

# Kurdish Dabke: An Exploration of Govend, Helperkê, and the Rhythms of Kurdish Identity

## I. Introduction: Defining "Kurdish Dabke" – Navigating Terminology and Cultural Context

### A. The Ambiguity of "Dabke" in a Kurdish Context

The term "Dabke" (also spelled Dabka, Dabkeh) is predominantly recognized as a Levantine folk dance, deeply embedded in the cultural traditions of Lebanese, Jordanian, Palestinian, and Syrian communities.<sup>1</sup> It is a vibrant form of communal expression, typically involving circle and line dancing, and is a staple at weddings and other joyous occasions.<sup>1</sup> The word itself, "Dabke," originates from the Levantine Arabic "dabaka" (دبكة), signifying the act of "stamping of the feet" or "to make a noise".<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has inscribed "Dabkeh, traditional dance in Palestine" on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, highlighting its significance within Palestinian culture, where it is performed by groups of dancers, accompanied by wind instruments and singing, to express joy and social cohesion.<sup>4</sup> However, when "Dabke" is juxtaposed with "Kurdish," a degree of terminological complexity arises. Kurdish communities possess a rich lexicon for their own traditional dances, with terms such as Govend, Dîlan, Helperkê (or Helperge, هه‌لپه‌رکی), and Şayî being widely used.<sup>5</sup> These are, much like Levantine Dabke, traditional group circle or line dances.<sup>5</sup> Some scholarly and popular sources acknowledge Dabke in a broader regional sense, suggesting its rhythmic characteristics and forms can be traced from Kurdish Iraq to the eastern Mediterranean coast.<sup>9</sup> Others note that "Dabke" is sometimes used as an external label by Levantines for similar line dances performed by neighboring groups, including Kurds.<sup>3</sup> This terminological fluidity necessitates careful consideration. The use of "Kurdish Dabke" may, in some instances, reflect an outsider's perspective or a generalization that potentially overlooks the specific indigenous terms and the distinct cultural ownership of these dance forms by Kurdish people. It is crucial to recognize that Kurdish dance traditions have their own unique history, musical accompaniment, choreographic vocabulary, and profound cultural meanings, even if they share structural similarities, such as line or circle formations and foot-stomping, with Levantine Dabke. The phenomenon of cultural misattribution is not unknown, particularly for stateless nations like the Kurds, whose cultural expressions have historically been subject to re-categorization or appropriation by dominant state cultures. For example, Turkey has been noted for recategorizing Kurdish dances as Turkish.<sup>7</sup> Therefore,

while this report addresses the query "Kurdish Dabke," it will prioritize indigenous Kurdish terminology and explore the specificities of Kurdish dance forms like Govend and Helperkê, while also acknowledging any potential overlaps, influences, or shared regional characteristics with the broader Dabke tradition.

## **B. Overview of Kurdish Dance (Govend/Helperkê) as a Core Cultural Expression**

Kurdish dance, known by various names including Govend and Helperkê, stands as a cornerstone of Kurdish cultural expression, holding a significance comparable to that of Kurdish music.<sup>5</sup> Across the historical regions of Kurdistan, hundreds of distinct dances have been cataloged, with many villages boasting their own signature choreographies and regional variations.<sup>6</sup> This rich diversity underscores the deep integration of dance into the fabric of Kurdish life.

A defining characteristic of almost all Kurdish dances is their communal nature. These are not typically solo performances but rather collective endeavors, frequently featuring men and women dancing together in the same line or circle.<sup>5</sup> This practice of mixed-gender participation is a notable feature that distinguishes Kurdish dance from some other dance traditions in neighboring Muslim-majority societies.<sup>5</sup> The prominent role of women in Kurdish culture is often reflected in this shared dance space.<sup>15</sup> The very structure of these dances, with participants holding hands or linking shoulders, inherently symbolizes unity and cohesion.<sup>4</sup> The leader of the dance, often called the *Serchopî* or *Sergovend*, plays a vital role in guiding the group and energizing the performance.<sup>2</sup> The arrangement of dancers, sometimes described as *gendum u jo* (گندم و جو), meaning "wheat and barley," where men and women alternate in the line, further underscores egalitarian ideals within the community.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Kurdish dance is more than mere entertainment; it is a social text, offering insights into the social fabric, gender dynamics, and communal values of Kurdish society. The socio-political resonance of these practices is evident even in contemporary times, as illustrated by instances such as the reported shutdown of a sports center in Iran due to mixed-gender Kurdish dances, highlighting the cultural and symbolic weight of this tradition.<sup>5</sup>

## **II. Historical Roots and Evolution of Kurdish Dance**

### **A. Ancient Origins and Mythological Connections**

The Kurdish people are recognized as one of the most ancient peoples of the Middle East, with archaeological and linguistic evidence pointing to a distinct cultural presence dating back approximately 4,000 years.<sup>15</sup> Their language belongs to the Indo-European family, setting them apart from neighboring Arabic or Turkic linguistic groups.<sup>15</sup> This deep historical continuity is reflected in their cultural practices, including dance.

While some theories propose that Levantine Dabke originated from ancient Canaanite fertility rituals or functional activities such as compacting mud for roofs<sup>2</sup>, parallel explorations into the origins of Kurdish dance reveal equally profound connections to history and ancient belief

systems. Persian-language sources, for instance, suggest that Kurdish dance, specifically Helperkê, has roots tracing back to the Median Empire (circa 678 BCE – 549 BCE).<sup>23</sup> According to these accounts, the Median king Cyaxares (هوخشتره) commanded that such dances be performed, particularly after military victories, to commemorate the empire's triumphs and ensure that these heroic sagas would not be forgotten.<sup>23</sup> Specific movements within these historical dances are interpreted as symbolic reenactments of battle strategies: a slow, deliberate start known as *Gehryan* (گهريان) representing the initial phase of engagement, followed by an acceleration of rhythm and movement signifying a swift attack, and particular steps like *Se-pa* (سه‌پا, three-step) symbolizing tactical retreats and advances.<sup>23</sup>

Archaeological findings further attest to the antiquity of dance in the Kurdish regions. Stone carvings dating to the first millennium BCE depict figures playing instruments like the *zurna* (oboe-like wind instrument) and *dahol* (large drum), which are traditionally associated with Kurdish dance, alongside figures engaged in rhythmic movement.<sup>18</sup> Even older evidence, such as pottery from the fourth and fifth millennia BCE, bears images of group dances, suggesting that collective rhythmic movement has been a part of life in this region for millennia.<sup>18</sup>

Beyond military commemorations, Kurdish dance is also linked to ancient agricultural rituals and cosmovision. Ethnomusicologist Dr. Qotbeddin Sadeghi posits that Helperkê, with its characteristic foot-stomping, was historically connected to agrarian practices, the impact on the ground intended to "awaken" the earth and promote fertility.<sup>24</sup> The circular formation, a common feature in many Kurdish dances, is interpreted as symbolizing the cyclical nature of time, the changing seasons, and the continuous rhythm of agricultural life.<sup>17</sup> The upward gestures of hands towards the sky in some dances can be seen as representing growth, ascension, and a connection to a higher or spiritual realm.<sup>17</sup>

These diverse origin theories and historical connections indicate that Kurdish dance is not merely a form of entertainment but rather an embodiment of historical narratives, cultural memory, and a particular worldview. It has served as a living archive, transmitting knowledge, values, and a sense of collective history across generations, often in pre-literate or non-formalized ways. This function is particularly vital for a culture that has faced significant challenges to the preservation of its documented history and the continuity of its formal educational systems. The dance itself becomes a mnemonic device, embedding history and cosmology within the very movements of the body.

## **B. Evolution and External Influences/Distinctions**

Over centuries, Kurdish dance has undergone a continuous process of evolution, adapting to changing social, political, and technological landscapes while retaining its core cultural essence.<sup>19</sup> While it shares certain characteristics with the dance traditions of neighboring peoples—Assyrian, Armenian, Turkish, and Arab dances are often noted in comparative contexts<sup>1</sup>—Kurdish dance has maintained distinctive features. Among the most frequently cited is the prevalence of mixed-gender participation, which sets it apart from some more segregated dance practices in the region.<sup>5</sup>

The interaction with surrounding cultures has inevitably led to some degree of cross-influence. For example, in Rojava (Kurdish regions of Syria), the influence of Arabic and

Assyrian dance forms is evident in certain local variations; some dances, like the *Baagi*, are acknowledged as being originally Assyrian, though adopted and adapted by Kurdish communities.<sup>19</sup> This highlights a dynamic of cultural exchange and adaptation rather than simple derivation.

In the contemporary era, globalization and new media have introduced further avenues for evolution. The phenomenon of "New Wave Dabke," primarily associated with Levantine artists like Omar Souleyman (who is Arab, not Kurdish, but whose music has regional impact), illustrates a trend of fusing traditional Dabke rhythms and melodic elements with modern electronic music, thereby broadening its appeal across ethnic and linguistic lines.<sup>9</sup> While this trend is most prominent in the Arab Dabke scene, the concept of modernizing traditional forms resonates within Kurdish contexts as well. Artist and dance instructor Arjen Brusk, for instance, has mentioned the emergence of "*tekno halay*" among Kurdish youth, where traditional *Halay* (a term often used for Govend, especially in Kurmanji-speaking regions) forms are danced to techno music, showcasing a youthful reinterpretation of heritage.<sup>11</sup>

This ongoing evolution exists in a dynamic tension with strong efforts towards the preservation of what are considered "authentic" traditional forms. There are significant concerns within Kurdish communities about cultural erasure, misattribution, or the dilution of traditional practices.<sup>7</sup> This dialectic between tradition and modernity is not a simple linear progression but a complex interplay, reflecting broader challenges faced by many indigenous and traditional art forms in a globalized world. For Kurdish dance, this process is further complicated by the political context of a stateless nation, where cultural preservation is often intertwined with identity politics and resistance against assimilation. The choices made regarding the evolution or strict preservation of dance forms are therefore particularly laden with cultural and political significance.

### **III. Core Characteristics of Kurdish Dance (Govend/Helperkê/Dabke-like forms)**

Kurdish dances, whether referred to as Govend, Helperkê, Dîlan, or sometimes colloquially by the broader regional term Dabke, exhibit a set of core characteristics that define their structure, movement vocabulary, and aesthetic. These elements, while varying in their specific manifestation across the diverse tapestry of Kurdish regions and individual dance types, provide a common framework for this expressive cultural form.

#### **A. Formations and Dancer Interaction**

The spatial organization of dancers is fundamental to Kurdish dance. The most common formations are the circle (*ger*, *xelek*), the semi-circle (*nîvxelek*), and the straight line (*rêz*).<sup>5</sup> Within these formations, dancers are interconnected, symbolizing unity and collective action. This linkage is achieved through various handholds: holding hands directly, standing shoulder to shoulder, interlacing pinky fingers—a method sometimes referred to as the "Kurdish hand hold"—or by dancers placing their hands on the lower backs or shoulders of their neighbors.<sup>5</sup> This physical connection is not merely functional but is imbued with social meaning,

reinforcing the communal spirit of the dance.

A pivotal figure in Kurdish dance is the leader, known by various regional terms such as *Serchopî* (سەرچۆپی, literally "head of the *chopî*," with *chopî* referring to the dance or the handkerchief), *Sergovend* ("head of the Govend"), or *Serçem*.<sup>6</sup> In Levantine Dabke, a similar role is fulfilled by the *Lawweeh*.<sup>1</sup> The leader, typically positioned at the right end of the line or head of the circle, often twirls a colorful handkerchief or cloth (*desmal*, *çopî*).<sup>5</sup> This handkerchief is not just a prop but a visual focal point, used to signal changes in rhythm or movement and to enhance the leader's expressive gestures. The leader is usually an accomplished dancer, responsible for setting the pace, energizing the group, and often performing more intricate or improvisational steps, showcasing their skill and guiding the collective energy.<sup>2</sup> The last dancer in the line, known as *Ben Chopî* or *Gawani*, also plays a role in maintaining the formation's integrity and rhythmic precision.<sup>6</sup>

## **B. Fundamental Steps and Movements**

The movement vocabulary of Kurdish dance is rich and varied, yet certain fundamental elements are recurrent. A key characteristic is the act of stomping or striking the ground with the feet.<sup>2</sup> This is directly reflected in the etymology of the Arabic term "Dabke" <sup>2</sup> and is central to the Kurdish term *Helperkê*, which can mean "to jump up" or "to stomp".<sup>17</sup> These stomps are not arbitrary; they can carry symbolic weight, connecting the dancers to the earth, expressing strength, or marking rhythmic accents.

While the basic Levantine Dabke often features a 6-count pattern moving to the right <sup>2</sup>, the specific steps of Kurdish dances are highly diverse, varying significantly depending on the particular dance type and its regional origin. Generally, men's dances, or male participation in mixed dances, may exhibit greater speed, athleticism, and more vigorous footwork, including leaps and intricate steps.<sup>7</sup> Women's movements, while also energetic, might emphasize more subtle and graceful motions of the feet, shoulders, knees, and neck.<sup>7</sup> However, it is important to note that many Kurdish dances are performed by mixed groups, with men and women executing the same or complementary patterns.

Regional stylistic differences are also apparent in the general comportment and movement quality. Kurmanji-dialect dances, for example, often feature an erect body posture, with dancers maintaining a tight connection through handholds like the "Kurdish hand hold" (interlocked fingers with arms straight down or slightly bent).<sup>6</sup> The movements in Kurmanji styles are frequently described as sharp, energetic, and visually impressive. In contrast, Sorani-dialect dances tend to involve simpler footwork but are distinguished by continuous, fluid movements of the shoulders, which are constantly raised and dropped, and a characteristic swaying or lilting motion of the body, sometimes likened to the graceful movement of a fish.<sup>6</sup> These stylistic distinctions often parallel linguistic and other cultural variations between Kurdish dialect groups.

## **C. Music and Rhythm**

Music is an inseparable component of Kurdish dance, providing the foundational pulse,

emotional contour, and rhythmic structure for the movements. Kurdish dance music is often characterized by strong, discernible downbeats that drive the dance forward.<sup>2</sup> Common rhythmic signatures found in Kurdish (and sometimes shared with Armenian) dance music include 2/4 and 6/8 time.<sup>10</sup> The 2/4 rhythm typically fosters a strong, driving feel suitable for lively, upbeat dances with a rapid tempo and energetic movements, while the 6/8 rhythm, with its six eighth notes per measure, often creates a more flowing, lilting, or swaying sensation, allowing for graceful movements and intricate footwork.<sup>10</sup>

A common dynamic in the musical accompaniment is a gradual acceleration of tempo. Many dances begin at a slower, more measured pace, allowing dancers to establish the rhythm and synchrony, and then progressively speed up, drawing the participants into a more energetic and exhilarating collective experience.<sup>2</sup> This dynamic build-up is a key feature that contributes to the excitement and participatory joy of the dances.

Specific songs and melodies are often associated with particular dances or dance genres. In the broader Levantine Dabke context, songs like *Dal Ouna* and *Al Jafra* are well-known.<sup>2</sup>

Within Kurdish traditions, specific melodies are integral to dances like *Geryan*<sup>31</sup> and *Şemame* (a song that popularized a particular style of Govend).<sup>11</sup> Numerous traditional melodies form the repertoire for the vast array of Helperkê dances.<sup>17</sup> The lyrics of folk songs accompanying these dances often articulate emotions relevant to the occasion, such as courage, strength, love, joy, or communal narratives.<sup>4</sup>

## D. Key Musical Instruments

The sonic landscape of Kurdish dance is dominated by a distinctive pairing of instruments: the *Zurna* and the *Dahol* (also known as *Davul*).<sup>5</sup> The *Zurna* is a powerful double-reed wind instrument, similar to an oboe, known for its loud, piercing, and often festive timbre.<sup>8</sup> The *Dahol* is a large, double-headed cylindrical drum, typically slung over the shoulder and played with two different types of beaters—a thick stick for the bass beat on one head and a thinner rod or switch for the sharper, often syncopated rhythms on the other head.<sup>33</sup>

This Zurna-Dahol dyad is iconic and almost indispensable for many traditional Kurdish dances, particularly the energetic outdoor line dances like Halay or Govend.<sup>33</sup> The combination of the Zurna's penetrating melodies and the Dahol's powerful, driving rhythms creates a vibrant and compelling soundscape that is perfectly suited for large communal gatherings, festivals, and celebrations such as weddings and Newroz.<sup>32</sup> The sheer volume and energy produced by these two instruments can fill open spaces and inspire collective movement on a grand scale. Their sound has become so intrinsically linked with Kurdish festivity and communal dance that the Zurna-Dahol pairing itself can be considered a potent sonic symbol of Kurdish cultural identity. Its presence often immediately signals a Kurdish celebration, carrying a weight of tradition and communal spirit. This instrumental signature is not merely a musical choice but a cultural signifier, its sound a form of cultural assertion, especially resonant in contexts where Kurdish identity and expression are celebrated and affirmed.

While the Zurna and Dahol are central, the broader spectrum of Kurdish musical traditions also incorporates a variety of other instruments that may feature in different dance contexts

or musical ensembles. These can include the *Oud* (a short-necked lute), *Mijwiz* (a double-pipe reed clarinet), *Tabla* (a goblet drum, also known as *Darbuka*), *Daff* (a large frame drum, often with rings or jingles), and *Arghul* (another type of double-pipe clarinet).<sup>1</sup> Stringed instruments like the *Tembûr* (a long-necked lute, similar to the Turkish *saz* or *bağlama*) are also prominent in Kurdish music and may accompany certain types of songs or more intimate dance settings.<sup>7</sup> Other instruments noted in Kurdish musical contexts include the *Kamanche* (a bowed spike fiddle), the *Ney* (an end-blown flute), and the *Shlimshal* or *Shubabeh* (a type of flute).<sup>1</sup> This array of instrumentation reflects the depth and diversity of Kurdish musical heritage that complements its equally varied dance traditions.

## IV. Regional Variations and Specific Dance Types

Kurdish dance is not a monolithic entity but rather a vibrant constellation of styles, steps, and rhythms that vary significantly across the geographical expanse of Kurdistan—encompassing parts of modern-day Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria—and often differ even from one village to the next.<sup>6</sup> This diversity is reflected in the terminology itself, with overarching names like *Shayee*, *Govend*, *Helperkê*, and *Dîlan* being common, alongside a multitude of more localized terms such as *Chopî*, *Gopand*, *Zamawand*, and *Lohan*.<sup>6</sup> Each dance carries its own unique rules, movements, and cultural resonance, shaped by local history, dialect, and social environment.

### A. Overview of Major Regional Dance Styles

A primary distinction in Kurdish dance styles is often made based on the major Kurdish dialect groups, Kurmanji and Sorani, whose linguistic differences are mirrored in their respective dance and music traditions.<sup>6</sup>

- **Kurmanji Dance Styles:** Predominantly found in the northern and western regions of Kurdistan (parts of Turkey, Syria, and the Behdinan region of Iraqi Kurdistan, including areas like Gaziantep, Bitlis, Van, and Diyarbakir). Kurmanji dances are generally characterized by an erect body posture and dancers maintaining a tight connection, often using the "Kurdish hand hold" (interlocking pinky fingers with arms held straight down or slightly bent).<sup>6</sup> The movements are typically sharp, energetic, intricate, and visually impressive.<sup>6</sup> Prominent named Kurmanji dances include *Keçiko*, *Çepikli* (from Gaziantep), *Garzane*, *Papuri*, *Meyroke* (from Bitlis), *Temilav* (from Van), and *Çeçeno* (from Diyarbakir).<sup>6</sup>
- **Sorani Dance Styles:** Common in the southern and eastern regions of Kurdistan (parts of Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran, in Sorani-speaking areas). Sorani dances tend to feature simpler footwork compared to Kurmanji styles. Their distinctiveness lies in the continuous, fluid movements of the shoulders, which are rhythmically raised and dropped, and a characteristic swaying or tilting motion of the body, sometimes described as resembling the graceful movement of a fish.<sup>6</sup> Named Sorani dances include *Gerdûn*, *Çepî* (or *Chepî*), *Khanim Mirî* (or *Khanim*), *Sêpêyî* (or *Sepeyî*), and *Dupa*.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond this broad Kurmanji-Sorani distinction, specific regions and even towns are known for

particular dance traditions:

- **Badinan Region (Duhok, Zakho in Iraqi Kurdistan):** The *Sheikhani* (Şêxanî) dance is particularly common here.<sup>6</sup>
- **Hawraman Region (border area of Iran and Iraq):** This mountainous region is known for a "tough dance" performed in the snowy winters, partly to generate warmth. Dancers wear specific traditional Hawrami costumes, including items like the *balak*, *klash* (shoes), *pastak*, *klaw* (cap), and *jamana* (headscarf) for men, and embroidered dresses for women, with the *duhol* and *sorna* being key instruments.<sup>6</sup> Visual documentation of Hawraman dance and attire exists.<sup>41</sup>
- **Kermanshah Region (Iran):** This area is particularly known for the *Do Dastmaleh* (دو دستماله, "two handkerchiefs") style, where the lead dancer uses two handkerchiefs for expressive movements.<sup>18</sup> Detailed descriptions of Kermanshah Kurdish clothing are available in Persian sources.<sup>42</sup>
- **Rojava (Kurdish regions of Syria):** *Dîlan* is cited as the most common dance style. Influences from neighboring Arabic and Assyrian dance traditions are noted, with some dances like *Baagi* being recognized as originally Assyrian but adopted by Kurds.<sup>19</sup> A contrast is drawn between the dances of Diyarbakır and Serhad (characterized by more rapid rhythms, enthusiastic stomping, and conveying epic sounds intended to demoralize enemies) and the dances of Roha (Urfa) and Jazira (which tend to express moments from agricultural life).<sup>19</sup>
- **Sanandaj Region (Iran):** *Geryan* (گەریان) is considered the most famous and widely performed dance style, appearing at almost any happy event.<sup>18</sup>
- **Mahabad (Iran) and Sulaymaniyah (Iraq):** The *Dagheh* style is well-known in these areas and serves as a basis for the *Haw-Shari* dance.<sup>31</sup>

This geographical and stylistic diversity underscores the challenge of comprehensively documenting and systematizing Kurdish dance. Many traditions are localized and transmitted orally, meaning that written or archived information may only capture a fraction of this rich heritage, or may represent versions adapted for stage or folkloric presentations. The work of researchers and cultural institutions is therefore vital in preserving these varied forms.

## B. Detailed Descriptions of Prominent Named Dances

While detailed choreographic information is not available for all numerous Kurdish dances, some prominent types have received more attention in accessible sources:

- **Sheikhani (Şêxanî / شێخانی):**  
This dance is widespread, particularly in the Behdinan region (Kurmanji-speaking Iraqi Kurdistan), and is also notably performed by Kurdish Jews and Assyrian communities, with Assyrians considering it one of their "national" dances.<sup>6</sup> This cross-cultural presence suggests a shared regional heritage or significant cultural exchange.
  - **Formation and Hold:** Typically an open circle or line, often utilizing the "Kurdish hold" (dancers close, fingers interlocked, arms bent at elbows with forearms at a right angle to the body, pointing forward) or a hold where the right hand is forward holding the left hand of the neighbor, which is placed in the small of their



back.<sup>45</sup>

- **Movement & Rhythm (Assyrian variations often documented):** Characterized by an erect carriage, strong, sharp movements, and a continuous bounce or vibration of the body.<sup>45</sup> One documented rhythm is a sequence of Slow, Quick-Quick-Slow, Slow, Slow, Slow, Slow, Quick-Quick-Slow, Quick-Quick-Slow, Slow, or in counts: 1,2&3,4,5,6,7,8&9,10&11,12.<sup>45</sup> Another version in 2/4 meter involves a basic two-step pattern (right-left-right, then left-right-left), with dancers moving forward, kicking into the center, and stepping back out.<sup>46</sup> An 8-bar "long version" also exists.<sup>48</sup>
- **Kurdish Context:** The popular Kurdish song and dance *Şemame* is sometimes described as being based on advanced *Şêxanî* patterns, featuring more stationary steps. The etymological root of *Şêxanî* itself is linked by some to "şêx" (sheikhs or masters), implying a dance of dignity or skill.<sup>11</sup>
- While detailed steps are often from Assyrian sources, the shared name and regional proximity point to related traditions.
- **Geryan (مەریان / گەریان):**  
One of the most famous and beloved Kurdish dances, especially prominent in the Sanandaj region of Iranian Kurdistan, Geryan is performed at almost all joyous occasions and is accompanied by a well-known and popular melody.<sup>18</sup> It is categorized as a "joyful dance".<sup>18</sup>
  - **Characteristics:** It can have many variations; for instance, the Mayn Zard dance group from Canada performs eight distinct varieties of *Geryan*.<sup>31</sup>
  - **Historical/Symbolic Interpretation:** In the narrative of the Median war dance, the slow initial phase called *Gehryan* is said to symbolize the cautious and deliberate beginning of a battle.<sup>23</sup>
  - Despite its popularity, specific step-by-step choreographic breakdowns are not readily available in the provided English-language sources, though its association with joy and festivity is clear.<sup>87</sup>
- **Çepî (چەپی / Chepi):**  
A widely performed Sorani dance, Çepî is found throughout many Kurdish areas.<sup>6</sup> It is described as having a relatively simple core choreography but allowing for a high degree of expressive body movement, leading to numerous variations (the Mayn Zard group presents three).<sup>31</sup>
  - **Movement:** A basic characteristic movement in Çepî (and the related *Sêpêyî*) involves taking two steps forward and then retreating two steps.<sup>14</sup> It is listed among the "joyful dances".<sup>18</sup>
  - <sup>74</sup>
- **Keçiko (کەچکۆ):**  
A Kurmanji dance with origins attributed to regions like Gaziantep and Elazig in Turkey.<sup>6</sup> The name Keçiko translates to "Beautiful Girl".<sup>49</sup>
  - **Formation and Music:** Performed in short lines with a shoulder hold or V-hold, with the leader at the end holding a handkerchief. The music is typically in 2/4

meter.<sup>49</sup>

- **Steps (based on Bora Özkök's teaching):** The dance is leader-called and has multiple parts.
  - *Part 1:* Step R (1), L (2) in line of direction (LOD). Step on R in LOD (1), bounce on R (&), touch ball of L foot next to R with a bent knee (2), bounce on R while pushing L and slightly straightening L knee (&). Repeat with opposite footwork but in place. The leader may call for changes in direction (e.g., to reverse line of direction - RLOD).<sup>49</sup>
  - *Part 2:* Facing slightly right of center, hop on L, touching R heel forward (like a soccer kick) (1). Step forward in LOD on R (&), L (2). Pivot to face slightly left of center, jump on both feet shoulder-width apart (1). With weight on R, bounce (2), bounce again (&). Pivot to face slightly right of center, put weight on L (1), bounce on L (2). Hop on L, bringing R foot next to L knee, toes pointed down.<sup>49</sup>
  - *Transition to Part 3:* Facing center and moving in, hop on L (1). Step on R (&), L (2) into the center.<sup>49</sup>
  - *Part 3:* Jump onto both feet with knees bent (L slightly in front) (1). Hop onto R, kicking L foot forward low. Touch L heel forward into center (1). Leap onto L, kicking R forward low (2). Touch R heel forward and slightly across L (knee straight) (1). Touch R heel to the diagonal R (2).<sup>49</sup>
  - *Transition to Part 4:* Backing away from center, hop on L (1). Step backward on R (&), L (2).<sup>49</sup>
  - *Part 4:* Repeat Part 3, but back in the original line formation until the leader signals a change to return to Part 1.<sup>49</sup>
- <sup>89</sup> This dance, as documented by a specific folk dance teacher, offers a rare glimpse into the complex structure a single Kurdish dance type can possess.
- **Gerdûn (Gerdun / گەردۆن):**

This is listed as a Sorani dance.<sup>6</sup> However, detailed choreographic descriptions, steps, or specific musical characteristics for Gerdûn are not readily available in the provided English-language snippets. Some Persian sources mention "Gerdûn" in literary or linguistic contexts rather than dance steps.<sup>50</sup> A video titled "Kurdish dance Govend Gerdûn" exists<sup>52</sup> but does not offer instructional detail. Its name recognition is present, but further ethnographic work would be needed to detail its specific features.
- **Other Named Dances:**

A multitude of other Kurdish dance names appear across sources, including Çepikli, Garzane, Papuri, Meyroke, Temilav, Çeçeno (all Kurmanji) <sup>6</sup>; Khandim Mirî, Sêpêyî, Dupa (all Sorani) <sup>6</sup>; Dîlan (a general term) <sup>5</sup>; Halay (often the Turkish term for Govend, prevalent in Kurmanji areas) <sup>7</sup>; Do Dastmaleh (leader with two handkerchiefs, common in southeastern Kurdistan, e.g., Kermanshah) <sup>18</sup>; Sê-Pa (three-step, mentioned in historical contexts and as a Shayaneh variation) <sup>18</sup>; Shekaki, Zangi (or Zandi), Haw-Shari (based on Dagheh style) <sup>18</sup>; and many more listed in inventories.<sup>18</sup> For most of these, available information is often limited to the name, general region of origin, or broad

stylistic category (e.g., "joyful," "martial").

## C. Comparative Overview of Key Kurdish Dance Styles/Categories

To synthesize the diverse information on Kurdish dance styles, the following table provides a comparative overview. It is important to note that this table represents a generalization based on available sources, and considerable local variations exist within each category.

Dance Name/Category	Primary Region(s) / Dialect Group	Typical Formation(s)	Key Movement Characteristics	Known Rhythmic Features/Tempo	Associated Instruments (if specific)	Cultural Context/Meaning	Source(s)
<b>Govend / Halay (General Kurmanji)</b>	Northern & Western Kurdistan (Turkey, Syria, Behdinan-Iraq) / Kurmanji	Circle, Semi-circle, Line; "Kurdish hand hold" (pinky), shoulder hold, hands on back	Erect posture, sharp, energetic, complex footwork, athletic (men)	Often 2/4 or 6/8; can accelerate	Zurna, Dahol (primary)	Communal, <sup>6</sup> celebratory, social cohesion, identity expression	
<b>Helperkê (General Sorani)</b>	Southern & Eastern Kurdistan (Iraq, Iran) / Sorani	Circle, Semi-circle, Line; various handholds	Simpler steps, continuous shoulder raising/dropping, fluid, swaying body, "fish-like" motion	Can be lilting or rhythmic; may accelerate	Zurna, Dahol (primary); Tembûr, Shlimshal also used	Communal, <sup>6</sup> celebratory, expressive of local life	
<b>Sheikhani (Şêxanî)</b>	Behdinan (Iraq), also by Assyrians & Kurdish Jews	Open circle/line; "Kurdish hand hold" or R hand fwd/L hand on neighbor's back	Erect, strong, sharp movements, bounce; two-step pattern (R-L-R, L-R-L);	2/4 or complex 6/8-like (S,QQS,S,S,S,S,QQS,QS,S); can be slower, bouncy	Zurna, Dahol	Social, celebratory; "masters' dance" implication <sup>6</sup>	

			kicks				
<b>Geryan</b> (گهريان)	Sanandaj (Iran) / Sorani	Circle, Line	(Specific steps not detailed); generally joyful, can have many variations	Popular, distinct melodies; can accelerate	Zurna, Dahol	Joyful, celebratory (weddings, festivals); historically linked to battle commencement (slow start)	<sup>18</sup>
<b>Çepî</b> (چهپی)	Widespread / Sorani	Circle, Line	Simple core choreography, two steps fwd & retreat; high level of expressive body moves	Rhythmic	Zurna, Dahol	Joyful, widely performed, social	<sup>6</sup>
<b>Keçiko</b> (كهچكو)	Elazig, Gaziantep (Turkey) / Kurmanji	Short lines; shoulder or V-hold	Complex, multi-part, leader-called; includes steps, hops, kicks, turns, specific heel touches	2/4	Zurna, Dahol	Social, "Beautiful Girl" dance	<sup>6</sup>
<b>Do Dastmaleh</b> (دو دستماله)	Kermanshah, Ilam, Sanandaj (Iran) / Southern Kurdish, Sorani	Line/Circle (leader prominent)	Leader dances expressively with two handkerchiefs	Rhythmic, lively	Zurna, Dahol	Lyrical, celebratory, showcases leader's skill	<sup>18</sup>
<b>Hawraman Dances</b>	Hawraman region	Group formations	"Tough dance" in	(Not detailed)	Duhol, Sorna	Seasonal (winter	<sup>6</sup>

	(Iran/Iraq)		winter; specific movements not detailed			warm-up), celebratory (Newroz)	
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This table illustrates the richness and regional specificity inherent in Kurdish dance traditions, highlighting the need for further localized ethnographic research to fully capture their nuances.

## V. Traditional Attire in Kurdish Dance

The visual dimension of Kurdish dance is profoundly shaped by the traditional attire worn by participants. These garments are not mere costumes but are deeply imbued with cultural significance, reflecting history, regional identity, and artisanal skill. The clothing is an active component of the performance, enhancing the movements and contributing to the overall aesthetic and symbolic power of the dance.<sup>5</sup>

### A. General Characteristics of Kurdish Clothing for Dance

Kurdish traditional clothing is renowned for its vibrant colors, intricate patterns, and the practice of layering multiple garments.<sup>7</sup> These outfits are diverse, with designs varying significantly based on region, specific Kurdish tribe, and sometimes even the individual dancer who may craft their own attire.<sup>7</sup> Handmade embellishments, such as embroidery, beadwork, and sequins, are common features, adding to the richness and visual appeal of the clothing.<sup>7</sup> The act of wearing this traditional clothing for dance performances is a powerful expression of cultural identity and pride, particularly at significant cultural events like Newroz and weddings, where dance plays a central role.<sup>13</sup> This clothing serves as a visual testament to Kurdish heritage, embodying both the overarching unity of "Kurdishness" and the rich internal diversity of the culture.

### B. Men's Traditional Dance Attire

The traditional attire for Kurdish men engaged in dance is designed to allow for freedom of movement, essential for the often energetic and athletic nature of their dances, while simultaneously conveying cultural identity and sometimes social status.

Common components include:

- **Pants (Shalwar/Şalwar, Ranek, Pântul, Jafi):** These are typically loose and baggy trousers, often made of wool or cotton, which may taper towards the ankle to allow for agile footwork.<sup>7</sup>
- **Shirt (Kras, Melki, Çûxe):** A long-sleeved shirt is worn, often under a jacket or vest.<sup>42</sup> The Çûxe (or Chokh) can also refer to a plain woolen blouse or tunic-like garment.<sup>42</sup>
- **Jacket/Vest (Salta, Kattafa, Faranji, Pastak):** A jacket or vest is commonly layered over the shirt. The *Faranji*, for example, is a felted wool vest characteristic of Hawrami men's attire, providing warmth in winter and coolness in summer.<sup>58</sup> The *Pastak* is another

type of vest for cold weather, made of wool or felt, often without buttons.<sup>43</sup>

- **Waist Sash (Peshtwen, Poshtvin, Shal, Kember):** A wide and often long cloth belt or sash is wrapped multiple times around the waist, over the shirt and trousers.<sup>42</sup> This sash, known as *Shal* in some contexts, can be up to 10 or 20 meters long and is a prominent feature.<sup>42</sup> Its style and the way it is tied can indicate regional origin or status; for example, older men might tie it with three knots in front, symbolizing Zoroastrian principles.<sup>42</sup>
- **Headwear (Jamana, Shashk, Klaw, Dastar, Keffiyeh):** Men often wear a head covering, which can be a turban (*Dastar*), a skullcap (*Klaw*), or a patterned headscarf like the *Jamana* (similar to a Keffiyeh), wrapped in various styles.<sup>42</sup>
- **Footwear (Klash/Giveh):** The traditional footwear is often *Klash* (also known as *Giveh*), which are handmade, typically white, woven shoes with flat soles, suitable for dancing.<sup>42</sup>
- **Accessories:** Woolen leg warmers (*Puzawana* or *اق بند پشمی*) may be worn under the trousers, especially in colder regions or for certain dances.<sup>43</sup>

## C. Women's Traditional Dance Attire

Kurdish women's traditional attire for dance is particularly renowned for its vibrant colors, elaborate designs, and rich ornamentation, creating a stunning visual spectacle.

Key elements include:

- **Dress (Kras, Jli Kurdi):** The centerpiece is usually a long, flowing dress, often reaching the floor, made from a variety of fabrics including light, sheer materials, silk, or velvet.<sup>42</sup> These dresses are frequently adorned with shimmering sequins, intricate embroidery, and beadwork.<sup>7</sup>
- **Sleeves (Faqiana/Senbuseh):** A distinctive feature of many women's dresses is the long sleeves that extend into a flared, dangling triangular piece of fabric called *Faqiana* or *Senbuseh*.<sup>58</sup> These can be wrapped and knotted around the arm or left to hang freely, adding an expressive, handkerchief-like element to the dance movements.<sup>60</sup>
- **Vest/Jacket (Kolonje, Sukhme, Jeliqe, Salta, Yel, Kawa, Qaba):** Layering is common, with a vest (*Kolonje, Sukhme, Jeliqe, Helak*) or a short jacket (*Salta, Yel*) worn over the dress.<sup>42</sup> These are often made of velvet or other rich fabrics and can be heavily embroidered or decorated with coins. Longer coats (*Kawa, Qaba*) may also be worn.<sup>42</sup>
- **Undergarments (Zher Krass, Darpe/Shalwar):** Beneath the main dress, women may wear a long camisole or underdress (*Zher Krass*) and loose trousers or bloomers (*Darpe* or *Shalwar*).<sup>43</sup>
- **Headwear (Klaw, Lachak, Sarvin, Yashar, Golvani, Amama):** Women's headwear is diverse and often ornate. It can include decorated skullcaps (*Klaw*), various types of scarves (*Lachak, Sarvin, Yashar, Golvani*), or small turbans (*Amama*).<sup>42</sup> These are often secured with pins and may feature fringes or coin embellishments.
- **Jewelry and Accessories:** Abundant jewelry is a hallmark of Kurdish women's attire, including necklaces (often with amber or coins), bracelets, earrings, rings, and sometimes ankle bracelets (*Khirkhal*).<sup>42</sup> Belts, often metallic or adorned with coins, are

also common. A shawl (*Shal*) may be worn over the shoulders.<sup>58</sup>

## D. Symbolism and Regional Distinctions in Dance Attire

Kurdish dance attire is far more than decorative; it is laden with symbolism and reflects the diverse cultural landscape of Kurdistan. The clothing often communicates regional identity, social status, historical connections, and even philosophical beliefs, making it an active participant in the dance's meaning-making process.

- **Environmental and Regional Adaptation:** Clothing styles are adapted to the diverse environments of Kurdistan, from mountainous terrains to plains, with variations in materials, style, and fit noticeable across different geographies.<sup>53</sup> The colors used can also reflect regional identity.<sup>53</sup> For instance, the men's *Shal* (waist sash) has distinct types associated with regions like Ranya, Bahdinan (particularly Zakho city), and Hawraman, each distinguished by its specific sewing methods, materials (like premium Marz goat hair for Zakho shals), and even pricing.<sup>63</sup> Hawraman attire, for example, includes a 'pashmina' cloak for men and distinctly embroidered dresses for women.<sup>37</sup> Specific clothing characteristics are noted for areas like Kermanshah<sup>42</sup>, and Kurmanji-speaking Kurds in Turkey and Syria are said to have unique patterns compared to Sorani-speaking Kurds in Iraq and Iran.<sup>56</sup> General regional clothing names like *Saqzi* (from Saqqez), *Orami* (Hawrami), *Mariwani* (from Marivan), *Sanandaji* (from Sanandaj), and *Baneh* (from Baneh) also point to these local distinctions.<sup>59</sup>
- **Symbolic Elements:** Specific items or features of the attire carry symbolic meanings. The three knots sometimes seen on the waist shawls of older men are interpreted by some as representing the Zoroastrian tenets of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.<sup>42</sup> The handkerchief (*Chopî* or *Desmal*) twirled by the dance leader is a potent symbol; it can represent a flag of the region or ethnic group, an invitation to uprising, or a symbol of peace and friendship with other groups, depending on its color and context.<sup>14</sup> The long, flowing *Senbuseh* or *Faqiana* sleeves of women's dresses are not merely decorative; they are intentionally left to hang and move with the dance, creating a visual effect similar to that of a handkerchief and adding to the expressiveness of the performance.<sup>60</sup> The vibrant colors themselves, often drawn from nature, reflect the mountainous identity and the spirit of the Kurdish people.<sup>53</sup>

The careful craftsmanship, the choice of materials, the specific ways of wearing garments, and the symbolic embellishments all contribute to a rich visual language that complements the kinetic language of the dance itself. This traditional attire acts as a powerful visual signifier of Kurdish identity, embodying both the overarching unity of "Kurdishness" and the remarkable internal diversity of Kurdish culture. The act of donning these clothes for dance is a performance of identity, reinforcing cultural distinctiveness while celebrating specific local traditions within the broader Kurdish nation.

## VI. Cultural Significance and Social Context

Kurdish dance, encompassing forms like Govend and Helperkê, is not merely a peripheral

artistic activity but a deeply ingrained cultural practice that permeates various aspects of Kurdish social life. Its significance extends beyond entertainment, serving as a vital medium for communal expression, identity affirmation, and the transmission of cultural values.

## **A. Role in Social Life: Weddings, Community Gatherings, and Everyday Expression**

Kurdish dance is fundamentally a social activity, woven into the fabric of community life. It is an indispensable element of significant life events and celebrations, most notably weddings, which are occasions of great joy and communal participation where dance circles spontaneously form.<sup>1</sup> Beyond weddings, dances are performed at a wide array of gatherings: festivals, birthdays, circumcisions, celebrations marking the return of travelers or the release of prisoners, national holidays, and various other ceremonies.<sup>1</sup> It serves as a primary way for individuals to share joy and solidarity with family, friends, and the wider community.<sup>4</sup> The widespread knowledge and practice of these dances among Kurds indicate their integral role in social interaction.

The dances bring people together, often with men and women participating side-by-side, holding hands or linking arms, and moving in synchronized harmony.<sup>4</sup> This collective participation reinforces social bonds and fosters a sense of belonging. The inclusive nature of these dances, where people may spontaneously join the line or circle, further highlights their function as a social lubricant and a means of strengthening communal ties.<sup>2</sup>

## **B. Significance in Celebrations: Newroz as a Prime Example**

Among the many celebrations where Kurdish dance takes center stage, Newroz (نەورۆز), the Kurdish New Year celebrated on March 21st, holds paramount importance.<sup>32</sup> Newroz is not just the welcoming of spring but a profound symbol of Kurdish identity, freedom, renewal, and the historical triumph of good over evil, often linked to the legend of Kawa the Blacksmith defeating the tyrannical king Zahhak.<sup>53</sup>

The performance of group dances, especially Kurdish Govend or Helperkê, is a central and indispensable ritual of Newroz celebrations.<sup>32</sup> Communities gather, often around large bonfires lit on mountaintops or in public squares, and engage in these collective dances. Participants, adorned in vibrant traditional Kurdish attire, join hands and dance for hours, the rhythmic stomping and unified movements creating a powerful display of cultural pride and communal spirit.<sup>32</sup>

The celebration of Newroz, and the dances intrinsically linked to it, has often become a highly politicized act, particularly in regions where Kurdish cultural expression has faced suppression or prohibition.<sup>32</sup> In such contexts, the public performance of Newroz dances transcends mere festivity; it becomes a potent symbol of Kurdish resilience, a reclaiming of cultural heritage, and an assertion of national identity and the enduring quest for recognition and rights.<sup>54</sup> The collective energy of the dance during Newroz embodies the spirit of Kurdish aspirations for freedom and self-determination.



## C. Kurdish Dabke/Govend as a Symbol of:

Kurdish dance, in its various forms, is laden with symbolic meaning, acting as a multifaceted emblem of core aspects of Kurdish culture and experience.

### 1. Kurdish Identity and Unity:

Dance serves as a unique and powerful signature of Kurdish identity.<sup>5</sup> In the context of a nation whose people are spread across several states and have historically faced pressures of assimilation, shared cultural practices like language, music, and dance become paramount in defining and maintaining a sense of collective Kurdish identity and nationhood.<sup>65</sup> Helperkê, for example, is explicitly described as a symbol of unity and order.<sup>17</sup> The very structure of these dances—the linked hands, the shoulder-to-shoulder formations, the synchronized movements of the group—embodies and reinforces concepts of communal joy, solidarity, social cohesion, and the indivisible unity of the Kurdish people.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Cultural Resilience and Resistance:

Throughout history, and continuing into the present day, Kurdish dance has functioned as a significant form of cultural resilience and, often, overt resistance.<sup>2</sup> The act of performing Dabke or Govend in public spaces, especially during protests or in defiance of restrictions, can be a powerful political statement.<sup>21</sup> It is a way for Kurds to reaffirm their distinct cultural identity and to protest against oppression, discrimination, and attempts at cultural erasure.<sup>11</sup> In regions like Turkey, where Kurdish language, music, and dance were historically suppressed or recategorized as Turkish <sup>7</sup>, the revival and proud performance of these dances represent a reclaiming of heritage and a challenge to assimilationist policies. The dance becomes a non-verbal language of defiance, asserting "we are here, our culture is alive." The very act of dancing, therefore, transforms into a form of political agency for many Kurds, where aesthetics, tradition, and resistance become inextricably linked.

### 3. Communal Joy and Storytelling:

At its heart, Kurdish dance is an expression of communal emotion, particularly joy, celebration, and shared experience.<sup>1</sup> It is a medium through which happiness, but also sometimes shared struggle or sorrow, can be collectively processed and expressed.<sup>66</sup> Beyond emotional expression, Kurdish dance, particularly Govend, is also linked to storytelling. Arjen Brusk, a Kurdish artist and dance instructor, suggests that the etymology of Govend—from the Kurdish *gotin û vendin*, meaning "to say and to move"—implies a tradition of conveying narratives, histories, and myths through the combined media of dance, sound, and movement, often without relying on spoken words.<sup>11</sup> The lyrics of the folk songs that invariably accompany these dances also contribute to this narrative function, often expressing emotions pertinent to the specific occasion—be it courage, strength, love, or recounting historical or legendary events.<sup>4</sup> In this capacity, the dance serves as a repository and dynamic transmitter of communal memories, values, and oral traditions, fostering social cohesion and intergenerational connection.

The multifaceted cultural significance of Kurdish dance underscores its vital role in not just reflecting but actively shaping Kurdish society and identity. It is a living heritage that continues to resonate deeply within Kurdish communities, adapting to new contexts while carrying the weight of centuries of history and meaning.

## VII. Contemporary Practice, Diaspora, and Preservation

Kurdish dance, with its deep historical roots and profound cultural significance, continues to be a vibrant and evolving tradition in the 21st century. It is practiced widely in Kurdish regions and has found new expressions and importance within the global Kurdish diaspora. Simultaneously, concerted efforts are underway to preserve and promote this rich heritage against the forces of modernization, political pressures, and potential cultural dilution.

### A. Kurdish Dabke/Govend in the Modern Era

Traditional forms of Kurdish dance, such as Govend and Helperkê, remain widely practiced in their communities of origin, gracing weddings, festivals, and social gatherings as they have for generations.<sup>5</sup> However, like many traditional art forms, Kurdish dance is not static and is subject to contemporary influences and reinterpretations.

In the broader Middle Eastern region, a notable trend has been the emergence of "New Wave Dabke." This phenomenon, primarily associated with Levantine Arab artists, involves the fusion of traditional Dabke rhythms and melodic structures with modern genres such as reggae, hip-hop, and electronica, often characterized by the use of electronic instruments and production techniques.<sup>9</sup> While not exclusively a Kurdish development, the regional popularity of such fusions inevitably influences the soundscape and potentially the performance practices of younger generations across ethnic lines. Indeed, within the Kurdish context, artist Arjen Brusk has pointed to the rise of "*tekno halay*," where Kurdish youth adapt traditional Govend (Halay) forms to techno music, demonstrating a dynamic engagement with global youth culture while retaining a connection to their heritage.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, traditional Kurdish dance styles are increasingly being adapted for formal stage performances by professional or semi-professional troupes. These adaptations often involve choreographic modifications, rearrangements of traditional sequences, and staging considerations designed to present the dances to wider audiences in theatrical settings.<sup>31</sup>

Such performances can play a role in raising awareness and appreciation for Kurdish culture, though they may also transform the dances from their original participatory social contexts.

### B. Performance by Diaspora Communities and Cultural Connection

The Kurdish diaspora, with significant populations in Europe (particularly Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Sweden), North America, and other parts of the world, plays a crucial role in the contemporary practice and perpetuation of Kurdish dance.<sup>26</sup> For Kurds living outside their ancestral homeland, traditional cultural practices like dance often take on heightened significance as vital links to their heritage, means of maintaining cultural identity in new environments, and tools for community building.

Diaspora communities actively engage in cultural production, with the performance of circle dances like Govend and Helperkê being a prominent feature of their social and cultural life.<sup>26</sup> These performances serve multiple functions: they help to restore and maintain collective

memories, promote and affirm Kurdish identity, foster a sense of belonging and community cohesion, and can even serve as platforms for advocating homeland-related political and social concerns.<sup>26</sup> Self-organized Kurdish dance troupes are common in diaspora settings, performing at community events, festivals, and cultural showcases.<sup>69</sup>

Cultural festivals organized by Kurdish communities in the diaspora, such as the annual Kurdish Culture Festival in Paris, prominently feature traditional dances, music, and cuisine.<sup>26</sup> Such events are often framed as a defiant stand against historical attempts at cultural suppression and provide an important avenue for younger, diaspora-born generations to connect with their roots and learn about their cultural heritage.<sup>26</sup> The experience of displacement and living in diaspora can, in fact, lead to an intensification of cultural practices like dance. Removed from the everyday context of the homeland, these traditions may assume even greater symbolic weight as markers of identity and belonging. Diaspora communities thus become not just passive recipients of tradition but active agents in its maintenance, reinterpretation, and transmission to future generations. The act of dancing can become a more self-conscious and deliberate affirmation of cultural identity than it might be in a context where it is an unquestioned part of daily life.

### **C. Festivals, Workshops, and Organizations for Preservation and Promotion**

Recognizing the importance of Kurdish dance as a unique cultural heritage, various efforts are being made, both within Kurdistan and internationally, to document, preserve, and promote these traditions.

Festivals dedicated to showcasing Kurdish dance and folklore are held in different parts of Kurdistan, such as the Kurdish Dance Festival in Duhok, Iraqi Kurdistan, which brings together troupes from all four regions of historic Kurdistan (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria).<sup>27</sup> Similarly, diaspora communities organize cultural festivals, like the one in Paris, that prominently feature dance performances.<sup>26</sup> These events aim not only to celebrate the traditions but also to promote awareness and encourage their continuation.

Several institutions and organizations are dedicated to the preservation of Kurdish culture, including its dance forms. The Kurdish Heritage Institute (KHI), based in Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan, plays a significant role in this regard. Headed by the renowned Kurdish singer Mazhar Khaleqi, the KHI works to collect, archive, and preserve traditional Kurdish musical genres, melodies, folklore, traditional clothing, and to document and rewrite texts related to *Shaiy* (Kurdish dance).<sup>28</sup> The institute possesses a vast collection of books, photographs, audio, and video files, much of which is undergoing digitization to ensure its long-term preservation and wider accessibility.<sup>28</sup> Other Kurdish Institutes, such as those in Paris (France) and Lausanne (Switzerland), also contribute to the preservation and promotion of Kurdish language, culture, and heritage, which implicitly includes dance traditions.<sup>29</sup>

Academic research and ethnographic studies also play a crucial part in documenting and understanding Kurdish dance. Scholars like Aso Naderi, who has published a comprehensive book on *Helperkê*, contribute significantly to the systematization and analysis of these

traditions.<sup>18</sup> Archives such as the Kurdish Digital Archive (part of the Digital Archive of the Middle East project at the University of Exeter) and the Mizrahi Dance Archive also hold materials relevant to the study of Kurdish dance and music.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the rise of online platforms has created new avenues for learning about and engaging with Kurdish dance. Some websites and social media channels offer information, tutorials, or showcase performances, making aspects of the tradition accessible to a global audience..<sup>1239</sup>

The long-term vitality of Kurdish dance appears to depend on a symbiotic relationship between ongoing grassroots community practice—which keeps the dance alive in its social context—and the more formal efforts of institutions, festivals, and researchers. Grassroots enthusiasm provides the living material and social relevance, while institutional support offers resources for documentation, archiving, scholarly analysis, and broader dissemination. This dynamic interplay is especially critical for a stateless nation like the Kurds, where state-sponsored cultural preservation initiatives may be absent, inadequate, or even hostile to authentic Kurdish cultural expression. These combined efforts are essential to ensure that this rich and expressive art form continues to thrive and to be passed on to future generations.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

Kurdish dance, known through a rich vocabulary including Govend, Helperkê, Dîlan, and Şayî, and sometimes referred to by the broader regional term Dabke, stands as a profound and multifaceted expression of Kurdish culture. This report has navigated the complexities of its terminology, tracing its deep historical roots from potential ancient ritualistic and commemorative origins, including links to the Median Empire and agricultural cycles, to its vibrant contemporary manifestations. The core characteristics of these dances—their communal formations signifying unity, the energetic and symbolic steps, the integral role of music often led by the powerful Zurna and Dahol dyad, and the stunning traditional attire—all contribute to a rich tapestry of cultural expression.

The remarkable diversity of Kurdish dance across different regions and dialectal groups, such as the distinct styles of Kurmanji and Sorani areas, and the unique traditions of places like Hawraman, Kermanshah, and Behdinan, underscores a cultural heritage that is both unified in its Kurdish identity and rich in its local variations. These dances are not static relics of the past but are living traditions, continually performed at weddings, Newroz celebrations, and myriad social gatherings, serving as a cornerstone of community life.

Crucially, Kurdish dance transcends mere entertainment. It functions as a potent symbol of Kurdish identity, unity, and resilience, often becoming a form of cultural resistance and political expression in contexts of suppression or adversity. The dances embody collective memory, transmit stories and values, and provide a powerful, non-verbal language for communal joy and solidarity.

In the modern era, Kurdish dance continues to evolve, with new interpretations emerging alongside traditional forms. The global Kurdish diaspora plays a vital role in its preservation and promotion, using dance as a crucial link to heritage and a means of fostering community in new homelands. Efforts by cultural institutions, festivals, and researchers to document,

archive, and support these traditions are essential for their continued vitality. Kurdish dance, therefore, endures as a dynamic and indispensable element of Kurdish cultural heritage, a testament to the enduring spirit and rich artistic legacy of the Kurdish people, connecting them to their past, to each other, and to their collective aspirations for the future.

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(What are the details of different types of Kurdish dances (Helperki), including regional differences in steps, music, and clothing?).<sup>18</sup>
120. <sup>53</sup> Can you provide more details on the traditional Kurdish clothing worn during Dabke, including any symbolic elements or regional distinctions?.<sup>53</sup>
121. <sup>11</sup> Does this article provide details on specific regional variations of Govend, the music and instruments used, or the traditional attire worn during performances?.<sup>11</sup>
122. <sup>17</sup> آیا این مقاله جزئیاتی در مورد انواع منطقه ای رقص کردی (هلپرکی)، موسیقی و سازهای خاص یا لباس های سنتی (Helperki)، specific music and instruments, or traditional clothing?).<sup>17</sup> ارائه می دهد؟
123. <sup>6</sup> Provide detailed descriptions of Kurmanji dances....<sup>6</sup>
124. <sup>12</sup> Can you describe the steps, formations, music, and rhythm for the following Kurmanji dances....<sup>12</sup>
125. <sup>31</sup> Provide detailed descriptions (steps, formations, music, rhythm) for the 7 Kurdish dance styles mentioned....<sup>31</sup>
126. <sup>18 18</sup> برای چند نمونه از رقص های کردی که در مقاله ذکر شده....<sup>18 18</sup>
127. <sup>59 59</sup> چه جزئیاتی در مورد لباس های سنتی کردی که به طور خاص برای رقص استفاده می شود وجود دارد؟.<sup>59 59</sup>
128. <sup>60</sup> Regarding women's Kurdish clothing, particularly the "Kras" with "Senbuseh"....<sup>60</sup>
129. <sup>26</sup> Does this article mention any specific Kurdish dance troupes that performed at the Paris festival?.<sup>26</sup>
130. <sup>27</sup> Can you list some of the 16 dance and music troupes that participated in the Duhok Kurdish Dance Festival?.<sup>27</sup>
131. <sup>6</sup> Provide any available specific details on the steps, formations, music, or unique characteristics of Sheikhanî dance as performed in Badinan..<sup>6</sup>
132. <sup>12</sup> Are there any specific step sequences, formations, or rhythmic patterns described for Sheikhanî dance, Keçiko, or Gerdûn?.<sup>12</sup>
133. <sup>31</sup> For Geryan, Shayaneh, and Chepi dances, does the article provide any specific details about the actual steps....<sup>31</sup>
134. <sup>61</sup> آیا این مقاله جزئیات بیشتری در مورد لباس های خاصی که در مناطق مختلف کردستان برای رقص های محلی مانند <sup>61</sup> هه لپرکی یا گوند پوشیده می شود، ارائه می دهد؟.<sup>61</sup>
135. <sup>63</sup> Beyond the general symbolism of the Shal, does this article mention any specific ways the Shal or other Kurdish clothing items are worn or adapted specifically for dance performances....<sup>63</sup>
136. <sup>56</sup> Does this article provide details on how specific items of Kurdish clothing (like Kawa, Jli Kurdi, Shal u Shepik) are specifically worn or styled for dance performances?.<sup>56</sup>

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