in dialogue while proclaiming the dignity of the human spirit, one must possess peaks such as Mukhtar Auezov” (Auezova 1972: 141).

### 3. Novel Approaches to Translation Selection in the Post-Soviet Period

Armenian-Kazakh cultural ties received a new impulse for development following the declarations of independence by Armenia and Kazakhstan. Significant milestones in the post-Soviet cooperation between the Armenian and Kazakh peoples include the opening of the Embassy of Armenia in Kazakhstan and the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Armenia, as well as the commencement of academic and scientific collaboration between the leading universities of the two sovereign nations — Yerevan State University (YSU) and the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU) — facilitated by a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2010. Other key developments include conferences dedicated to the ideas of Eurasianism, issues in Armenian-Kazakh relations, and the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate (2015); a Kazakh film festival held in Armenia (2017); and opening at YSU of the first Center for Kazakh Language, Culture, and History in the CIS region, named after the great Kazakh thinker Abai (2020). These milestones also encompass literary readings dedicated to the heritage of Kazakh classical literature, as well as meetings and discussions with contemporary Kazakh writers. Unlike the Soviet stage of translation, the post-Soviet era was accompanied by profound social transformations and the liberation of modern creative and research strategies from the dictates of Communist ideology, the clichés of atheism, and the imposed “artistic frameworks” of “socialist realism.” The post-Soviet translation process had to align with new methodologies and respond to the evolving perceptions of the contemporary reader. Inevitable shifts in the ethical and aesthetic reception of literary texts within post-Soviet societies have necessitated a fundamental re-evaluation of how phenomena from one cultural-civilizational system are adapted to another during the practice of literary translation. A key innovation in translating Kazakh (and other Turkic-language) works into Armenian during the post-Soviet period is, specifically, the preservation of the traditional Eastern figurative system and the use of more appropriate Armenian equivalents instead of the “Russified analogues” that dominated the Soviet translation tradition.

An example of the fruitful cooperation established in the 2000s between two prestigious journals *Literary Armenia* (published in Armenia in Russian) and *Alem Adebieti* (*World Literature*, published in Kazakhstan) was the translation of works by contemporary Armenian prose writers and poets into the Kazakh language, with an entire voluminous issue of the Kazakh literary journal dedicated exclusively to Armenian material. The introductory article, titled *Armenia, Ararat, Matenadaran*, was written by the journal’s editor-in-chief, Kenes Yusup. This issue featured poems by Silva Kaputikyan, Tatul Bolorchyan, Levon Blbulyan, and Henrik Edoyan; prose and essays by Hrant Matevosyan, Margo Ghoukasyan, Patrik Artem, and Susanna

Harutyunyan; and an interview with Hrant Matevosyan conducted by Hovik Vardumyan. The volume also included reproductions of masterpieces from various periods by Martiros Saryan (including his *Portrait of the Poet Yeghishe Charents* (1923) and *Ararat Valley* (1945)) (Alem Adebieti 2008). Thanks to the *Ruhani Zhangyru* (*Spiritual Revival*) program, known as the program for the modernization of social consciousness and the multi-year efforts of Armenian scholars and translators, as well as the valuable consultations and organizational support provided by the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Republic of Armenia, a unique literary ‘trptych’ was published in Armenian translation for the first time. This was made possible through the collaborative work of Turkologists from YSU, specialists from the M. Abeghyan Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (NAS RA), contemporary poet-translators, and the “Bzez” publishing house. The triptych includes the *Anthology of Kazakh Literature* (2019), Abai Kunanbayev’s *Words of Edification* (*Kara Sozder*, 2020), and a new edition of Mukhtar Aueзов’s epic novel *The Path of Abai* (*Abai Zholy*, 2020). The publication of these books became a long-overdue necessity decades after Armenia and Kazakhstan gained independence, reflecting the new landscape of the publishing industry in these friendly nations. The aforementioned anthology was compiled by Timur Urazaev and Kaisar Amirzhanov and edited by Vardan Devrikyan and Alexander Safaryan. The preface was written by Alexander Safaryan, while the historical and philological notes were authored by Vardan Devrikyan. Notably, at the initiative of the Union of Kazakh Writers, the preface to this fundamental anthology of Kazakh literature in Armenian was published in the prestigious Russian-language Kazakhstani journal *Prostor*. This version appeared in the author’s own translation and was presented in its entirety. During the Soviet era, *Prostor* (Safaryan 2020: 162-173) was renowned for publishing out-of-favor writers such as Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Osip Mandelstam, as well as the first scholarly materials dedicated to the works of Mikhail Bulgakov. The publication of the preface to the Anthology in Russian translation in the journal *Prostor* appears to have been motivated by the interest of Kazakh writers and readers to the publicistic representation, offering an “external perspective” on the highly contested issues of post-Soviet Kazakh socio-political discourse, including the necessity to reassess the historical evaluations of the Soviet period, the crystallization of definitions concerning Stalinist repression, the catastrophic famine and depopulation in Kazakhstan, and the recognition of the necessity of presenting the poetic legacy of outstanding poets such as Magzhan Zhumabayev to the international community.

The structure of the anthology was determined by a chronological and genre-based approach. The “Poetry” section included, for the first time, the medieval oral poetry of the *zhynraus*, figures who were simultaneously epic bards and warriors<sup>4</sup>. The works of

---

<sup>4</sup> The early period of *zhynrau* poetry is represented by the works of Asan Kaigy (*Asan the Sorrowful* or *Asan the Grievous*). Asan is a near-mythological figure, inspired by the search for the promised land, *Zher-Uyuk*. Legend tells that he traversed the earth on the winged she-camel *Zhel-Maya* in search of a place where his long-suffering people could be happy, eventually vanishing in the sands of Central Asia. In honor of Asan’s son, Abat — who fell heroically in battle against the Kalmyks — a burial site known as *Abat-Baitak* was erected in the present-day Aktobe region of Western Kazakhstan; it

Asan Kaigy Zhyrau (14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries), Kaztugan Zhyrau (15<sup>th</sup> century), Shalkiiz Zhyrau (15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries), and Bukhar Zhyrau (17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries) were translated by E. Militonyan and V. Khastur. Nineteenth-century poetry is represented by names that are as original as they are diverse, both in terms of genre and modes of lyrical expression. Makhambet Utemisov (1803–1846) was a heroic-romantic warrior-poet who died in the struggle for his people's freedom from Tsarist colonization. Also featured are the poems of Abai Kunanbayev (1845–1904), Ybrai Altynsarin (1841–1889), and Shakarim (1858–1931), whose spiritual and poetic legacy became accessible only in the post-Soviet era. Twentieth-century poetry is represented by the works of forty-seven authors. The translation of the anthology includes both the republication of several translations of Kazakh poetry — originally rendered by Gevorg Emin, Silva Kaputikyan, and other prominent Soviet-era Armenian poets — and newly commissioned translations. A key “innovation” of the anthology is the inclusion of works by authors who were repressed or banned from publication during the Soviet period, such as Mashkhar Zhusup Kopeev (1858–1931), Sultanmahmud Toraygyrov (1893–1920), Beimbet Mailin (1894–1938), Magzhan Zhumabaev (1893–1938), Akhmet Baitursynov (1872–1937), Alikhan Bokeikhanov (1866–1937), Myrzhakyp Dulatov (1885–1935), Ilyas Zhansugurov (1894–1938), Saken Seifullin (1894–1938), and Kasym Amanzholov (1911–1955). The name of the mystic poet Mashkhar Zhusup Kopeev who prophetically foretold the seventy years of Soviet rule, the historical junctures, and the subsequent liberation of the Kazakh people — is today widely cited not only by specialists but also by the general reading public. The fact that these poets served as translators of the poetry of Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov, for instance, Akhmet Baitursynov is well known for his translations of Ivan Krylov's fables and Pushkin's fairy tales (*The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*; *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel*), and that they became authoritative conduits to the world of Russian culture for Kazakh readers, did not spare them from political persecution.

The primary difficulty lay in the lack of Russian translations for the works of rehabilitated victims of Stalinist policy, such as Beimbet Mailin, Magzhan Zhumabaev, Akhmet Baitursynov, Alikhan Bokeikhanov, Myrzhakyp Dulatov, and Kasym Amanzholov. This necessitated translating these works into Armenian using interlinear glosses (literal word-for-word translations) which were prepared by a Kazakh language instructor at the Department of Turkology at YSU Shushanik Khachatryan, a specialist with advanced proficiency in Kazakh. The translation project involved Varoujan Khastur — renowned in Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora for his masterful

---

remains one of the many sacred landmarks of Kazakh culture. Shalkiiz Zhyrau is regarded as the first poet to adopt the philosophy of Sufism from the dervishes — the wandering mendicants of the East. Sufi themes, imagery, and motifs were later developed in the poetry of both Abai and his nephew, Shakarim — a recluse and a victim of Bolshevik repression. In the 18th century, Shalkiiz reflected upon Sufi ideas and artistically substantiated the concept of the causal conditioning of all earthly existence—pandeterminism. The word *Shal* literally means “old man.” The connotation that defined Shalkiiz's literary name is the symbolism of wisdom and the authoritative word: an elder endowed with the gift of foresight and prophecy. Finally, Bukhar Zhyrau, who brought the medieval era to a close, is known for developing epic and narrative elements and for his lyrical interpretation of the historical events during the final stages of the Khanate's formation.

translations of Omar Khayyam and Magtymguly Pyragy, and Edvard Militonyan, Chairman of the Writers' Union of Armenia and a long-time friend of Kazakh poets, who was the first to translate the works of Olzhas Suleimenov (b. 1936) into Armenian. Levon Blbulyan translated works by Akhmet Baitursynov (1872–1937) — an eminent Kazakh educator, leader of the “Alash” movement, and victim of Stalinist repression, executed as an “enemy of the people.” The *Anthology* also featured examples of Kazakh folk tales, journalistic essays by Olzhas Suleimenov regarding the history of his book *Fixing the World with a Metaphor*, and selected pages from the correspondence between Fyodor Dostoevsky and Shoqan Walikhanov. Moreover, studies by prominent Kazakh literary scholars were published in Armenia for the first time: a synthesizing article on the concepts and genres of Kazakh literature by Rimgali Nurgali, and an article by Kuralay Urazaeva on *zhyrau* poetry.

Reflecting on the established practice of implementing innovative methodologies to present the classical literary heritage of Kazakh and other Turkic peoples to Armenian readers, and recognizing the importance of folklore as a tool for cultural dialogue and mutual enrichment, the faculty of Yerevan State University, in collaboration with the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Armenia, produced the first fundamental collection of *Kazakh Folk Tales in Armenian* (2023). The publication (256 pages) includes prefaces in both Armenian and Kazakh, alongside translations of magic tales, animal fables, and tales of everyday life and satire. In compiling the collection, the Armenian translators and publishers adhered to the traditional classification established by Kazakh scholars. In the historical and philological notes to the volume, various concepts of Kazakh reality encountered in the tales were clarified for the Armenian reader. These include the names of national dishes (*beshbarmak*, *kazy*, *kuirdak*, *baursak*, etc.), the portable nomadic dwelling (the *yurt*), and various utilitarian objects. Among the items explained are the *kamcha* (a traditional whip used by Turkic peoples), the *kuryk* (a horse breeder’s long pole with a loop), *koshma* (felt matting), and the *khomut* (a horse collar, part of a harness). The translators into Armenian opted to retain original Kazakh terms and provide corresponding, at times detailed, explanations. They reasoned that using approximate Armenian equivalents would have constituted an unacceptable deviation from the source text (It is noteworthy that during the Soviet period, translation traditions permitted and even encouraged the use of “Russified equivalents”). This modern approach was further reinforced by the fact that certain Turkic words have identical meanings in Armenian particularly in its dialects such as *kose* (beardless) and *biz* (an awl).

Within the socio-political discourse of sovereign Armenia, it is crucial to re-evaluate the pathways of engagement with the Turkic-Muslim world and to provide a comprehensive representation of the history and phenomena of Turkic spiritual culture (Safaryan 2004: 219-229; Safaryan 2004:141-152). The current paradigm of translation activity, in tandem with the interdisciplinary research of Armenian Turkologists, can facilitate the identification of both shared elements and the unique characteristics of national cultures crystallized within the centuries-old literary heritage of diverse peoples.

#### 4. The Armenian Translations of Abai's Works

The tradition of literary scholarship links Abai Kunanbayev with the Armenian enlighteners Khachatur Abovyan and Hovhannes Tumanyan<sup>5</sup>. Abai was united with these Armenian thinkers, as well as with the classic of Turkmen literature, Magtymguly Pyragy, by a universal dream: to transform others through love and to reorganize the entire social environment. This stems from a unique mode of religious tolerance, expressed in the assertion that "...no matter how many religions there may be, they all maintain that justice and love are inherent to God" (Kunanbayev 1993: 80), and Abai's ideal of human self-perfection: "...the one who possesses the most knowledge, love, and justice is a sage and a scholar; such a person has mastered the world" (ibid., 82). The scope of Abai's knowledge and his literary and musical interests extended from the Bible and the Quran to Arabic, Persian, and Turkic philosophy and literature, and from Russian to Western European culture. The memoirs of the American traveler and journalist George Kennan are particularly noteworthy; he wrote about the inhabitant of the steppe who had made such an impression on him: "I was told about a Kazakh named Ibrahim Konobai [Abai], a frequent visitor to the library who reads Mill, Buckle, Draper, and others. At our very first meeting, he surprised me by asking to explain induction and deduction. It turned out he had become deeply interested in English and Western European philosophers. When we spoke twice about Draper's book, *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, he displayed a great knowledge of the subject" (Kennan 1972: 193). The renowned Kazakh scholar Zhibek Syzdykova wrote of the three sources and, consequently, the receptions of Abai's poetics: "the oral creativity of the Kazakh people, the finest examples of Eastern poetry, and Russian culture" (ibid.).

The issue of translating Abai's works into Armenian is inherently linked to the role of Russian as a mediator language. In this context, Russian translations of the Kazakh poet serve as the primary instrument of cultural transmission. During the Soviet era, the poetry of the Kazakh classic reached Russian, Armenian, and other readers through the translations of Mikhail Dudin, Vera Zvyagintseva, Maria Petrovykh, Lev Ozerov, and Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky (Sizdikova 2007: 187-233). In 1970, the *Hayastan* publishing house released a collection of Abai's selected poems translated by Armenian poets Artashes Poghosyan, Vahagn Karents, Vram Hovsepyan, Soghomon Mkrtchyan, and Mikayel Harutyunyan (Kunanbayev 1970).

Abai's masterpiece of philosophical prose, *Words of Edification (Kara Sozder)*, has been translated into numerous world languages, including Russian, English, Chinese, French, German, Turkish, Tajik, Uzbek, Tatar, Mongolian, Latvian, and Korean. To

---

<sup>5</sup> In particular, the Armenian literary scholar Sergey Daronyan, who collaborated with Mukhtar Auezov, noted how the great Kazakh prose writer and scholar "loved Armenian literature and knew it well." Daronyan shared his recollections regarding the immense significance Abai held for Auezov: "For me, Abai is synonymous with Kazakh literature and the Kazakh people, much like Khachatur Abovyan is for you, I assume. Their creative works share many foundational characteristics. Both were poet-enlighteners and the founders of their respective modern national literatures; both profoundly exposed the wounds of their long-suffering peoples. Moreover, their tragic fates share much in common..." (Auezova 1972: 67).

mark the 175th anniversary of Abai's birth, *Words of Edification* was translated into Armenian for the first time. In preparing this first Armenian edition, the translators (Alexander Safaryan, Varoujan Khastur, and Arman Safaryan) utilized various Russian translations produced over the years — specifically those by Viktor Shklovsky (1945), Leonid Sobolev (*The Thirty-Seventh Word*), and Satimzhan Sanbaev (1970), as well as later versions by Rollan Seisenbaev and Klara Serikbaeva (1992–1993). They also consulted Turkish and English translations, cross-referencing all versions with the text of the original Kazakh scholarly edition (Kunanbayev 1995: 158-218).

Abai's *Words of Edification* were translated into Russian by the renowned Soviet man of letters Viktor Shklovsky as early as the Stalinist era. At that time, Abai was already perceived as a “sanctioned symbol” of Kazakh national identity, in contrast to the Kazakh *zhhyraus* or authors linked to the *Alash Orda* national liberation movement. However, Shklovsky's Russian translation contains significant omissions and stylizations, clearly resulting from the ideological dictates of militant atheism. In the Armenian translation, specifically, religious passages that had been previously excised have been restored. For instance, following every mention of the Prophet Muhammad, the Armenian version includes the phrase obligatory for any devout Muslim (the *salawat* or *tasliya*) — “peace and blessings of Allah be upon him” — an invocation that Abai himself would never have omitted (Kunanbayev 2020: 85).

As the authors of the preface to the Armenian edition of Abai's philosophical and literary masterpiece emphasized, “Abai is more relevant today than ever before, as his enlightening and humanistic philosophy addresses the new challenges of the 21st century, at a time when our contemporaries must choose a trajectory for personal development while remaining within the flow of progress, precisely navigating between the Scylla of national insularity and the Charybdis of cultural dissolution within globalization” (Kunanbayev 2020: 17). Notably, the translation was published with a dedicated preface in Armenian, Kazakh, and Russian.

It should be noted that the book's title was translated literally into Armenian as *Sev Khosk'er* (Black Words), reflecting the complete semantic overlap between the lexical fields of the word *kara* in Kazakh (and other Turkic languages) and *sev* in Armenian. Significantly, the Turkish translation is likewise titled *Kara Sözcükler*. In the annotations to this edition, it was essential to clarify specific concepts for the Armenian reader regarding Kazakh national customs and the realities of the nomadic steppe economy. These included terms such as *zhut* (the mass die-off of livestock due to severe weather), *bi* (a judge who administers justice based on codified Kazakh steppe law), and *baige* (traditional Turkic horse racing).

## 5. Conclusion

The overview of the history of translations of Kazakh literature into Armenian presented in this article illustrates the significance of transmitting national spiritual values. It further highlights the vital role played by the creative work of translators, Orientalists, and publishers in the process of the mutual cultural enrichment of nations.

The periodization of translations into Soviet and post-Soviet eras is rooted in the historical socio-political transformations of societies across the post-Soviet space. It reflects the necessity of dismantling the ideological clichés of the communist-totalitarian past and introducing Kazakh authors to Armenian readers who were accused of nationalism and Pan-Turkism during the Soviet period, such as Magzhan Zhumabayev and Akhmet Baitursyn whose works were strictly prohibited from publication. At the same time, the preparation of new editions was guided by a methodological imperative to account for the traditions and positive legacy of Armenian-Kazakh cultural and humanitarian cooperation. This approach, in particular, justified the inclusion of Soviet-era translations produced by preeminent poet-translators and canonical figures of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Armenian literature, such as Silva Kaputikyan and Gevorg Emin.

A key innovation in *the post-Soviet* translation of Kazakh (and other Turkic) literature into Armenian is the specific methodology used to adapt phenomena from one cultural-civilizational system to another. This approach prioritizes the preservation of the traditional Eastern figurative system and the use of precise Armenian equivalents in place of the “Russified clichés” that dominated the Soviet translation tradition. Furthermore, new editions are supplemented with prefaces and extensive historical and philological annotations that provide insight into the original Kazakh source texts (*whereas, only brief biographical notes on the authors were included in Soviet-era Armenian collections of Kazakh poetry and prose*). These literary translations from Kazakh into Armenian have been supported by rigorous Turkological and literary research, making it possible to model trajectories for cultural and humanitarian cooperation between Armenia and the Turkic-speaking world.

## References

- Alem Adebieti [World Literature]*. 2008. No. 1. Astana: Foliant [in Kazakh].
- Alimzhanov, Anuar. 1982. *Surhandak [Messenger]*. Translated by Samvel Davayan. Yerevan: Sovetakan grogh. [in Armenian].
- Auezov, Mukhtar. 1952. *Abai*. Translated by Hrant Borozanyan. Yerevan: Haypethrat. [in Armenian].
- . 1988. *Krakots' leṛnantsqum (zhoghovatsu) [Shot in the Mountain Pass (Collection)]*. Translated by Elya Masumyan. Yerevan: Sovetakan grogh. [in Armenian].
- Auezova, Leyla. 1972. *Avtobiografiya: M. Auezov v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov [Autobiography. M. Auezov in the Memoirs of His Contemporaries]*. Almaty: Jazushi [in Russian].
- . 1997. *Istoriya Kazakhstana v tvorchestve M. Auezova [The History of Kazakhstan in the Works of M. Auezov]*. Almaty: Sanat [in Russian].
- Babayan, Vardges (comp. and ed.). 1968. *Ghazakh banasteghtsner [Kazakh Poets]*. 1968. Yerevan. Hayastan. [in Armenian].
- Eseemberlin, Ilyas. 1984. *Siraharnerĕ [The Lovers]*. Translated by Artashes Krkyasharyan. Yerevan: Sovetakan Grogh. [in Armenian].

- . 1989. *Voske Horda [The Golden Fleece]*. Translated by Arzuman Khotsanyan. Yerevan: Hayastan [in Armenian].
- Hrachyan, Khachik, comp. and ed. 1952. *Margaritner: SSRM zhoghovurdneri heqiatner [Pearls: Fairy Tales of the Peoples of the USSR]*. Yerevan: Haypethrat. [in Armenian].
- Jambul. 1938. *Erger ev poemner [Songs and Poems]*. Translated by Gevorg Abov. Yerevan: State Publishing House [in Armenian]. Accessed January 17, 2026. [https://haygirk.nla.am/upload/1512-1940/1901-1940/jambul\\_yerger\\_1938.pdf?\\_\\_cf\\_\\_chl\\_f\\_tk=mMapnPPXs.XvIxYXTGsM0c6BHPL9EiGnSyfrwQEHRw-1783003-670-1.0.1.1-EtvnNw5fnzzVLc1lg4IJUGfyfkOxvP.\\_Oi9auLzs0jA](https://haygirk.nla.am/upload/1512-1940/1901-1940/jambul_yerger_1938.pdf?__cf__chl_f_tk=mMapnPPXs.XvIxYXTGsM0c6BHPL9EiGnSyfrwQEHRw-1783003-670-1.0.1.1-EtvnNw5fnzzVLc1lg4IJUGfyfkOxvP._Oi9auLzs0jA)
- Kennan, George. 1906. *Sibir' i ssylka [Siberia and Exile]*. Saint Petersburg: V. Raspopov [in Russian].
- Khachatryan, Shushan. 2018. “Mukhtar Auezovi steghtsagorts‘utyunneri hayeren targmanutyunneri shurj” [On the Armenian Translations of Mukhtar Auezov]. *Arevelagitutyun Hartser [Issues of Oriental Studies]* 14: 299–314. [in Armenian].
- Kunanbayev, Abai. 1970. *Hatëntir. banasteghtsutyunner [Selected Works: Poems]*. Translated by Artashes Poghosyan et al. Yerevan. [in Armenian].
- . 1993. *Kara söz. poemalar. Kniga slov. poemi [The Book of Words. Poems.]* Translated by Rolan Seysenbayev, and Klara Serikbayeva. Almaty: El. [in Kazakh and Russian].
- . 1995. *Şığarmalarınñ eki tomdıq tolıq jınağı. Ekinşi tom [Complete Collection of Works in Two Volumes. Volume 2]*. Almaty: M. Auezov Institute of Literature and Arts, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan. [in Kazakh].
- . 2020. *Sev khosk'er [Black Words]*. Translated by Alexander Safaryan, Varoujan Khasatur, and Arman Safaryan. Yerevan: “Bzez” Publishing House. [in Armenian].
- Miller, Frank J. 1990. *Folklore for Stalin: Russian Folklore and Pseudofolklore of the Stalin Era*. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Mousrepov, Gabit. 1980. *Mek angam ev amboghj kyanqum [Once and for All]*. Yerevan. [in Armenian].
- Safaryan, Alexander. 2004. “Ziya Gökalp on National Education.” *Iran and the Caucasus* 8(2): 219–229. Brill.
- . 2007. “On the History of Turkish Feminism.” *Iran and the Caucasus* 11(1): 141–151. Brill.
- . 2020. “Iz istorii armyano-kazakhskikh kul'turnykh svyazey” [From the History of Armenian–Kazakh Cultural Ties]. *Prostor* 2: 162–173. [in Russian].
- Safaryan, Alexander, and Lusine Sahakyan. 2016. “Armyano-kypchakskie rukopisi — istochniki izucheniya istorii tyurkskikh yazykov” [Armenian-Kipchak Manuscripts as Sources for the Study of the History of Turkic Languages]. In *Rossiya — Tyurksko-musul'manskiy mir: Istoriko-kul'turnye svyazi*, 168–176. Kazan–Yelabuga. [in Russian].
- Simonyan, Aram, Alexander Safaryan, and Lusine Sahakyan. 2022. “Grammatika kypchakskogo yazyka, v'klyuchennaya v armyanskiy manuskript (Matenadaran, ruk. No. 3522), sozdannyi vo L'vove v XVII veke” [‘Grammar of the Kipchak

- Language,' Included in an Armenian Manuscript (Matenadaran, Manuscript No. 3522) Produced in Lviv in the Seventeenth Century]. *Hayagitutyun Hartser* [Issues of Armenian Studies] 2(26): 213–235. [in Russian].
- Syzdykova, Zhuldiz. 2006. "Osobennosti tsivilizatsionnogo faktora i rol' istoricheskogo naslediya v Tsentral'no-Aziatskom regione" [Features of the Civilisational Factor and the Role of Historical Heritage in the Central Asian Region]. *Meyeriana* 2: 187–233. [in Russian].
- Tyan, Valentin. 2011. "Evolyutsiya vlasti i liberalizatsiya obshchestvennoy i kul'turnoy zhizni v SSSR v period khrushchevskoy 'otpepli'" [The Evolution of Power and the Liberalisation of Social and Cultural Life in the USSR during the Khrushchev 'Thaw']. *Vlast' [Power]*, 139–142. [in Russian].
- Ustinkin, Sergey, Vladimir Belous, and Boris Ginzburg. 2012. "Vlast' i obshchestvo v period khrushchevskoy 'otpepli' (1953–1964 gg.)" [Power and Society during the Khrushchev 'Thaw' (1953–1964)]. *Otechestvennyy opyt* [National Experience], 129–133. [in Russian].
- Vardapetyan, Arpik (comp. and ed.). 1968. *Ghazakhakan patmvatsqner* [Kazakh Short Stories]. Yerevan: Hayastan. [in Armenian].
- Witt, Susanna. 2013. "The Shorthand of Empire: Podstrochnik Practices and the Making of Soviet Literature." *Ab Imperio* 3: 155–190.
- Zemskova, Elena. 2017. "Soviet Folklore as Translation Project: The Case of *Tvorchestvo narodov SSSR, 1937.*" In *Translation in Russian Contexts: Culture, Politics, Identity*, edited by Brian James Baer and Susanna Witt, 175–189. London: Routledge.

### Archival Source

Archive No. 510, File 128. *Conversation between Armenian Writers and A. Mikoyan.* Manuscript by Hrachya Kochar. Museum of Armenian Literature and Art, Manuscript Collection. Yerevan

### Conflict of Interests

The author(s) declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in relation to this research.

### Ethics Statement

The author(s) confirm that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.