

# Musical Instruments and Wedding Performance Practice in 16th-Century Azerbaijan: An Iconographic Analysis of a Safavid Miniature

Abbasgulu Najafzade<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This study examines the 16th-century Safavid miniature entitled “*The Ceremonial Display of the Wedding of Zuleykha and Aziz*” as an iconographic source for Azerbaijani wedding music and performance practice. Although the painting visually illustrates a scene derived from Abdurrahman Jami’s masnavi “*Yusuf and Zuleykha*,” it simultaneously functions as a historical document reflecting musical ensemble structure, instrumental typology, and ceremonial acoustics in Safavid-period Azerbaijan.

The primary aim of the research is to identify and analyze the musical instruments depicted in the miniature and to reconstruct the performance practice represented in the wedding scene. The study employs an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology combining iconographic analysis, organology, historical-literary interpretation, and performance-based examination. The spatial arrangement of musicians, the hierarchical placement of loud and soft instruments, and the relationship between instrumentalists, vocalists, and dancers are systematically evaluated.

The findings reveal the collective performance of twelve musical instruments, including wind, percussion, and string instruments, organized within a structured ensemble model. The differentiated acoustic positioning of performers indicates a deliberate understanding of sound projection in open-air ceremonial settings. Furthermore, the presence of the ashik–balaban pairing and the sazanda ensemble demonstrates the integrated character of Azerbaijani wedding music, where ashik art, mugham elements, dance, and festive ceremonial music coexist within a syncretic performance framework.

The study concludes that the miniature should be regarded not merely as a literary illustration but as a valuable musicological and organological source documenting ensemble organization, acoustic awareness, and wedding performance practice in 16th-century Azerbaijan.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijani wedding music, Safavid miniature, iconographic analysis, organology, ensemble structure, performance practice

---

<sup>1</sup> Professor, Azerbaijan National Conservatory, Baku, Azerbaijan. E mail: a.najafzade@yahoo.com