

**THE IMAGE OF THE OLD WOMAN IN EPIC
FOLKLORE OF AZERBAIJAN**

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Applicant: **Shabnam Vagif gizi Asadova**

ABSTRACT

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Scientific supervisor: Full Member of ANAS,
Doctor of Philology, Professor
Mukhtar Kazim oglu Imanov

Official Opponents: Doctor of Philology, Professor
Ramazan Oruc oglu Gafarov

Doctor of Philology,
Associate Professor
Islam Huseyn oglu Sadigov

Doctor of Philosophy in Philology,
Associate Professor
Etibar Ajdar oglu Talibli

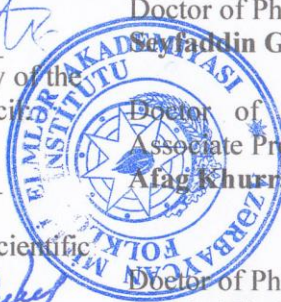
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Chairman of the Dissertation

Council:  Doctor of Philology, Professor
Sayfaddin Gulverdi oglu Rzayev

Scientific secretary of the
Dissertation Council:  Doctor of Philosophy in Philology,
Associate Professor
Afag Khurram gizi Ramzanova

Chairman of the Scientific
Seminar:  Doctor of Philology, Professor
Afzaladdin Daghbeyi oglu Asgarov



GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

Topicality and degree of using of the research. Epic folklore is rich in characters formed on a mythological basis. Such characters possess similar functions and attributes across different genres. However, there are instances where some characters stand out due to their distinctive traits, attracting the attention of researchers. One such character is the old woman. This figure plays various roles in folklore texts and appears in different forms.

In general, the old woman which is among the most complex and contradictory characters in Azerbaijani folklore studies, holds a central place in various folklore texts. This complexity and contradiction can be explained by the prolonged process of the figure's formation. The old woman has accumulated elements from different sources, starting from ancient myths to tales, epics, and even beliefs. In oral literature, this figure occupies a unique position as both a crucial participant in the hero's trials and struggles and a representative of specific statuses in social and cultural contexts.

The old woman is remarkably rich in terms of multilayered symbolism. Her portrayal as both wise and cunning reflects the various dimensions of the people's worldview. Through this study, the position and functions of the old woman in epic folklore are analyzed in depth, elucidating its role in social, cultural, and mythological contexts. Investigating the old woman as a folklore character is also significant for understanding the transformation processes of characters in folk creativity.

The old woman figure appears in various forms in tales, epics, and other folklore genres—sometimes as a wise advisor, sometimes as a protector, and sometimes as a cunning or witch-like figure. This multilayered and symbolic meaning helps explain the social changes experienced by the people throughout history, the role of women in society, and how this role has evolved over different periods. This research reveals that the old woman is not merely a witch or a fearsome being but also a bearer of wisdom and knowledge. It provides an opportunity to understand the richness of Azerbaijani epic folklore and its socio-cultural content. While the old woman may not attract as much

attention as main heroes due to her role as a supporting character, her study is of great importance for folklore studies.

The lack of sufficient research on the old woman figure in Azerbaijani epic folklore is a primary factor that underscores the relevance of this topic. The relevance of this research is also explained by the fact that, for the first time, the old woman figure has been systematically studied based on extensive epic folklore material. As a result, the functions of the figure in ancient Turkic folklore and its unique features in Azerbaijani folklore have been identified, as well as its specific characteristics within examples of epic folklore.

As for the degree of study of the topic, it can be stated that the old woman figure in Azerbaijani epic folklore has not been systematically examined as a separate research topic. So far, only the Great Mother figure and its derivatives have been explored in Azerbaijani folklore studies. The main studies related to the “Ulu Ana” (Great Mother) are associated with the names of Jalal Beydili and Fuzuli Bayat¹. These studies contain essential facts. The figures derived from the Great Mother have been examined in the monographs and articles of Mirali Seyidov, Arif Ajalov, Asif Hajili, Afzaladdin Asgar, Afag Khurramgizi, and Shakir Albaliyev². Among Turkish researchers, Abdulkadir Inan, Mehmet Alparslan Kuchuk, Esma Shimshek, and Orhan Acipayamli, as well as foreign researchers such as Mircea Eliade, Uno Harva

¹ Beydili (Mammadov), C. *Turk Mythological Dictionary* / C. Beydili. – Baku: Elm, – 2003. – 418 p; Beydili (Mammadov), C. *The System of Turkic Mythological Figures: Structure and Function* / C. Beydhili. – Baku: Mutarjim, – 2007. – 272 p; Bayat, F. *Turkic Mythological System. Turkic Mythology in the Context of Ontology and Epistemology* / F. Bayat. – Istanbul: Otuken, – Vol. 1, – 2007. – 380 p; Bayat, F. *Turkic Mythological System. The Sacred Feminine – The Mythological Mother, Primitive Mythological Categories in the Umay Paradigm – Spirits and Demonology* / F. Bayat. – Istanbul: Otuken, – Vol. 2, – 2007. – 368 p.

² Seyidov, M. *Contemplating the Ethnic Roots of the Azerbaijani People* / M. Seyidov. Baku: Yazichi, – 1989. – 496 p; Seyidov, M. *Shaman and Its Sources: An Overview* / M. Seyidov. Baku: Ganjlik, – 1994. – 232 p; Acalov, A. (M. Novruzov). “The Cult of Al and Its Traces” // A. Acalov, M. Novruzov. *Journal of Azerbaijani Philology Issues*, – Baku: – 1983. – pp. 247-258; Hacılı, A. *The Belief World of the Ahıska Turks* / A. Hacılı. – Baku: Mutarjim, – 2014. – 108 p; Khurramgizi, A. *Azerbaijani Ritual Folklore* / A. Khurramgizi. – Baku: Seda, – 2002. – 270 p; Albaliyev, Sh. *The Hal Image in Myth and Ritual* // *Studies on Azerbaijani Oral Folk Literature*, Vol. XXV, – Baku: Nurlan, – 2007, – pp. 50-72.

Holmberg, Erich Neumann, Elizar Moiseyevich Meletinsky, and Viktor Yakovlevich Butanayev, have discussed the figures transformed from the Great Mother in their works and addressed certain problematic issues³.

Regarding the old woman figure, Oruj Aliyev addressed certain nuances about the character in his two monographs titled “The Poetics of Azerbaijani Tales” and “Azerbaijani Tales: Problems of Genre, Plot, and Character”.⁴ The folklorist, drawing on examples from tales in these works, provided information about sorceress, witch-like, and benevolent old women. The researcher emphasized that the image of old woman holds a significant place among the representatives of evil forces in Azerbaijani magical tales.⁵ Russian folklorists such as N.V. Novikov in

³ İnan, A. On the Spirit of Al: An Evil Spirit in Turkic Mythology // Journal of Turkish History and Ethnography, Issue I, July 1933, – pp. 160-167; İnan, A. Shamanism in History and Today / A. İnan. – Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Press, – 1986. – 229 p; Kuchuk, M. A. A Mythological Perspective on 'Maternal Feminine Spirits' in Traditional Turkic Religion // Iğdır University Faculty of Theology Journal, Issue 1, April 2013, – pp. 105-134; Shimshşek, E. The Place of Alkarısı Legends in Turkish Legends as Told in Çukurova // I. International Karacaoğlan and Çukurova Culture Symposium, November 21-23, 1990, Proceedings, – Adana, – 1990, pp. 536-545; Acıpayamli, O. Ethnological Study of Customs and Beliefs Related to Birth in Türkiye / O. Acıpayamli. (Publication No. 68, Research Series No. 57). – Erzurum: Atatürk University Press, – 1974. – 118 p; Eliade, M. Shamanism / M. Eliade. (Translated by İsmet Birkan), – Ankara: İmge Bookstore, – 1999. – 560 pages; Eliade, M. The Sacred and the Profane / M. Eliade. (Translated by Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay), – Ankara: Gece Publishing, – 1991. – 191 pages; The Mythology of All Races, In Thirteen Volumes // Finno-Ugric, Siberian by U. Harva. Holmberg, Vol. 4, New York: Cooper Square Publishers Inc, – 1964, – 713 pages; Neumann, E. The Great Mother / Depth Psychology and Psychoanalysis / E. Neumann. (Translated by I. Erzina), – Moscow: Dobrosvet, KDU Publishing, – 2014. – 410 pages; Meletinsky, E. M. On Literary Archetypes / E. M. Meletinsky. – Moscow: Russian State Humanitarian University, – 1994. – 136 pages; Meletinsky, E. M. The Hero of the Fairy Tale / E. M. Meletinsky. – Moscow-St. Petersburg: Academy of Cultural Studies, Tradition, – 2005. – 240 pages; Butanayev, V. Y. The Cult of the Goddess Umai Among the Khakas // Ethnography of Siberian Peoples, – Novosibirsk: Science Siberian Branch, – 1984, – pp. 93-105.

⁴ Aliyev, O. The Poetics of Azerbaijani Tales / O. Aliyev. – Baku: Seda, – 2001. – 192 p; Aliyev, O. Azerbaijani Tales: Problems of Genre, Plot, and Character / O. Aliyev. – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, – 2019. – 304 p.

⁵ Aliyev, O. Azerbaijani Tales: Problems of Genre, Plot, and Character / O. Aliyev. – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, – 2019. – p. 59.

“Images of East Slavic Fairy Tales”, V. Propp in “Historical Roots of Fairy Tales”, and E. Meletinsky in “The Hero of the Fairy Tale” have discussed the motifs, functions, and attributes of characters like “Baba Yaga” and “Starukha,” which are equivalents of the old woman figure in Russian and European folklore. However, since these characters have not been studied within the context of serving mythology, the topic stands out for its originality.

The object and subject of the research. The object of the research is Azerbaijani epic folklore. The subject of the research is the old woman figure in these epic folklore texts and the study of its evolutionary stages. As this figure attracts attention with its mythological origins, the systematic examination of mythological texts from ancient Turkic cultures has also been identified as a primary focus.

The aim and objectives of the research. The main aim of the research is to study the image of the old woman in Azerbaijani epic folklore. This primary goal entails the fulfillment of the following key tasks:

- Investigating the image of the old woman as an archetypal image;
- Examining the transformation from the Great Mother to the old woman image to fully reveal the essence of the problem;
- Identifying the mythological roots of the old woman image by determining its function in myths and legends;
- Clarifying the process of transformation from the Hal figure to the old woman in mythological texts;
- Defining the role of the old woman in shamanism, which holds a unique place in the system of early mythological beliefs, and identifying her shamanic functions;
- Analyzing the old woman image in various genres of epic folklore;
- Highlighting the characteristics that connect this image to the realm of the dead;
- Determining the status, functions, and attributes of the old woman;
- Conducting a comparative analysis of the old woman separated from the feminine principle, and the wise old man, who represents the masculine paradigm;

- Identifying the elements that render the old woman image comedic;
- Defining similar functions of the old woman image in other folklore genres, and so on.

Research methods. The primary research method employed in the dissertation is the historical-comparative method. This approach facilitates the analysis of epic folklore materials related to the old woman both within the framework of Azerbaijani folklore and in the context of universal world folklore. The method has enabled the study of how the old woman image was formed, developed, and transformed over time in epic folklore.

The theoretical-methodological foundation of the dissertation, dedicated to the study of the old woman image in Azerbaijani epic folklore, includes research, scholarly-theoretical ideas, and reflections aimed at resolving this issue. The dissertation is based on both scientific and theoretical principles of folkloristics, benefiting from significant scientific achievements to date. It references important works by researchers from Azerbaijan, Turkiye, Russia, and other countries related to the study of this topic.

The main provisions for defense. Since the topic of “The Image of the old woman in Azerbaijani Epic Folklore” has not been systematically studied in Azerbaijani folkloristics to date, the following propositions are presented for defense regarding the resolution of this issue:

1. The old woman image, rooted in mythology, embodies benevolent functions in myths and legends as a guardian spirit, creator, protector, life-giver, and rewarder, as well as malevolent functions as a destructive figure.
2. The transformation of the old woman from the Great Mother archetype.
3. The existence of the old woman as a shamanic figure.
4. The significant role of the old woman image, particularly in epic folklore texts.
5. The presence of both shared and distinct characteristics between the old woman and the wise old man archetype.
6. The old woman image holds statuses such as grandmother, mother, and nurse in epic folklore texts.

7. The diverse functions of the old woman image, including hosting guests, baking bread, healing, fortune-telling, guiding, practicing witchcraft, interpreting dreams, mediating disputes, resolving conflicts, matchmaking, assisting in elopements, distributing gifts, naming, and providing advice.

8. The specific locations associated with the old woman image, such as caves, forests, wells, roads, the hut, castles, fortresses, and others.

The scientific innovation of the research. The image of the old woman can be found to varying degrees in the different genres of every type of Azerbaijani folklore. While certain aspects of the transformations of the old woman image have been studied individually, a comprehensive and systematic approach to this image has not yet been undertaken, nor has the issue been addressed in a holistic manner. The primary scientific novelty of this dissertation lies in its attempt to fill this gap by conducting the first fully systematic study of the old woman image, tracing its transformation process from mythological texts to epic folklore genres.

In this research, the old woman image has been extensively examined across the existing genres of the epic type, with shared and distinct aspects subjected to complex analysis. The study offers a comparative analysis of the characteristic features of the image in each genre, providing a holistic understanding of its role and evolution.

As a result of the study of the old woman image in Azerbaijani epic folklore, numerous scientific innovations have been achieved in the dissertation. These can be broadly grouped as follows:

- The genesis of the old woman image has been studied based on mythological texts.

- The primary functions and attributes of the old woman have been identified within the context of epics and various narrative-based fairy tales.

- The analysis of the old woman image in fairy tale examples has revealed certain parallels.

- For the first time, proverbs and sayings were analyzed to determine the place of the old woman image in these concise genres.

– While examining the old woman image in proverbs and sayings, it was identified that the type of proverb known as vellerism in world folklore is also present in Azerbaijani epic folklore.

– The old woman image was analyzed for the first time within the context of space and time.

– The comic features of the old woman image and its manifestation as a trickster figure have been systematically studied for the first time.

– The essence of the old woman image in traditional games was explained through an analysis of the world of characters in games.

The theoretical and practical significance of the research. The theoretical significance of the dissertation lies in the fact that both the theoretical provisions derived from it and its bibliography can be utilized in future studies on folkloristics. The practical significance of the research is primarily related to education. This study can be used as a teaching resource during the instruction of Azerbaijani folkloristics in the philology faculties of higher education institutions.

Approbation and application of the research. The scientific innovations and key scientific findings of the research have been reflected in the author's scientific articles published in journals recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission both domestically and internationally, as well as in scientific conference materials and theses.

The name of the institution where the dissertation work was performed. The dissertation was conducted at the Institute of Folklore of ANAS. The topic of the dissertation was approved at the meeting of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Folklore of ANAS on November 24, 2008 (Protocol No. 8). The topic was also approved at the meeting of the Scientific Research Coordination Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan on May 12, 2009 (Protocol No. 1).

The structure of the dissertation: The total volume of the study, consisting of Introduction, three Parts, Conclusion (Introduction: 10256 signs; Part I: 76906 signs; Part II: 116718 signs; Part III: 59910 signs; Conclusion 10370 signs), is 274160 signs.

THE MAIN CONTENT OF THE DISSERTATION

In the part “**Introduction**” of the dissertation the information about subject’s actuality, the level of its research, the object and scientific resources of the work, as well as the main aim of the research and the proposed tasks, theoretical-methodological bases of the research, scientific innovation, practical significance of the work, as well as the structure of the study is given.

The first part of the dissertation called “**The Mythological Roots of the Old woman Image**” consists of two chapters. The first chapter is titled “*The Old woman Image in Myths and Legends*”. This section highlights that archetypal images have always served as a source for mythology. Archetypes, which are infinite in number, have been transformed into characters primarily through mythological texts and later through folklore examples. It is noted that the archetype of the Mother is widely encountered in its old woman form in mythological texts.

In mythological texts, the old woman does not appear as the old woman with white hair and a single tooth often encountered in fairy tales and epics. In some mythological texts, the old woman directly acts as a transformation of the Great Mother, while in others, it only carries traces of her. There are old woman figures in legends who fulfill the function of a protector spirit. In the legend titled “*Khazina Gaya*”⁶ (Treasure Rock), the old woman appears as the protector sour and a manifestation of the Great Mother. With her curse, thunder roars and lightning strikes, turning the cruel king's entire treasure into stone. Mourning for her only grandchild, the old woman transforms into the guardian of the people, saving the lives of young men during the king's aggressive conquests.

This old woman resembles Ashapatma from Chuvash demonology. Ashapatma is a mythological being who foretells the future, protects people from all forms of curses, and acts as their protector. She is depicted as an old woman with silvery hair, one eye, and a single golden tooth. Her domains are the sea, forest, and mountains⁷.

Due to her protective and child-bestowing qualities, the old woman is similar to Ag Ana and Ana Maygil from the Altai creation

⁶ Myths, Legends, and Narratives / Compiled by: Arif Ajaloğlu, Celal Beydili. Baku: Sherg-Gerb, –2005. – p. 162

⁷ Trofimov, A.A. Ashapatman: <http://www.enc.cap.ru/>

epics, Aan Alahchin Hotun in Yakut mythology, and the benevolent spirit Umay Ana, widely spread in archaic beliefs of Central Asia. The creative maternal function of women is also reflected in the old woman figure who appear in the dreams of childless women. In a legend related to Venk Piri, collected from the Sharur region, a woman longing for a child dreams of a woman in a black veil who grants her a child. After that dream, the woman becomes a mother⁸.

It is worth noting that the figure of a black-veiled woman also appears in Azerbaijani fairy tales. In the tale “The Turtle Girl” (Tısbaga Giz), the Turtle Girl's grandmother is a black-veiled woman living in a pit. This black-veiled old woman is a manifestation of the benevolent spirit Umay, widely recognized in archaic beliefs of Central Asia. Umay bestows life and protects newborns from malicious spirits. However, Umay is depicted wearing white garments. White symbolizes purity and sanctity. Similarly, the “white” in Ag Ana, another transformation of the Great Mother, signifies holiness and purity. According to Fuzuli Bayat, Ag Ana is the mythological Mother herself. He explains this by stating that Ag Ana imparted the consciousness of creation to Ulgen⁹.

Calendar myths provide extensive material for exploring the genesis of the old woman image. In these myths, Chillas (harsh winter periods) are portrayed as the sons of an old and decrepit old woman. In calendar myths, the old woman is depicted as a part of chaos.

When examining the mythological roots of the old woman image, it becomes evident that she often appears as Hal Ana in mythological texts. Research and information collected from folklore narrators reveal that Hal is predominantly envisioned in the form of an old woman. The primary feature of Hal Ana is her long legs, with her right breast thrown over her left shoulder and her left breast over her right shoulder.

In some Azerbaijani mythological texts, Hal is depicted as a being resembling a monkey or a creature with “velvet-like fur”¹⁰. In

⁸ Myths, Legends, and Narratives / Compiled by: Arif Ajaloğlu, Celal Beydili.. Baku: Sherg-Gerb, –2005. – p. 162

⁹ Bayat, F. Turkish Mythological System. Turkish Mythology in Ontological and Epistemological Context / F. Bayat. Volume: 1, – Istanbul: Otuken, –2007, –p.49

¹⁰ Anthology of Azerbaijani Folklore. Volume XII (Zangezür Folklore) / Compiled and edited by V. Nebioglu, A. Asgarov, M. Kazimoglu. – Baku: Seda, – 2005. – p.59

Azerbaijani mythology, Hal Ana is neither entirely benevolent nor entirely malevolent, embodying a dual nature.

The second chapter of the first part of the dissertation is titled "*The Shamanic Function of the old woman*". It is noted that the functions of shamans have been transferred to the old woman figure in folklore texts¹¹. As shamans, old woman figures participate in rituals such as summoning rain or wind. In mythological texts and legends, old woman figures sometimes appear as shamans and sometimes as participants in the process of becoming a shaman.

The old woman often stands at the center of events surrounding a shaman candidate until they officially become a shaman. With the help of these old woman the candidate either completes their transformation into a shaman or renounces the role. Some old woman figures found in epics resemble elderly female shamans who are summoned to cure a shaman candidate of the so-called "shaman sickness". It is also noteworthy that the initiation ceremony is often led by female shamans. Another function that has transitioned from shamans to the old woman figure is the act of naming. In fairy tales and epics, old woman figures often gather to name the hero. Just as there are White (benevolent) and Black (malevolent) shamans in beliefs, the old woman figures in fairy tales and epics also exhibit either good or bad traits. Based on research, it can be said that elderly women often carry the functions of black shamans. This is because, like black shamans, the old woman figures in fairy tales and epics are connected not to the heavens but to the underworld. The mystical functions of shamans, such as divination and foresight, are also present in the old woman figure. Some attributes possessed by shamans are also evident in the "old woman" figures in fairy tales and epics. For example, like shamans, old woman figures are seen using mirrors, blood, and drums as magical tools. "*The mirror is used to see the Otherworld and to locate the spirits. In shamanism, the mirror symbolizes the sun, growth, and rebirth*"¹². In the fairy tale "The Magic Mirror" the sorceress sends the king's son in search of a magical

¹¹ Huseynova, Sh. The Shamanic Function of the Old Woman in Primitive Beliefs // – Baku: WEST CASPIAN UNIVERSITY Scientific News (Humanitarian and Socio-political Sciences series). – 2021. No. 2, – p. 98

¹² Bayat, F. Outlines of Turkish Shamanism / F. Bayat, Istanbul, Otuken, 2006, pp. 190-192

mirror that shows the world¹³. One of the attributes of a shaman is the drum. In fairy tales with plot-driven motifs, 428 In the Service of the Ogress¹⁴ is depicted with a drum. In the tale “Torchuoğlu” we see a woman dipping bread in blood and eating it. This recalls the shamanic ritual of consuming blood during a trance state.

The second part of the dissertation is called “**The Old woman in Epic Folklore Texts**”. The second part consists of five chapters. The first chapter is titled “*The Old Woman Image in Fairy Tales and Its Comparative Analysis with the Image of the Wise Old Man*”. This section primarily examines the connection of the old woman image with the initiation ceremony.

“*Fairy tales, in addition to preserving traces and perceptions related to the world of the dead, also encompass a widely practiced ritual—concepts related to the sexual maturity of young men and the initiation ceremony connected to death and rebirth*”¹⁵. Based on the ideas of V.Y. Propp, it can be said that to fully understand the old woman figure, who belongs to the realm of the dead and oversees the initiation ceremony, it is necessary to conduct research on fairy tales. For this purpose, the catalog compiled by Ilkin Rustamzade¹⁶ has been consulted.

In Azerbaijani fairy tales, alongside the old woman image, the image of the wise old man also draws attention. While the wise old man may seem to oppose the old woman a parallelism between the old woman, dervish, and wise old man emerges within the narrative. Hikmet Guliyev explains this parallelism as follows: “*In the texts, these two figures act in parallel because the 'father' and 'mother' archetypes represent two essential principles of existence... The father embodies the active, creative principle, while the mother encompasses sensitivity and care*”¹⁷. We can add to this idea by stating that since both figures

¹³ Collection of Azerbaijani Folklore. Volume VII. Tales (Book VII) / Edited by H. Ismayilov, O. Aliyev. – Baku: Nurlan, – 2008. p.140

¹⁴ Rustamzade, I. Index of Azerbaijani Tales / I. Rustamzade. – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, – 2013. – 368 p.

¹⁵ Propp, V.Ya. Historical Roots of Fairy Tales. – Leningrad: Leningrad State University Publishing House, – 1986, p.73

¹⁶ Rustamzade, I. Index of Azerbaijani Tales / I. Rustamzade. – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, – 2013. – 368 p.

¹⁷ Guliyev, H. The Semantic Structure and Paradigms of the Wise Old Man Archetype / H. Guliyev. – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, – 2016. – p.112

embody the male and female principles, they participate in the act of creation either together or separately. This aspect is reflected in fairy tales. “Prince Mutalib” “Siman's Tale” “Jantiq” and “The Poor Old Woman and the Prince” are characteristic examples that illustrate this parallelism.

In the tale “Prince Mutalib” the figures of the dervish, the luminous old man, and the old woman appear in parallel. While the dervish provides a remedy for the king's sorrow of being childless, and the luminous old man reveals the secret of the apple that falls from the sky, it is the old woman who alleviates the pain of childbirth for the king's young wife. Each time this old woman appears, chaos ensues, and she emerges from a dark cloud¹⁸. When a hero sent to another world encounters an obstacle, he overcomes it with the advice of a wise old man. In most fairy tales, unlike some exceptions involving old women, the old man is portrayed positively while the old woman is depicted negatively. In the parallelism of the wise old man and old woman, the old man symbolizes the cosmos and the old woman represents chaos. There are many similarities between the archetypes of the luminous old man and the old woman, which can be seen in the functions they perform: warning, guiding, informing, etc. The hero is shown the way to escape the old woman's tricks by the luminous old man, or a dervish. If the luminous old man is a paradigm of the Wise Old Man archetype, then the old woman is a transformation of the Great Mother.

The second chapter of second part is called “*The Image of the Old Woman in Epics*”. This paragraph analyzes the various functions of old women in epics. Research indicates that, unlike in fairy tales, the functions and attributes of the old woman image in epics are not extensive. In epics, old women are often portrayed as nursemaids. However, their characteristic aspects in epics also include helping a cursed lover, finding a remedy for their affliction, showing ways to reunite with their beloved, and sometimes intervening to separate lovers. Old women in epics are generally described as knowledgeable, cunning, and far-sighted.

¹⁸ Azerbaijani Tales: In 5 Volumes, Volume II / Compiled by A. Akhundov. Baku: Sherg-Gerb, – 2005. – p.121

In the epic “The Book of Dede Gorgud” four types of old women are discussed¹⁹. Descriptions of old women also appear in the epic “Koroglu”²⁰. M. Jafarli speaks of the old woman as a leading image in his work “Structural Poetics of Azerbaijani Epics,” stating: “*In the image system of love epics, the negatively functional 'old woman' image actively participates in the climactic development of events along the plot line, contributing to the intensification of psychological tension*”²¹. Old women are more commonly found in love epics, where they serve as mediators. Based on his research on the “Asli and Kerem” epic, Seyfeddin Rzasoy confirms the mediative function of the old woman in two aspects: first, her fixed place within the epic plot, and second, her mediative capabilities, thereby emphasizing her role as a reconstructive force²². Indeed, after being cursed, the hero becomes dependent on the old women, who seem to control their lives until the next marriage act. It can be argued that the marriage act may be considered an act of rebirth because, through marriage, the hero is, in a sense, reborn. Naturally, this is a topic that requires further research.

In many epics, old women are named, with the epic “Ali Khan” being a clear example: “Old women come in various types: Perjahan, Hurjahan, Zorjahan; Napak gari, Ipek gari, Kopek gari”²³. In the epic “Qurbani,” there is not one, but several old women characters. They call upon old women to understand the troubles of Mirzali Khan's son Qurbani²⁴. Eventually, it is the silk old woman who diagnoses the hero's ailment. She examines the patient's pulse and tells him that he has been cursed, has fallen in love, and will recover in two or three days. Shakir Albaliev, in his work “The Place, the Locale, the Address of the Curse”

¹⁹ Book of Dede Gorgud. Azerbaijani Folk Literature / Edited by S. Alizade, – Baku: Onder, –2004. – p. 22

²⁰ Koroglu (Epic) / I. Abbasli, B. Abdulla. – Baku: Lider, –2005, –pp.337-339

²¹ Jafarli, M. Structural Poetics of Azerbaijani Epics / M. Jafarli. – Baku: Nurlan, – 2010. – p.326

²² Rzasoy, S. The Shaman-Hero Archetype in Azerbaijani Epics ("Asli-Kerem" and "Dede Gorgud") / – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, –2015. – p. 105

²³ Azerbaijani Epics / [in 5 volumes]. Edited by Tahmasib, M., Akhundov, A. – Baku: Lider, – Volume 1, – 2005. p.199

²⁴ Azerbaijani Epics / [in 5 volumes]. Edited by A. Akhundov. – Baku: Lider, – Volume 3, – 2005. – p. 42

rightfully notes that “*the secret of the young man – the lover, taxed by the chaotic world – could not be immediately understood and comprehended by the people of this world*”²⁵. To understand the patient's condition, the resident of the chaotic world is needed. This resident is the silk old woman. As seen in the epic, neither the Napak gari nor the Kopek gari are free from the issue. Because the process of giving and receiving a curse involves sanctity, the person giving the curse must be sacred, just as the old woman who solves the patient's trouble must be the pure, silk old woman. One of the main functions of old women in epics is that of a nursemaid. Prominent examples of nursemaid old women are Banichichek's nursemaids, Bogazca Fatma and Kisirca Yenge. Nursemaid old women also appear in the epics “Tahir and Zohre” “Abdulla and Jahan Khanim” and “Shah Ismail”.

The next chapter of second part is titled “*Old Women in Proverbs and Sayings*”. Based on the analyzed examples, it can be said that proverbs and tales about old women reflect both the real image of the old woman and her mythological representation. The dual nature of the old woman's image is also mirrored in proverbs. Phrases such as “There is the old woman whose words are praised, and the old woman whose words are cursed” and “Some old women should be celebrated in the community, others should be struck on the head”²⁶ are examples. Proverbs about old women are often ironic. It should also be noted that some of these proverbs and tales about old women originate from jokes, mainly due to the cunning characteristic often associated with the old woman image. During the research, vellerisms²⁷ related to old women also emerged. Some proverbs about old women require a different approach. In the tale “Father and Son,” an old man wanting to marry seeks his son's approval using a proverb about old women: “a wife is the pillar and blessing of the home, the harmony,” and “a man is not

²⁵ Albaliyev, Sh. The Place, Locale, and Address of the Curse // Studies on Azerbaijani Oral Folk Literature, Book XXXXII, – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, – 2013. – p. 83

²⁶ Anthology of Azerbaijani Folklore. Volume XXI (Gazakh Samples) / Compiled by M. Hekimov. – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, – 2012. – p.177

²⁷ Huseynova, Sh. Old Women in Proverbs and Sayings // Studies on Azerbaijani Oral Folk Literature. Scientific-Literary Collection, – 2019/1 (54) – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, – 2019. – p.70-74

orphaned by his mother's death, but by his wife's"²⁸. Such proverbs are known in world folklore studies as vellerisms, anti-proverbs, or антипословица [antiposlovitsa]. "A vellerism is a type of proverb that has a different syntactic formula, used for satire or humor purposes"²⁹. In vellerisms, the core content resembles the original but some words are altered for comedic effect. During the research, we also encountered proverbs related to the old woman called Hal. Although these proverbs stem from beliefs, they have permeated real life and have become active proverbs used today.

The fourth paragraph of the second chapter, titled "*The Status, Function, and Attributes of the Old Woman Image in Epic Folklore*" extensively explores the status, function, and attributes of the old woman image found in epic folklore. Research shows that the status, functions, and attributes of the old woman image in epic folklore vary. For instance, the manifestation of the old woman image in Azerbaijani tales is observed with contrasts: sometimes seen as a malevolent force, and sometimes as a helper to the hero. This image is also associated with various roles such as baking bread, hosting guests, being a messenger, healer, sage, intermediary, peacemaker, envoy, abductor, distributor, name-giver, advisor, guide, dream interpreter, and nursemaid. Another defined function of this image in tales is the old women holding the answers to secret words and difficult tasks, transmitting secret knowledge and information to the hero.

In tales or epics, if the discussion is about a negatively characterized old woman, she appears with names like Kopek, Napak or Kupegiren (witch). Conversely, old women with positive traits are often referred to with the epithet "silk." When examining examples of Azerbaijani epic folklore, we notice that descriptions of old women take into account both their physical appearance and internal qualities. Since the old woman image is most frequently encountered in tales among the genres of epic folklore, the characteristics listed need to be studied more

²⁸ Anthology of Azerbaijani Folklore. Volume XIII (Folklore of Sheki, Gabala, Oguz, Qakh, Zagatala, Balakan) / Edited by I. Abbasli, O. Aliyev, M. Abdullayeva. – Baku: Seda, – 2005. – p.291

²⁹ Coinnigh M. M. 5 Structural Aspects of Proverbs. https://www.academia.edu/3629309/Structural_Aspects_of_Proverbs pdf

extensively based on tales. According to their function in tales, old women can be categorized as either active or inactive. In Azerbaijani epic folklore, active old women are more prevalent. As the names suggest, inactive, passive old women do not give special tasks, nor do they serve as advisors, mediators, or intermediaries. The old women we encounter in tales are often childless women. These old women have a single child, who is either a wise daughter or a perceptive bald child. Often, the old woman adopts the daughter or son later. One of the primary functions of the old woman is “hosting guests”. Related to this function is the old woman's role as a “bread maker”. Research suggests that if a negatively-typed old woman hosts a hero in her home, feeding and entertaining him, this does not necessarily make her a positive figure. Other functions of old women include mediating, settling disputes, and acting as messengers.

In the Azerbaijani tales we have studied, the primary attributes of old women include a pot, broom, mortar, oven, chest, sieve, magic wand, golden basin, and golden tray. These attributes serve as tools for the old women to carry out their functions. The attributes listed are symbols representing the world of the dead. It has been established that the attributes possessed by old women in Azerbaijani epic folklore samples are also found among old women in the folklore of other peoples.

The fifth chapter of the second part is titled “*Places Where the Old Woman is Encountered in Folklore*”. It is shown that, both in mythology and folklore, the places where the old woman is encountered vary. As a mythological figure, the old woman is connected to the world of the dead. The factor of location proves her connection to the realm of the dead. Rural areas are generally more characteristic for the image of the old woman. The old woman's house, the road leading to her house, forests, caves, wells—these are typically the locales where events related to the old woman take place. In tales, the old woman appears before the hero in dark caves, wells, forests, or deserted cities—places that represent a world of chaos. On a journey filled with obstacles, the old woman sometimes becomes the greatest barrier. Under her care, the hero is rejuvenated, resurrected, and undergoes initiation. In these rural locales, the old woman's dwelling is located, and in this dwelling, she hosts the hero. The foundation for the mysterious events we encounter

throughout the tale is laid in this dwelling. Apart from heroes, old women can navigate and emerge from impassable castles and fortresses.

The third part of the dissertation is titled “**The Old Woman as a Comic Hero**”. This part consists of three chapters. The first chapter is titled “*The Comic Old Woman in Tales and Epics*”. In tales, we encounter both purely comic old women and mythological old women whose actions are comedic. “*As the text's comedy intensifies, the realm of myth diminishes, and myth cedes its place to a humorous distortion of itself*”³⁰. Starting from myths and continuing through legends, epics, and tales, the old woman image often emerges and can be considered a trickster due to certain characteristics. What is a trickster? Researchers have answered this question in various ways. Ramazan Gafarli's definition of a trickster is more precise: “*A trickster in mythology is a term given to the cultural hero's opposite—a demon-like, comical, acrobatic, mischievous double*”³¹. The trickster enters the scene to disrupt tradition, disrupts the world's order, and causes chaos. The characteristics that make the old woman image a trickster are sufficient.

The image of the comic old woman is inseparably linked with the motif of acrobatics. “*Acrobatics and foolishness combine the positive and the negative, the good and the bad*”³². One characteristic feature of the trickster image is foolishness. In the tale “The Foolish Wife,” the foolish old woman is the target of laughter. A woman who finds a pot in the river gives away all her gold to someone named Ramadan, believing her husband's statement that “we will spend the gold when Ramadan comes”. Another trait that makes the old woman a trickster is her greed. For instance, in the tale “The King of the Genies' Daughter” the old woman asks the king's son for money in exchange for advice and guidance³³.

³⁰ Kazimoglu, M. *The Poetics of Folk Humor* / M. Kazimoglu. – Baku: Elm, – 2006. – p.158

³¹ Gafarli, R. *Mythology* [in 6 volumes]. *Mythogenesis: Reconstruction, Structure, Poetics* / R. Gafarli. – Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, – Vol. 1, – 2015. – p.231

³² Kazimoglu, M. *The Archaic Roots of Humor* / M. Kazimoglu. – Baku: Elm, – 2005. – p. 37

³³ *Collection of Azerbaijani Folklore. Volume VII. Tales (Book VII)* / Edited by H. Ismayilov, O. Aliyev. – Baku: Nurlan, – 2008. – pp. 323-327

Comic old women also hold a special place in epics. In the epic “The Book of Dede Gorgud” Banichichek's nursemaids are comic old women. In the epic “The Book of Dede Gorgud,” the characters of Bogazca Fatma and Kisirca Yenge fall into comic situations and become the targets of laughter. However, while the form here is comical, when we look into the content, we see a serious side, chaos. The names Kisirca and Bogazca serve to highlight the comic nature of Yenge and Fatma. Mukhtar Kazimoglu points out that their amusing behaviors confirm these characters' comic relief and suggests viewing their actions, and their emergence from various pranks in the gorges, as indicators of humor³⁴.

In epics, malevolent old women are beaten and scolded for being deceitful and cunning, becoming targets of criticism. In the epic “Heydar,” Süsenberin's nursemaid, and in “Seydi and Peri” Bayramkhatun are such old women.

In the first chapter of the third part, the first section titled “*Confrontation Between the Trickster Old Woman and the Trickster Bald Man*” primarily focuses on comparing the images of the old woman and the bald man. In this section, it is emphasized that encounters between the old woman and the bald man are more commonly found in tales. Like the old woman, the genesis of the bald man's image also traces back to demonic entities. However, benevolent supernatural attributes are also added to this demonism. In the plot line involving the old woman and the bald man, either the old woman assists the bald man, or the bald man helps his grandmother. Typically, the bald man is the active party³⁵. The simplicity of the old woman and the cunning of the bald man form a tandem in tales. The old woman often falls victim to the bald man's tricks. Generally, the bald man not only overcomes the old woman, but also the king, the vizier, or the demonic entities he encounters in the Otherworld with his acrobatics. In tales involving the bald man, the confrontation between the old woman and the bald man enhances the comedy. An interesting aspect of the old woman-bald man confrontation is that it is not the foolish old woman who changes

³⁴ Collection of Azerbaijani Folklore. Volume I. Tales (Book I) / Edited by H. Ismayilov, O. Aliyev. – Baku: Seda, – 2006. – p. 40

³⁵ Kazimoglu, M. The Doubling of Images in Folklore / M. Kazimoglu. – Baku: Elm, – 2011. – p.102

clothes, but her grandson, the bald man. The bald man, who dresses as a girl, a doctor, eventually becomes the king's vizier in reality. If one of these two tricksters had not performed acrobatics or changed clothes, they would have strayed from their mythological roots. This is because the trickster serves as a bridge between this world and the Otherworld. Additionally, the separation of the old woman and the bald man as distinct entities in Turkic mythology has been confirmed. The origins of both characters are connected to the element of Mother Earth. A. Asgar discusses characters bearing the attribute of baldness, touching on female images with this attribute and presenting interesting ideas: *"In tales and epics, the bald figure as a helper to the hero performs the same function as the shaman's guardian spirits in shamanism"*³⁶. If the old woman represents the other world, the bald man, as a golden-haired hero, is "a hero connected to the other world by his extraordinary feature, deriving his power from that magical realm"³⁷.

The second chapter of the third part of the dissertation is titled *"Old Women in Jokes"*. This paragraph engages a series of jokes where the main character is the old woman, categorizing these jokes based on the position held by the old women, the functions they perform, and the topics they are criticized for or criticize. In jokes, old women are often the target of criticism. The old woman image is mainly found in domestic-related jokes. A cruel mother-in-law who is not loved by her daughter-in-law ("If the track is that of a donkey, the deed is that of the daughter-in-law"³⁸), the old woman with lost teeth and deafness, but still wishes for a long life ("The old woman's wish"³⁹), an old woman with grandchildren who is eager to get married in her old age ("The truth world"⁴⁰), ("Do you know better, or a prophet of God?!"⁴¹), a funny old

³⁶ Asadova, Sh. The Trickster Woman in Turkish Mythology [Based on Azerbaijani Folklore Examples] // MANAS Journal of Social Research, Kyrgyzstan: Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, - vol. 9, - 2020. No. 3, - p. 1938

³⁷ Asgarov, A. The Hero in Azerbaijani Fairy Tales / PhD Dissertation / – Baku, – 1992. – p.79

³⁸ Kazimoglu, M. The Poetics of Folk Humor / M. Kazimoglu. – Baku: Elm, – 2006. – p.158

³⁹ Ismayilov, H. The Homeland Remained Abroad. Baku: Yazichi, 1993, p.452

⁴⁰ Karabakh: Folklore is Also History. Book IV (Folklore Samples Collected from Lachin, Gubadli, and Zangilan Districts). Baku: Elm ve Tehsil, 2013, p.326

woman who amazed young people with her wit (“In the mouth”⁴²) is described in anecdotes. The images of old women in these jokes attract attention as ironic examples of the mythological old woman image.

The final chapter of the third part of the dissertation is titled “*Similar Functions of the Old Woman Image in Other Genres of Folklore*”. It should be noted that the functions of the old woman mentioned are also found in other genres of folklore. Without straying from the topic, a brief study has been conducted on games, and it has been shown that in games, old women perform two functions. In some games, we encounter cunning, trickster old women, while in others, wise women or maternal figures. In several games, the “old woman” or “mother” players determine the rules, control the game, punish the loser, while in others, players punish the old woman.

In games, the “mother” image is a sign of the “mother rulership” worldview, which is also found in other folklore samples. Azad Nabiyeu writes, “*The “mother” we see in folk games may have stemmed from centuries-old desires to preserve the sanctity of maternal rulership, or these games historically take us back to very early ages*”⁴³.

Before starting the game, it is necessary to determine the “old woman”. Sometimes, at the beginning of the game, rhymes or counting-out rhymes are recited, and the last syllable determines who the old woman will be. The old woman in the game is sometimes chosen by stacking hands one on top of the other. The game's “mother” is usually chosen from among the older or more knowledgeable participants, who are also physically stronger. Unlike children's games, in adult games, the “mother” is selected with the consent of the participants. Some games require cunning, and since the old woman is a cunning character, she is used in these games. However, when advice or management is needed, the “old woman” character transforms into the “mother” character.

⁴¹ Southern Azerbaijani Folklore. Book I (Folklore Samples Collected from Tabriz, Yekanat, and Hamadan Regions) / Compiled by M.Q. Farzaneh, Edited by S. Abbasli. – Baku: Elm ve tehsil, – 2013. – p.198

⁴² Anthology of Azerbaijani Folklore. Book IV (Sheki Folklore), Volume II, Baku: Seda, 2000, p.263

⁴³ Nabiyeu, A. Folk Songs, Traditional Games / A. Nabiyeu. – Baku: Azerneshr, – 1988. – p.153

Indeed, upon deeper reflection, the “mother” in games represents the embodiment of abundance and fertility, the Great Mother. Conversely, the old woman is considered the inverse embodiment of the Great Mother.

The “**Conclusion**” section of the dissertation summarizes the results obtained:

1. In Azerbaijani folklore, the old woman, one of the most frequently encountered images, appears in various genres of the epic type, performing complex, contradictory roles.

2. Research has shown that although the old woman in Azerbaijani epic folklore has a demonic character, her ability to embody both benevolent and malevolent forces makes her a complex phenomenon. She can simultaneously be a positive hero's ally and a negative hero's accomplice. From these contradictory characteristics, the following important functions of the old woman have emerged: The positive old woman prepares the hero for the other world → gives the hero a magical item to ease their situation. The negative old woman sends the hero into exile → meets the hero in the other world → complicates the situation. Thus, the positive old woman is a friend to the hero, and the negative old woman is an enemy.

3. The main functions and attributes of the old woman have been identified in the context of various plot narratives. It has been concluded that all these functions and attributes characterize the world of the dead. Analysis of the old woman's distinct external appearance has shown that the toothless, one-eyed, squint-eyed, dog-like, with lower lips sweeping the ground, upper lips touching the sky, hair disheveled or unkempt old woman carries demonological traits and is a chthonic image by genesis.

4. The main functions of the old woman are related to the initiation ceremony. Because the mythological old woman is the guardian of the initiation ceremony.

5. Analysis of fairy tale texts has revealed some parallels. It has been determined that whether it is the old woman, the wise old man, or the dervish, their involvement in various processes is parallel. In this parallelism, the wise old man symbolizes the cosmos, and the old woman symbolizes chaos.

6. During the research, it was concluded that the places where the mythological old woman is encountered are also related to the world of the dead.

7. The study of the old woman image in epics has concluded that, although they are helper figures, in many cases, old women become controllers of events. In epics, old women primarily perform the nursemaid function, being present at the hero's side during the curse receiving process, helping reach the curse, advising, and sometimes these nursemaid old women act maliciously and become obstacles for lovers.

8. It has been concluded that proverbs and tales about old women reflect both the real old woman and the mythological image of the old woman. Proverbs about old women are mostly ironic. Even some proverbs and tales about old women originate from jokes.

9. The image of the old woman as a comic hero has been analyzed, and it has been determined that the old woman belongs to the series of trickster images in folklore. The main characteristic of old women in tales and epics is trickery. The comic, thieving, acrobatic, and cunning characteristics that trickster images possess in folklore texts are also present in the old woman.

10. It has been concluded that the old woman-bald man unity is a distinct topic. In the old woman-bald man plotline, either the old woman helps the bald man, or the bald man helps his grandmother. Typically, the active side is the bald man. The old woman's simplicity and the bald man's cunning form a tandem in tales.

11. Because the image of the old woman is encountered in jokes, this genre has also been included in the study, and the function of the old woman in jokes has been explained. It is concluded that old women in jokes mostly generate laughter with their quick wit. Old women performing the mother-in-law function in jokes reveal themselves through their actions, becoming the target of laughter and criticism. Some joke examples feature old women who create humor and draw the listener into reformation. They are sharp-witted, wise with their responses, trying to reform those with moral flaws through their actions and conversations that contain humor.

12. The analysis of the old woman image in other genres of folklore has determined that the functions of the old woman have an inter-genre character and acquire different meanings in various contexts.

The main content of the dissertation is reflected in the author's published scientific articles:

1. "The Image of the Old Woman in Epics" – Istanbul: Motif Academy Folklore Journal. – 2015. No. 15, Volume: 8, - p.119-127. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/mahder/issue/28385/301776>

2. "Transformation of the Old Woman Image to the 'Mother' Image in Azerbaijani Folk Dances" – Baku: Civilization. – 2015. No. 5, - p. 111-116.

3. "The Image of the Old Woman in Tales Collected from Iranian Turks (in tales and epics)" – Baku: Issues in Philology. – 2015. No. 9, - p.444-448.

4. "From Mother to Old Woman Image" – Baku: Issues in Philology. -2017. No. 3, - p.440-446.

5. "The Old Woman in Proverbs and Sayings" – Baku: Studies on Azerbaijani Oral Folk Literature. – 2019. No. 1, – p. 70-74.

6. "Trickster Old Woman in Turkic Mythology (Based on Azerbaijani Folklore Examples)" – Kyrgyzstan: Manas. – 2020. No. 9, – p. 1934-1941

7. "Comparative Analysis of the Old Woman and Wise Old Man Images" – Baku: Journal of Language and Literature International Scientific-Theoretical. – 2021. No. 1, (115), – p. 317-318.

8. "The Shamanic Function of the Old Woman in Primitive Belief" – Baku: West Caspian University Scientific News (Humanitarian and Socio-political Sciences series). – 2021. No. 2, – p.92-99.

9. "The Image of the Old Woman in Karabakh Folklore Samples" – Karabakh Folklore: Issues, Perspectives on the Republican Scientific Conference materials.-Baku: Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences Folklore Institute. – December 26, 2012, – p.201-208

10. "The Characters of Kisirca Yenge and Bogazca Fatma in "Dede Qorqud" within the Context of Old Woman Images in Our Epics // Materials of the Epic and Ethnos International Scientific Conference. – Baku: November 06-07, 2015 (2016). – pp. 333-336.

11. The Old Woman (Female) Character in Folk Games // I. International Turkish World Children's Games and Toys Congress Full text proceedings book. – Eskişehir: Türkiye May 14-17, 2015. – p.429-434.

12. Transformation from Great Mother to Old Woman Character (Based on Mythological Texts) // III. International Folk Culture Symposium. Proceedings Volume-2, - Ankara: - October 8-10, 2015. – p.619-624.

13. Mythological Character – Alkarısı in Yozgat and Old Turks // I. International Bozok Symposium. (I. International Bozok Symposium). Proceedings Book Volume III. – Yozgat: May 05 -07, 2016. – p.419-426.

14. Humorous Character 'Old Woman' in Folk Literature // International Young Academicians Cultural Congress. Proceedings book, - Izmir: October 6-8, 2016(2017). – p. 427-434.

15. The Al Belief of Ahiska Turks Living in Azerbaijan // Erzincan University International Ahiska Turks Symposium. Proceedings Volume-2, – Erzincan: May 11-13, 2017. – pp. 493-497.

16. Al Gizi or Alkarısı - In Gaziantep and Azerbaijani Folk Beliefs // International Gaziantep History Symposium National Struggle Period in Gaziantep. From History to Today Ayıntap-Gaziantep conference texts book, – Gaziantep: December 25-26, 2017(2018). – p.1411-1421.

17. Historical Development of the Old Woman Character in Turkish Folk Literature- From Myths to Tales // 18th Turkish History Congress Presented Papers Turkish Language and Literature History (Volume XII). Turkish Language and Literature History – Ankara: October 1-5, 2018. – p.409-418.

The defense will be held on the 26th of December 2024 at 1400 at the meeting of the Dissertation council ED – 1.27 of Supreme Attestation Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan operating at the Institute of Folklore Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences

Address: AZ 1001, Baku, Kichik Gala str, 31, Institute of Folklore Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences

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