

# Ayşe Şan: An Ethnomusicological Portrait of a Kurdish Icon

## I. Introduction: Ayşe Şan, Voice of a People

Ayşe Şan (Aysha Shan), born in 1938 and passing away on December 18, 1996, occupies a seminal position within the landscape of Kurdish music.<sup>1</sup> Frequently referred to by alternative names such as Eyşana Kurd, Eyşe Xan, and Eyşana Eli<sup>1</sup>, she is widely regarded as one of the most significant and legendary voices in the contemporary Kurdish musical tradition.<sup>1</sup> Her influence and artistry resonated across the Kurdish regions, leaving an indelible mark on generations.<sup>6</sup>

This report endeavors to provide a comprehensive account of Ayşe Şan's life, artistic trajectory, musical characteristics, cultural impact, and the formidable challenges she encountered. Adhering strictly to the mandate for rigorous source attribution, every piece of information presented herein is explicitly linked to the specific source documents provided [User Query]. The analysis and synthesis are derived solely from this corpus of material, encompassing sources in Turkish, Kurdish, and English, reflecting the multilingual nature of scholarship concerning Kurdish culture [User Query].

The subsequent sections will navigate through Ayşe Şan's biography, from her origins in Diyarbakır to her final years in İzmir. It will trace her complex career path through Turkey, Germany, and Iraq, analyze the defining features of her musical style and thematic concerns, assess her profound cultural significance within the Kurdish community and beyond, detail the persecution she faced, present a compilation of her documented works, and reflect upon her enduring legacy. Throughout this examination, the integration of source material remains paramount, ensuring a verifiable and detailed portrait of this influential artist.

## II. Origins and Early Life in Diyarbakır (1938-c.1958)

### A. Birth and Family Context

Ayşe Şan entered the world in Diyarbakır (often referred to by its Kurdish name, Amed), Turkey, in 1938.<sup>1</sup> While Diyarbakır is consistently cited as her birthplace, some accounts note her family's origins trace back to Erzurum (Erzirom).<sup>8</sup> She was born into a large and well-known family<sup>5</sup>, the daughter of Heciya Xanim and Osman.<sup>5</sup> Her mother, Heciya, hailed from Erzurum<sup>7</sup>, while her father, Osman, was a member of the prominent Cibran (Cibriyan) tribe.<sup>5</sup> Crucially for Ayşe Şan's future path, her father was himself a respected and popular traditional Kurdish singer, known as a *dengbêj*.<sup>1</sup> Her upbringing was steeped in this musical tradition. The family home frequently hosted *dengbêj* gatherings, known as *divans*, where singers would perform and share traditional songs.<sup>4</sup> This environment provided Ayşe Şan with early and deep immersion in Kurdish music, storytelling, cultural narratives, and historical

consciousness.<sup>9</sup> She later recalled the power of her father's voice, describing it as resonant enough to echo across distances, even reaching neighboring villages.<sup>7</sup> Available sources indicate she was the eldest child, with siblings including three sisters and one brother<sup>7</sup>, though one source mentions a total of six children in the family.<sup>8</sup>

## **B. Early Musical Inclination and Societal Constraints**

The rich musical environment of her childhood profoundly shaped Ayşe Şan. Her affinity for singing was primarily influenced by her *dengbêj* father and the many other traditional singers she encountered.<sup>5</sup> She listened intently, absorbing the melodies and narratives performed in her home.<sup>5</sup> Her initial foray into performance involved singing religious hymns, known as *mevlit*, at women's gatherings.<sup>4</sup> Even in these restricted settings, the exceptional quality of her voice was recognized by the women present.<sup>7</sup>

A significant event in her youth was the death of her father when she was nine years old.<sup>7</sup> This loss fueled her desire to sing, partly as a way to preserve his memory and legacy, as she felt others did not perform his songs with the same skill or feeling.<sup>7</sup> However, this ambition immediately collided with the rigid social constraints of her time and place.

Ayşe Şan faced formidable obstacles rooted in the prevailing patriarchal mindset, which viewed women's voices in public, particularly in the presence of men, as shameful, sinful, and forbidden.<sup>6</sup> Men in her community explicitly reinforced this prohibition, stating that women could not sing publicly.<sup>7</sup> With the notable exception of her mother, her family strongly opposed her musical aspirations.<sup>3</sup> Even her father, the source of her musical inspiration, reportedly disapproved of her performing publicly and preferred she follow a traditional path of marriage and domesticity.<sup>10</sup>

This early period of Ayşe Şan's life thus reveals the foundational tensions that would define her entire existence. A profound connection to her Kurdish musical heritage, directly inherited and absorbed from her father and the *dengbêj* tradition, was set in sharp contrast against the severe patriarchal and familial restrictions imposed upon her as a woman seeking to participate publicly in that very tradition. Her desire to honor her father's legacy through song<sup>7</sup> created an immediate and inherent conflict between respecting her heritage and adhering to the social codes that sought to silence her female voice. This clash between artistic passion, cultural inheritance, and societal prohibition foreshadowed the larger struggles she would later face against state censorship and continued familial opposition, establishing the narrative arc of her life as one marked by resistance.

## **III. Navigating Tradition and Repression: Early Career (c. 1958–1976)**

### **A. Forced Marriage and Departure from Diyarbakır**

The opposition to Ayşe Şan's singing ambitions manifested in direct action by her family. In an effort to curtail her musical pursuits, she was compelled into marriage at the young age of 15,

around 1953, to a man named Şevket Turan.<sup>7</sup> An earlier account mentions an "unsuccessful marriage" preceding her move to Gaziantep.<sup>1</sup> Following the marriage, she relocated to the Derik district of Mardin province and gave birth to a daughter.<sup>7</sup> (A comment on a video platform suggests this daughter's name was Yasemin<sup>14</sup>).

The marriage proved unhappy, and Ayşe Şan desired a divorce, a wish initially opposed by her family, relatives, and tribe.<sup>7</sup> Despite this resistance, she eventually ended the marriage and returned to Diyarbakır (Amed) with her daughter, finding work in a tailor's workshop.<sup>7</sup> Her decision to divorce and her continued determination to pursue music were met with strong disapproval from her extended family and tribal community.<sup>7</sup> The situation escalated to the point where threats from her brother prevented her from returning to her family home; she found refuge with a friend named Kadriye.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, the combination of intense family pressure and opposition to her musical path forced her to leave her native Diyarbakır and relocate to Gaziantep (Antep).<sup>1</sup>

## **B. Gaziantep Period (c. 1958-1963)**

In Gaziantep, Ayşe Şan began to formally establish her artistic presence, starting to sing at local events around 1958.<sup>1</sup> To support herself, she reportedly worked in a tea house<sup>7</sup> and possibly took in sewing work.<sup>5</sup> A crucial development occurred when, with the assistance of an individual named Nail Baysu<sup>5</sup>, she secured work singing for the local radio station in Antep.<sup>1</sup>

However, this opportunity came with a significant constraint reflective of the political climate: the Kurdish language was officially banned in Turkey at the time. Consequently, for approximately two years, Ayşe Şan was required to sing exclusively in *Turkish* for her radio performances.<sup>1</sup> Despite this restriction on the airwaves, she continued to perform both Kurdish and Turkish songs in live concerts.<sup>7</sup> This duality increased her visibility, garnering both admirers and detractors.<sup>10</sup> News of her activities, even singing Turkish folk songs on the radio, reached her family, who reacted by spreading rumors about her.<sup>7</sup> Throughout this period, only her mother offered support, though she was unable to shield Ayşe Şan from the familial backlash.<sup>7</sup>

## **C. Istanbul Period (c. 1963-1976)**

Seeking greater artistic opportunities and aiming to escape the persistent rumors<sup>7</sup>, Ayşe Şan moved to Istanbul. Sources vary slightly on the timing, placing the move around 1960<sup>1</sup> or more frequently 1963.<sup>3</sup> She viewed Istanbul as the "center of art"<sup>6</sup> and made the move accompanied by her daughter.<sup>7</sup> Some accounts also cite economic difficulties as a contributing factor to her migration to the metropolis.<sup>3</sup>

Istanbul marked a significant milestone: it was here that she recorded her first album or musical works in the Kurdish language.<sup>1</sup> This act of recording in her mother tongue, despite the political risks, was deeply meaningful for her, described as feeling like being "reborn".<sup>15</sup> Her talent quickly gained recognition. The song "Ez Xezalım" (or "Ez Xezal im," meaning "I am a

gazelle") became a major success, propelling her to fame.<sup>3</sup> The release of her first cassette, featuring both Kurdish and Turkish songs, further cemented her reputation across Kurdish-populated regions.<sup>6</sup> She continued to perform live concerts in both languages.<sup>3</sup> However, this period also brought significant adversity. Her open defiance of the language ban through recording and performing in Kurdish led to state intervention; she was detained in Istanbul for her Kurdish songs, though subsequently released.<sup>7</sup> Undeterred, she persisted in singing in Kurdish.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, she faced severe economic exploitation. Record labels she worked with allegedly took advantage of her, securing the rights to her work and profiting from her music while leaving her in poverty despite her growing fame and talent.<sup>5</sup> This abuse of her rights reportedly continued for years, contributing to ongoing financial hardship.<sup>5</sup> This phase of Ayşe Şan's career vividly illustrates her navigation between two powerful, intersecting forces of repression. The Turkish state's prohibition on the Kurdish language directly impacted her professional life, compelling her to perform in Turkish on Gaziantep radio.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, the persistent patriarchal and familial opposition, stemming from traditional views on women's roles, continued to exert pressure, contributing to her initial departure from Diyarbakır and the spread of rumors during her time in Antep.<sup>3</sup> Her move to Istanbul was, in part, an attempt to escape this latter pressure.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in Istanbul, she faced renewed state action in the form of detention for her Kurdish artistic expression.<sup>7</sup> These forces operated concurrently, shaping her decisions about where to live and in which language to perform publicly versus privately or in concerts, creating a constant state of vulnerability.

Furthermore, the success she achieved proved to be a double-edged sword. The widespread recognition brought by "Ez Xezalim" <sup>6</sup>, rather than providing security, intensified the scrutiny and pressure she faced from authorities due to her insistence on singing in Kurdish during a highly repressive era.<sup>3</sup> Multiple sources explicitly link this increased pressure directly to her decision to leave Turkey and emigrate to Germany.<sup>1</sup> Her artistic visibility, therefore, made her a more prominent target for state persecution, highlighting the inherent dangers faced by leading Kurdish cultural figures who challenged the assimilationist policies of the time.

## **IV. Exile, Loss, and International Recognition (1976-c.1980s)**

### **A. Germany (c. 1972/1976 - c. 1979)**

Facing mounting pressure and threats in Turkey for her Kurdish musical activities <sup>1</sup>, Ayşe Şan made the difficult decision to emigrate. Sources place her move to Germany around 1972 <sup>5</sup> or, more commonly, 1976.<sup>1</sup> She reportedly settled in Munich.<sup>9</sup> In exile, she continued her artistic work, recording numerous songs and achieving further fame.<sup>7</sup> During this era, like many other Kurdish artists living abroad, her music often circulated through informally produced and distributed cassettes, reaching audiences despite censorship and distance.<sup>10</sup>

However, her time in Germany was marked by profound personal tragedy. Her 18-month-old

daughter, Shahnaz, passed away while they were living there.<sup>1</sup> This devastating loss caused Ayşe Şan immense grief, leading her to temporarily cease singing.<sup>5</sup> It was in response to this heartbreak that she composed and sang one of her most enduring and legendary songs, "Qederê" (Fate), a powerful lament expressing her sorrow.<sup>1</sup>

This period underscores the complex reality of exile. While Germany offered a refuge from the direct political pressures she faced in Turkey, allowing for the continuation of her recording career<sup>7</sup>, it simultaneously became the setting for immense personal suffering with the loss of her daughter.<sup>1</sup> This experience highlights that exile, while potentially providing safety or artistic freedom, often carries its own heavy burdens and forms of pain, demonstrating its dual nature as both sanctuary and site of tragedy.

## **B. Return to Turkey and Renewed Pressure**

Following her time in Germany, Ayşe Şan returned to Istanbul.<sup>6</sup> Some accounts place this return between her German residency and her subsequent move to Baghdad<sup>6</sup>, though the timeline across different sources presents some ambiguity. By this point, she was reportedly a mother of three children.<sup>6</sup> However, her return to Turkey did not signify an end to her struggles. She encountered renewed pressure and threats, this time stemming not only from lingering family disapproval but also directly from the state authorities due to her continued insistence on singing Kurdish songs.<sup>3</sup> Compounding her difficulties, it is reported that her children also distanced themselves from her or did not offer support during this challenging period.<sup>6</sup>

## **C. Iraq / Iraqi Kurdistan / Baghdad (c. 1979)**

Facing untenable pressure in Istanbul, Ayşe Şan once again sought refuge abroad. Several sources indicate she moved to Baghdad, Iraq, in 1979<sup>3</sup>, following the renewed threats and lack of familial support.<sup>6</sup> Other accounts mention a visit to Iraqi Kurdistan in 1979<sup>1</sup> or a move to Iraq in 1978.<sup>7</sup> In Baghdad, she found an outlet for her music at Baghdad's Voice Radio (Dengê Bexdayê), where she performed under the name Eyşana Eli.<sup>3</sup> This was feasible because, at that time, the Iraqi authorities permitted cultural and artistic programming in the Kurdish language on the radio.<sup>10</sup>

Her time in Iraq proved artistically fruitful. She connected and collaborated with numerous influential Kurdish musicians and singers from Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>1</sup> Prominent among these were figures like Mihemed Arif Cizîrî (also rendered as Mehmet Arif Cizrawi) and Tahsin Taha or İsa Berwari.<sup>1</sup> Her talent and life story reportedly moved Cizrawi to compose songs expressing his admiration for her.<sup>6</sup> Ayşe Şan gave concerts in various cities across Iraqi Kurdistan, including Baghdad, Mosul, Hewlêr (Erbil), and Duhok<sup>3</sup>, where she was warmly received by the Kurdish population.<sup>9</sup> However, her activities in Southern Kurdistan, perceived as promoting the "Kurdish cause," attracted negative attention from the Turkish state. Upon her eventual return to Turkey, she faced threats and harassment from the Turkish intelligence agency, MİT.<sup>5</sup> This period in Iraq highlights a significant dimension of Ayşe Şan's career and influence. Her

work at Baghdad Radio not only provided a crucial platform during a difficult time but also facilitated vital connections with major artistic figures from a different part of the politically divided Kurdish homeland.<sup>1</sup> These collaborations and performances across state borders (Turkey-Iraq) served to strengthen cultural ties within the fragmented Kurdish nation. It solidified her status beyond being primarily an artist from Turkey's Kurdish region, positioning her as a trans-regional figure embraced more broadly within the Kurdish diaspora and homeland, bridging cultural divides imposed by political boundaries.

## V. The Artistry of Ayşe Şan: Musical Style and Thematic Depth

### A. Roots in Dengbêj Tradition

Ayşe Şan's musical identity was profoundly shaped by the *dengbêj* tradition, the art of Kurdish oral storytelling through song. Her primary and most significant influence was her father, himself a respected *dengbêj*.<sup>1</sup> She grew up immersed in the sounds and narratives of the *dengbêj* gatherings held in her home.<sup>4</sup> This deep connection is reflected in the fact that several sources explicitly identify Ayşe Şan herself as a *dengbêj*.<sup>1</sup>

The classical songs and performance styles she learned from her father served as a source of strength and continuity throughout her often tumultuous life.<sup>5</sup> Her stated motivation to sing, in part, was to preserve her father's memory by performing his repertoire authentically, believing others did not do justice to his art.<sup>7</sup> Her musical output, particularly her laments and narrative songs, draws heavily from this rich tradition of sung epic poetry and storytelling, characteristic of *dengbêjî*.<sup>7</sup>

### B. Vocal Characteristics

Descriptions of Ayşe Şan's voice emphasize its unique quality and emotional power. It was noted for its "exceptional quality" even from a young age<sup>7</sup> and described as "sweet".<sup>5</sup> A more evocative characterization from a Turkish source describes her voice as "yanık, kor gibi, kızıl kadife gibi" – translating roughly to "scorched, like embers, like red velvet".<sup>6</sup> This suggests a vocal timbre possessing warmth, depth, a capacity for conveying pain, and a rich texture. She herself felt she inherited her vocal talent and musical inclination from her father's side of the family, recalling his voice as beautiful and powerfully resonant.<sup>11</sup>

### C. Key Themes in Her Music

Ayşe Şan's songs are notable for their thematic depth, often weaving together personal experience with broader social and political commentary.

- **Personal Experience and Hardship:** A significant portion of her repertoire drew directly from her own life.<sup>7</sup> Her songs often reflected the specific pains and sorrows familiar to women in her region<sup>7</sup>, chronicling the difficult periods she endured.<sup>5</sup> Themes of loneliness and oppression permeate her work.<sup>13</sup>

- **Loss and Grief:** Two of her most celebrated songs are powerful expressions of personal loss:
  - "Qederê" (Fate): This widely known song was composed and performed in memory of her 18-month-old daughter, Shahnaz, who died tragically during their time in Germany.<sup>1</sup> The lyrics delve into themes of destiny, hardship, injustice, and the looming presence of mortality.<sup>9</sup>
  - "Xerîbim Dayê" (I am alone/longing, Mother) or "Dayikê" (Mother): This poignant lament addresses the death of her own mother.<sup>1</sup> It reflects Ayşe Şan's profound sorrow, compounded by her inability to be present during her mother's final moments or attend her funeral due to ongoing family opposition and the constraints of exile.<sup>6</sup> The song became an anthem resonating with themes of maternal love, separation, and loss<sup>6</sup>, with lyrics expressing deep grief and isolation.<sup>9</sup> It remains one of her most famous and emotionally impactful works.<sup>1</sup>
- **Women's Rights and Experiences:** Ayşe Şan consciously used her music to articulate her perspectives on women's rights and status.<sup>5</sup> She created original songs, such as "Derdê Hewiyê" (The pain of a co-wife)<sup>5</sup> and "Qederê Yar" (The fate of a lover)<sup>5</sup>, which addressed the challenging situations faced by many Kurdish women.<sup>5</sup> Her entire life can be viewed as a struggle against the gender stereotyping prevalent in her society.<sup>7</sup>
- **Kurdish Identity, Culture, and Politics:** Her unwavering commitment to singing in the Kurdish language, despite official bans and personal risks, is a central element of her legacy.<sup>1</sup> She explicitly dedicated her life and voice to the Kurdish cause<sup>5</sup> and addressed the political struggles of the Kurdish people in her songs.<sup>5</sup> Her music is recognized as playing a role in cultural resistance and the preservation of Kurdish identity.<sup>9</sup> Described as a *welatperwer* (patriot), she demonstrated a keen awareness of the oppression faced by her people.<sup>9</sup> In her later work, she addressed specific political events, such as the destruction of villages and massacres in Kurdistan, through songs like 'Werin werin Pêşmerge', 'Newroz', and 'Diyarbekir'.<sup>9</sup> The inclusion of a song titled "Zimane Kurdi" (Kurdish Language) in her repertoire further underscores this commitment.<sup>21</sup>
- **Exile and Longing:** The theme of exile (*gurbet*) is evident in song titles like "Gurbette"<sup>7</sup> and "Gurbet Bana Mekan Olmaz" (Exile Cannot Be My Home).<sup>22</sup> Her own life, marked by constant displacement and movement between cities and countries, undoubtedly informed this recurring theme.<sup>6</sup> The profound sense of longing and separation in "Xerîbim Dayê" also speaks to the pain of exile.<sup>1</sup>
- **Love and Traditional Narratives:** Her work was also influenced by classic Kurdish and Middle Eastern love epics, such as Leyla and Mecnun, and Kerem and Asli.<sup>11</sup> Songs like "Memo Alan"<sup>6</sup>, a well-known Kurdish folk epic, likely represent her engagement with these traditional narrative forms.

Ayşe Şan's musical output thus functions as a powerful convergence of the personal and the political. Her most renowned songs, such as "Qederê" and "Xerîbim Dayê," originate from specific, deeply personal tragedies.<sup>1</sup> Yet, their enduring resonance within the Kurdish

community stems from their ability to tap into broader, collective experiences: the weight of fate, the pain of loss, the sorrow of exile, and the particular struggles faced by Kurdish women and the Kurdish people under oppressive conditions.<sup>7</sup> Her music simultaneously served as social commentary, addressing women's rights <sup>5</sup>, and as an act of political resistance through the very use of the forbidden Kurdish language <sup>7</sup> and her dedication to the Kurdish cause.<sup>5</sup> The widespread impact of songs like "Xerîbim Dayê" <sup>5</sup> demonstrates how themes rooted in her individual suffering transcended the personal to articulate collective Kurdish experiences of loss, separation, and longing, often intertwined with political circumstances and the reality of exile. Her art, therefore, operates compellingly on multiple levels: as intimate autobiography, as gendered social critique, and as a potent vehicle for cultural and political expression.

## VI. Documented Works: Discography

Compiling a definitive and fully accurate discography for Ayşe Şan based solely on the provided source materials presents challenges. Information is fragmented across various sources, including commercial databases (<sup>21</sup>), articles (<sup>17</sup>), and archival references (<sup>9</sup>). These sources list original releases, later re-issues, compilations, and sometimes contain potentially inaccurate or future-dated release years (e.g., a 2025 release listed in <sup>21</sup>). The following table synthesizes the available information, aiming to provide a representative overview of her recorded output as documented in the sources, while acknowledging these limitations and noting discrepancies where apparent.

**Table 1: Ayşe Şan Selected Discography (Based on Provided Sources)**

Title	Format/Type	Label / Source	Cat. No.	Year	Source(s)	Notes
<i>First Kurdish Album</i>	Album	(Unspecified Label)	-	c. 1960/63	<sup>1</sup>	Recorded in Istanbul
<i>First Kurdish-Turkish Cassette</i>	Cassette	(Unspecified Label)	-	Post-1963	<sup>6</sup>	Made her known in Kurdish provinces
Memo Alan Ve Zine	7" Single	Urfanın Sesi Plâk	USP-18	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	With Kemal Örkün
Kaderey Yar / Vallah Taneyirim	7" Single	Yakışan Plak	YY 67	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	
Vare Keçi / Gurbet Çocuğu	7" Single	Urfanın Sesi Plâk	U.S.P.20	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	
Veri Babo Havar / Saliho	7" Single	Silvana	-	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	2 versions exist



Diyarbakır'ın Gelin Havası /...	7" EP	Edifon	7600	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	Multiple tracks
Ezelden Gülmedi / Siverek Yollarında /...	7" EP	Edifon	-	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	2 versions exist, multiple tracks
Yeni Çiftlik / Yeni Geldi Bahar	7" Single	Edifon	none	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	
Cemo / Cemi Beşeri	7" Single	Şan Plak	-	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	2 versions exist
Yabancı Değilem / Bahçelerde Bülbül Der	7" Single	Türkofon	5992	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	
Erzurumdan Aşağı / Benim Derdim	7" Single	Edifon	9233	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	
Hapsio	Cassette/Alb um	Harika / Aşanlar / (Recent Music)	4262	1993 / 2002	<sup>23</sup>	Also listed as 11 tracks, 2002 release
Ayşe Şan	Cassette Album	Raks Müzik	11879	1993	<sup>23</sup>	
Karşıda Kürt Evleri	LP	Yavuz Asöcal / Yavuz & Burç	none	1993	<sup>23</sup>	
Nevruz 'Ayşane'	Cassette/Dig ital	Not On Label / (Apple Music/Recent)	111	Unknown / 2011	<sup>21</sup>	Listed as "Nevruz / Ayşane" 2011 (9 tracks)
Ayşe Şan	Cassette Album	Türkofon	900065	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	
Ayşe Şan~7	Cassette Album	Uzelli	469	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	
Tik-Tak	Cassette Album	Uzelli	1049	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	
3	Cassette Album	Türküola	213	Unknown	<sup>23</sup>	
Newruz	Album	(Recent	-	2001	<sup>25</sup>	8 tracks

		Music)				
Kilamê Klasîk	CD Album	Çağdaş Müzik	none	2006	<sup>23</sup>	
Stranên Bijartî	CD/Digital Album	Kom Müzik / (Apple Music/Recent)	-	2007	<sup>17</sup>	Compilation, 15 tracks
Murad i Mi Lawo	Digital Album	(Apple Music / Recent Music)	-	2011	<sup>21</sup>	9 tracks
Gönül Ben Ölem	Digital Album	(Recent Music)	-	2011	<sup>25</sup>	9 tracks
Qederê	Digital Album	(Apple Music / Recent Music)	-	2011 / 2018	<sup>21</sup>	10 tracks (2011) / 2 tracks (2018) / Also song title
Xim Ximê Torivana	Digital Album	(Apple Music / Recent Music)	-	2017	<sup>21</sup>	12 tracks
Kürtçe Uzun Havalan	Digital Album	(Apple Music / Recent Music)	-	2017	<sup>21</sup>	10 tracks
Dengê Kurdistan'ê	Digital Album	(Apple Music / Recent Music)	-	2018	<sup>21</sup>	With İsa Berwari, 2 tracks
Ayşe Şan	Digital Album	(Apple Music / Recent Music)	-	2020	<sup>21</sup>	16 tracks (Apple/Recent) / Also Odeon Müzik Album (different tracks)
Şivano Bilurvano	Digital Album	(Apple Music)	-	2025 (listed)	<sup>21</sup>	Listed as "Latest Release", 10 songs, future date likely placeholder
Memê Alan	Album	(Rûdaw)	-	Unknown	<sup>17</sup>	Also song title
Tomarên	Album	(Rûdaw)	-	Unknown	<sup>17</sup>	Live

Konseran 1979						recordings from 1979
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### Notable Songs (Mentioned frequently or by title in sources):

- "Ez Xezalım" / "Ez Xezal im" <sup>3</sup>
- "Qederê" / "Ay Lê Qederê" <sup>1</sup>
- "Xerîbim Dayê" / "Dayikê" / "Dayê Dayê" <sup>1</sup>
- "Lê Lê Xifşê" / "Xivşê" <sup>6</sup>
- "Lorke" / "Lorkê lorkê" <sup>3</sup>
- "Siverek Yollarında" <sup>7</sup>
- "Gurbette" <sup>7</sup>
- "Derdê Hewiyê" <sup>5</sup>
- "Qederê Yar" <sup>5</sup>
- "Lê lê Bêmal" <sup>3</sup>
- "Cemîle Here Were" <sup>6</sup>
- "Xezal" / "Xezal Xezal" <sup>6</sup>
- "Kirasê Te Meles E" <sup>17</sup>
- "Yar Meyro" / "Yar Meryemê" <sup>6</sup>
- "Hepsîyo" <sup>6</sup>
- "Min Tu Dibu" <sup>6</sup>
- "Memê Alan" <sup>6</sup>
- "Nazliyê" <sup>6</sup>
- "Wey Saliho Kurmam" / "Saliho Kurmam" <sup>6</sup>
- "Ay Dil" <sup>21</sup>
- "Bavê Seyro" <sup>26</sup>
- "Heywax Dayê" <sup>26</sup>
- "Zerî Heyran" <sup>28</sup>
- "Lawikê Metînî" <sup>9</sup>
- "Hesenikou Ase" / "Heseniko Asê" <sup>21</sup>
- "Zımane Kurdî" <sup>21</sup>
- "Anama Ağıt" <sup>21</sup>
- "Deli İbrahim" <sup>21</sup>
- "Diyarbakır Güzel Bağlar" <sup>21</sup>
- "Üç Güzeller" <sup>21</sup>
- "Ayvaza Ağıt" <sup>21</sup>
- "Ha Ninna" <sup>22</sup>
- "Wey Dünya'yê" <sup>32</sup>
- "Lo Pısmamo" <sup>32</sup>

The available discographic data, while incomplete, reflects the trajectory of Ayşe Şan's career

and the evolving technological landscape of music production and consumption. Early 7-inch singles listed on platforms like Discogs<sup>23</sup> likely correspond to her initial recording phase in Turkey, particularly Istanbul. The prevalence of cassette releases<sup>23</sup> aligns with the 1970s to 1990s, a period when cassettes were the dominant format, especially crucial for disseminating music under conditions of censorship or in exile – a reality noted for Kurdish musicians abroad during that time.<sup>10</sup> Labels such as Uzelli and Türküola, appearing on some of her cassette releases<sup>23</sup>, were known for catering to the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora in Europe. The subsequent emergence of CD releases (e.g., *Kilamê Klasîk* in 2006<sup>23</sup>) and the proliferation of digital albums and compilations on platforms like Apple Music post-2000<sup>21</sup> point towards significant posthumous efforts to archive, compile, and re-release her work for contemporary audiences and formats. The mention of an album titled *Tomarên Konseran 1979* (Concert Recordings 1979)<sup>17</sup> also highlights the importance of her live performances, particularly during her significant period in Iraq. Thus, the documented recorded output mirrors not only her artistic phases but also the shifting media technologies and the challenging conditions—censorship, exile, market dynamics—under which Kurdish music was produced and circulated throughout her lifetime and beyond.<sup>34</sup>

## VII. Cultural Significance and Enduring Legacy

### A. Status as a Kurdish Icon

Ayşe Şan's stature within Kurdish culture extends far beyond that of a mere popular singer. She is consistently described as one of the most legendary and foundational voices in contemporary Kurdish music.<sup>1</sup> Her impact was profound, leaving what one source calls an indelible "seal" (*mühür*) on the formative years of an entire generation of Kurds who came of age listening to her music.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most telling indicator of her status is the widely used moniker "Taçsız Kraliçe"—The Uncrowned Queen.<sup>1</sup> This title eloquently captures the reverence in which she was held by the Kurdish people, signifying a form of popular royalty bestowed upon her due to her artistic mastery and cultural importance, despite the lack of official state recognition or a life free from hardship. As another source elaborates, she was a "princess without a crown and throne" among Kurds.<sup>9</sup>

The title "Taçsız Kraliçe" itself carries deep significance, reflecting both her elevated status and the arduous circumstances of her life. The "Queen" aspect speaks to the high esteem, legendary voice, and profound cultural impact attributed to her.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, the "Uncrowned" element highlights her existence lived largely in opposition to, or outside of, established structures of power. She defied restrictive family and tribal expectations<sup>7</sup>, resisted state prohibitions on her language and art<sup>7</sup>, endured periods of exile<sup>1</sup>, faced significant financial exploitation and precarity<sup>5</sup>, and was ultimately denied her final wish for burial in her homeland.<sup>1</sup> She possessed immense cultural authority derived from her talent and the affection of her audience, but lacked the formal power, security, or ease that a literal crown might symbolize. The title thus encapsulates the central paradox of her life: immense popular

and cultural sovereignty coexisting with marginalization, persecution, and struggle. It signifies a royalty earned through resilience and artistry, recognized by the people rather than conferred by institutions.

## **B. Symbol of Cultural Resistance and Preservation**

Ayşe Şan's life and work are inextricably linked to the preservation and assertion of Kurdish cultural identity in the face of systematic suppression. Her steadfast dedication to singing in Kurdish, despite official bans, threats, and personal risk, transformed her into a potent symbol of cultural survival.<sup>5</sup> Sources indicate she consciously devoted her voice and artistic life to the Kurdish cause<sup>5</sup>, becoming recognized as a defender of the Kurdish language and its musical traditions.<sup>15</sup>

Her music served as a vital tool in resisting assimilationist pressures and maintaining a distinct Kurdish identity.<sup>9</sup> By reviving and performing traditional *dengbêj* songs, including those learned from her father, she played a crucial role in the intergenerational transmission of this oral heritage.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, her personal narrative embodies a dual resistance: against the oppressive policies of the Turkish state regarding Kurdish language and culture, and against the restrictive gender norms within her own community that sought to silence female voices.<sup>6</sup>

## **C. Posthumous Recognition and Documentation**

Decades after her passing, Ayşe Şan's legacy continues to resonate powerfully.<sup>25</sup> Her songs remain widely listened to, cherished by millions who connect with her voice and the experiences she articulated.<sup>7</sup> There are ongoing efforts to formally recognize and document her contributions.

A significant development is the publication of the book titled 'I am Ayşe Şan' in 2024 by the Kurdish Cultural Association, authored by researchers Zeyneb Yaş and Himî Akyol.<sup>8</sup> This work, containing biographical information, details of her artistic output, analyses of her role in Kurdish music, photographs, and historical documents, represents a major step in consolidating her legacy within the documented history of Kurdish culture.<sup>8</sup> Zeyneb Yaş, in particular, has been involved in compiling and archiving Kurdish music, including Ayşe Şan's work, for decades.<sup>38</sup> The book project itself is framed as part of a broader initiative to document and honor key figures in Kurdish cultural history.<sup>8</sup>

Public memorials, such as the naming of Ayşe Şan Park in Diyarbakır<sup>39</sup>, also serve to keep her memory alive in the public sphere. Her inclusion in scholarly discussions and publications focusing on Kurdish music, culture, and history further solidifies her importance as a subject of academic interest and cultural heritage.<sup>38</sup> These posthumous efforts underscore her enduring significance and the continued relevance of her life story and artistic contributions.

## **VIII. A Life of Resistance: Persecution and Unfulfilled Wishes**

## A. Multifaceted Oppression (Synthesis)

Ayşe Şan's life was characterized by a relentless struggle against multiple intersecting forms of oppression, emanating from familial, societal, state, and economic spheres.

- **Familial and Societal Pressure:** From her youth onwards, she faced persistent opposition from her family (excluding her mother) and the broader tribal community.<sup>3</sup> This was rooted in deeply ingrained patriarchal norms that deemed it unacceptable for women to sing publicly, especially before men.<sup>6</sup> This opposition manifested in various ways: a forced marriage intended to curb her ambitions<sup>7</sup>, direct threats from her brother<sup>7</sup>, the spreading of malicious rumors by relatives<sup>7</sup>, and, most poignantly, being denied the opportunity to see her dying mother or later visit her grave.<sup>7</sup>
- **State Repression:** The policies of the Turkish state created a hostile environment for Kurdish cultural expression. The official ban on the Kurdish language directly impacted her career, forcing her to sing in Turkish during her time at Antep radio.<sup>1</sup> Her insistence on performing and recording in Kurdish led to direct state action, including detention in Istanbul.<sup>7</sup> As her fame grew, so did the pressure and threats from authorities, contributing significantly to her decision to seek exile.<sup>3</sup> Even her activities abroad, such as her visit to Iraqi Kurdistan, resulted in threats from the Turkish intelligence agency (MİT) upon her return.<sup>5</sup> This occurred within a general climate of fear surrounding the use of the Kurdish language and expressions of Kurdish identity.<sup>18</sup>
- **Economic Hardship:** Alongside social and political pressures, Ayşe Şan endured significant economic difficulties. Exploitative practices by record labels reportedly deprived her of rightful earnings from her successful recordings, leaving her in poverty despite her talent.<sup>5</sup> Economic hardship was cited as a factor in her move to Istanbul.<sup>3</sup> In her later years, after returning to Turkey and settling in İzmir, she worked in a local post office to support herself, indicating continued financial precarity.<sup>1</sup>
- **Exile and Loss:** The cumulative pressures forced Ayşe Şan into exile, most notably her emigration to Germany.<sup>1</sup> Her life, marked by constant movement between Diyarbakır, Antep, Istanbul, Germany, Baghdad, and finally İzmir<sup>3</sup>, was described by one observer as a "monument of suffering" (*çile abidesi*).<sup>6</sup> Exile brought not only separation from her homeland and parts of her family (she was unable to return to Diyarbakır due to threats<sup>6</sup>) but also the devastating personal loss of her daughter Shahnaz in Germany.<sup>1</sup>

## B. The Final Wish Denied

Ayşe Şan's life, marked by struggle and displacement, ended in İzmir on December 18, 1996, after battling cancer.<sup>1</sup> (A minority of sources state the date as January 18, 1996<sup>8</sup>, but December 18 appears more frequently). In her final testament, she expressed a deep desire to be buried in Diyarbakır, the city of her birth.<sup>1</sup>

Tragically, this last wish remained unfulfilled.<sup>3</sup> The reasons cited in the sources point to the enduring conflicts that defined her life: persistent opposition from members of her family<sup>3</sup> and/or the family's inability to cover the financial costs associated with transporting and

burying her remains in Diyarbakır.<sup>1</sup> Instead, she was laid to rest in İzmir, reportedly with only a small number of people attending her funeral.<sup>12</sup>

The denial of Ayşe Şan's final wish serves as a poignant and powerful concluding symbol, encapsulating the core conflicts that shaped her existence. It reflects the seemingly irreconcilable rift with segments of her family, a conflict deeply rooted in the patriarchal traditions she challenged throughout her life by pursuing a public artistic career.<sup>3</sup> Their refusal to honor her wish signifies that this fundamental disagreement remained unresolved even in death. Furthermore, the potential financial barrier cited in some sources<sup>1</sup> connects to the economic precarity she experienced, a consequence, at least in part, of the exploitation within the music industry<sup>5</sup> and the broader difficulties faced by Kurdish artists operating under repressive socio-political conditions. Thus, the unfulfilled burial is not merely a sorrowful footnote but a resonant symbol of the enduring nature of the patriarchal, political, and economic struggles that characterized her life and continue to shape her legacy. It underscores that her long journey, marked by displacement and resistance, ended without the final, desired homecoming.

## IX. Conclusion: The Uncrowned Queen's Echo

Ayşe Şan's life narrative traces a remarkable and arduous path from a young girl in Diyarbakır, captivated by the *dengbêj* tradition embodied by her father, to becoming an iconic figure in Kurdish music—a revered, albeit "uncrowned," queen. Her journey was defined by an unyielding artistic drive constantly navigating a complex terrain of personal tragedy, restrictive societal norms regarding gender, persistent familial opposition, and severe state repression targeting Kurdish language and culture.

Her artistry, deeply rooted in the *dengbêj* heritage, became a vessel for expressing profound personal grief, particularly in seminal works like "Qederê" and "Xerîbim Dayê." Simultaneously, her music served as a platform for broader social commentary, addressing the experiences and rights of Kurdish women, and as a courageous act of cultural resistance through her insistence on singing in her mother tongue despite official prohibitions and personal risk. The themes of loss, exile, identity, and resilience that permeate her work resonated deeply within the Kurdish community, reflecting shared experiences under challenging historical circumstances.

Despite facing multifaceted oppression—familial, societal, political, and economic—Ayşe Şan carved out a unique and enduring space in cultural history. She achieved legendary status not through institutional support or privilege, but through the sheer power of her voice, her artistic integrity, and her unwavering commitment to her cultural identity. The title "Taçsız Kraliçe" aptly reflects this reality: a sovereign recognized by her people, yet perpetually existing outside the sanctioned realms of power, her reign defined by artistic brilliance and profound struggle.

Even in death, the denial of her wish to be buried in her native Diyarbakır served as a final, poignant symbol of the unresolved conflicts that marked her life. Yet, her legacy endures. Her voice continues to echo, listened to by new generations, and her life story serves as a powerful testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the vital role of music in

preserving identity and challenging oppression. Ongoing efforts to document her life and work, such as the publication of biographical studies<sup>8</sup>, ensure that the story of Ayşe Şan—the Uncrowned Queen of Kurdish music—will continue to be told, studied, and remembered as a crucial chapter in the cultural history of the Kurdish people and the broader narrative of artistic resistance in the face of adversity.

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