

# The Enduring Echoes: A Study of Famous Kurdish Epics

## 1. Introduction to Kurdish Epics and Oral Tradition

Kurdish literature, with its profound historical roots, encompasses a vast body of oral and written works. A significant portion of Kurdish narrative traditions has been transmitted orally for centuries, a practice that continues to this day.<sup>1</sup> This oral heritage is particularly rich in epic poetry, which serves as a vital repository of Kurdish history, cultural values, mythology, and collective memory. The *dengbêj*, traditional Kurdish speech-singers or bards, have played a crucial role in preserving and disseminating these epics, often narrating tales of heroism, tragic love, and significant societal events during long winter nights and communal gatherings.<sup>2</sup> These oral narratives are not merely entertainment; they are foundational texts that reflect the Kurdish people's struggles, aspirations, and enduring identity.<sup>4</sup>

The themes explored in Kurdish epics are diverse, ranging from romantic tragedies and heroic exploits to allegorical representations of national identity and the quest for justice.<sup>6</sup> Many of these epics, initially part of a vibrant oral tradition, were later transcribed and adapted by poets and scholars, ensuring their transmission to new generations and their place within the broader canon of world literature.<sup>2</sup> The study of Kurdish epics offers a unique lens through which to understand the cultural, social, and political landscape of Kurdistan, revealing a literary tradition that is both deeply rooted in its specific context and resonant with universal human experiences. This report will delve into some of the most renowned Kurdish epics, examining their narratives, historical contexts, thematic concerns, and enduring cultural significance.

## 2. Detailed Analysis of Key Kurdish Epics

The Kurdish literary landscape is adorned with numerous epic tales that have shaped its cultural and historical consciousness. These narratives, whether born from ancient oral traditions or penned by influential poets, offer profound insights into the Kurdish experience.

### 2.1. *Mem û Zîn*

*Mem û Zîn* stands as a cornerstone of Kurdish literature, widely regarded as the Kurdish national epic.<sup>8</sup> Its enduring power lies in its poignant love story, rich symbolism, and profound reflection of Kurdish identity and aspirations.

#### 2.1.1. Origin, Author, and Historical Context

The epic is believed to have originated as an oral tale around 1450, passed down through generations by *dengbêj*.<sup>2</sup> This oral tradition was later immortalized in written form in the 17th century by the eminent Kurdish scholar, poet, and mystic Ehmedê Xanî (1650–1707).<sup>2</sup> Xanî,

considered a foundational figure in Kurdish nationalism, undertook the significant act of composing the epic in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish, a deliberate choice in an era when Arabic and Persian were the dominant literary languages.<sup>2</sup> His work, consisting of 2,650 couplets, is said to have been inspired by a real event that occurred in Bohtan (modern-day Cizre) in the mid-14th century.<sup>7</sup> The earliest known manuscript of *Mem û Zîn* is housed in the Baghdad Museum of Manuscripts.<sup>7</sup>

The historical context of the epic's creation in the 17th century is significant, as Xanî experienced and reflected upon events fateful for the Kurdish people, including the partition of Kurdistan between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires.<sup>11</sup> This backdrop informs the epic's allegorical interpretations concerning Kurdish unity and sovereignty.

### 2.1.2. Plot Summary

*Mem û Zîn* narrates the tragic love story of Mem, a young man of the Alan clan and heir to the City of the West, and Zîn, the beautiful daughter of the governor of Jazira Botan.<sup>2</sup> They meet during a Newroz (Kurdish New Year) celebration, disguised in each other's traditional gender attire, and fall instantly in love.<sup>2</sup> Their love represents righteousness and goodness.<sup>2</sup> However, their union is thwarted by the malevolent Beko (or Bekir) of the Bakran clan, an evil counselor to Zîn's brother, the prince. Jealous of their love, Beko schemes to reveal their relationship to the prince, leading to Mem's imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> Mem's loyal friend, Tacdîn, attempts to free him but fails.<sup>2</sup> Mem eventually dies in prison. Upon hearing of Mem's death, Zîn succumbs to grief seven days later and is buried beside him in Cizre.<sup>2</sup> Beko's treachery is exposed, and Tacdîn kills him. According to Mem's dying wish, Beko is buried near the lovers to witness their eternal bond. However, a thorny rosebush, nourished by Beko's malevolent blood, grows from his grave, its roots penetrating the earth to separate Mem and Zîn even in death.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1.3. Main Characters

- **Mem:** A sensitive, poetic, and honest youth of the Alan clan.<sup>2</sup> In Xanî's version, Mem is portrayed as a nobler character compared to some oral versions.<sup>9</sup> He embodies the ideal lover and hero.<sup>12</sup>
- **Zîn:** The angelically beautiful daughter of the governor of Botan, sister to Prince Zeyneddîn.<sup>2</sup>
- **Beko (Bekir):** The antagonist from the Bakran clan, representing evil, mischief, and jealousy. His schemes are the direct cause of the lovers' tragedy.<sup>2</sup>
- **Tacdîn:** Mem's best friend, who marries Zîn's sister, Sitî. Their successful union contrasts with the tragic fate of Mem and Zîn.<sup>2</sup>
- **Sitî:** Zîn's sister, who marries Tacdîn.<sup>8</sup>
- **Prince Zeyneddîn:** The Mîr (prince) of Botan, Zîn's brother, who is manipulated by Beko into imprisoning Mem.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.1.4. Major Themes

*Mem û Zîn* explores several profound themes:

- **Tragic Love:** The central theme is the devastating power of a love that cannot be realized due to external malice and societal barriers.<sup>2</sup> The torment of love and devotion unto death are vividly portrayed.<sup>7</sup>
- **Good versus Evil:** The characters of Mem and Zîn embody goodness and righteousness, while Beko represents pure evil and destructive jealousy.<sup>2</sup>
- **Kurdish Nationalism and Identity:** Many Kurds view the epic as an allegory for the Kurdish nation's quest for statehood and self-determination, with the separated lovers symbolizing a divided Kurdistan.<sup>2</sup> Xanî himself expressed aspirations for Kurdish unity and recognition.<sup>11</sup>
- **Mysticism and Divine Love:** Xanî explicitly indicates an allegorical reading of the narrative, where the "metaphorical" love between Mem and Zîn can be interpreted as stages in the human soul's journey towards "literal" or divine love for God. The unconsummated nature of their earthly love allows it to be purified and transmuted into spiritual devotion.<sup>8</sup>
- **Social Conventions and Politics:** The epic provides a window into the social customs, political life, and cultural environment of 17th-century Kurdistan.<sup>2</sup>
- **Fate and Free Will:** The tragic outcome is often seen as a result of both malicious human actions (Beko's scheming) and an overarching, perhaps unlucky, fate.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.1.5. Symbolism

- **The Thornbush:** Growing from Beko's grave and separating the lovers even in death, the thornbush symbolizes the enduring power of evil and the persistent obstacles to Kurdish unity and happiness.<sup>2</sup>
- **Newroz:** The festival where Mem and Zîn meet symbolizes renewal, hope, and the blossoming of love, but also the beginning of their tragic journey.<sup>2</sup>
- **Cross-dressing:** The initial meeting where Mem and Zîn are dressed as the opposite gender during Newroz can symbolize the transgression of social norms and the initial confusion and enchantment of love.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1.6. Cultural Significance and Influence

*Mem û Zîn* is more than a literary work; it is a cultural touchstone for the Kurdish people.<sup>2</sup>

- **Literary Landmark:** It is one of the first and most significant works written almost entirely in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish, demonstrating its capacity as a language of art and literature.<sup>2</sup>
- **National Epic:** It is widely considered the national epic of the Kurds, embodying their collective identity, historical consciousness, and aspirations for freedom and unity.<sup>8</sup>
- **Inspiration for Arts:** The tale has inspired numerous songs, films, plays, and stories, attesting to its deep cultural resonance.<sup>2</sup> A film directed by Ümit Elçi was released in 1992, though it had to be in Turkish due to prohibitions on the Kurdish language at the time.<sup>2</sup>

- **Suppression and Resilience:** The epic has faced periods of banning and censorship, labeled as a harmful publication at times.<sup>2</sup> Its first publication in Istanbul in 1919 by Hamza of Müküs in the original Arabic script was a significant event, followed by editions in Damascus (1958, Arabic script) and Moscow (1962, Latin script).<sup>7</sup> Despite such adversities, its survival and continued relevance underscore the resilience of Kurdish culture.
- **Academic Interest:** The epic has been the subject of scholarly analysis, including Michael Chyet's PhD dissertation, and has been translated into over 20 languages, taking its place in world literature, although perhaps not yet receiving the full recognition it merits.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1.7. Different Versions and Translations

The story of Mem û Zîn exists in numerous oral versions, often circulating under the title Memê Alan.<sup>7</sup> Ehmedê Xanî's poetic version is the most renowned written form. While Xanî was likely inspired by local oral traditions, his rendition differs considerably, particularly in the ennoblement of Mem's character and the integration of mystical themes.<sup>9</sup>

The epic has been translated into numerous languages, including Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Russian, German, and English.<sup>7</sup> An English translation by Feryad Fazil Omar and Mitch Cohen, based on a German translation, was published in 2018.<sup>11</sup> The first known publication was in Istanbul in 1919, followed by editions in Damascus (1958) and Moscow (1962).<sup>7</sup> The Turkish Ministry of Culture published the manuscript, transcription, and Turkish translation in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2. *Kurdish Shahnameh (Şahnameya Kurdî)*

The *Kurdish Shahnameh*, or *Şahnameya Kurdî*, represents a significant body of epic poetry within Kurdish oral and literary traditions, distinct from, yet related to, the famed Persian *Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2.1. Origin and Historical Context

The *Kurdish Shahnameh* primarily exists as a collection of epic poems transmitted orally through generations as part of Kurdish oral tradition.<sup>13</sup> While popular culture often attributes the collection and writing of the *Shahnameh* in the Gorani dialect to the 18th-century Kurdish poet Sarhang Almas Khan (also Almaskhan Kondolei), historical evidence suggests that numerous writers and collectors have contributed to its documentation across different times and locations.<sup>13</sup> Manuscripts, both older and more recent, attest to its long history.<sup>13</sup> Almaskhan Kondolei, a commander in Nader Shah Afshar's army, is said to have composed or translated parts of the *Kurdish Shahnameh* after being dismissed by the Shah, a narrative that mirrors the legendary fate of Ferdowsi and reflects the often-fraught relationship between artists and rulers.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2.2. Content and Main Stories/Heroes

The content of the *Kurdish Shahnameh* is diverse and can be categorized into stories that align with Ferdowsi's work, those adapted with modifications, and supplementary tales not

found in the Persian version.<sup>14</sup> It features renowned heroes from the Iranian epic cycle, such as Rostam (Rustemê Zal), Sohrab, Esfandiyar, Fereydun, Kikavus, and Kay Khosrow, but often presents them within a distinct Kurdish cultural and linguistic framework.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the prominent stories and cycles within the Kurdish Shahnameh include:

- *Razmnameh Zardeh Neg û Ristem* (The Battle Tale of Zardeh Neg and Rostam) <sup>14</sup>
- *Heft Leşker* (The Seven Armies) <sup>14</sup>
- *Ristem û Zorab* (Rostam and Sohrab) <sup>14</sup>
- *Ristem û Esfendiyar* (Rostam and Esfandiyar) <sup>14</sup>
- Tales involving Rostam's descendants, such as Timur, Jahangir, and Jahanbakhsh.<sup>14</sup>
- The collection *A Fire in My Heart: Kurdish Tales* by Diane Edgecomb includes stories based on legendary figures like Rustemê Zal, referred to as the Kurdish Hercules.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.2.3. Comparison with Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*

Several key differences distinguish the *Kurdish Shahnameh* from Ferdowsi's masterpiece:

- **Language:** The Kurdish versions are composed in Kurdish dialects, primarily Gorani (Hawrami), whereas Ferdowsi's is in Persian.<sup>13</sup> While Gorani's classification is debated (some consider it a distinct language, others a Kurdish dialect), it served as a significant literary language in the Zagros region, and Gorani poems are widely classified under Kurdish literature.<sup>14</sup> Manuscripts often refer to the language simply as "Kurdish".<sup>14</sup>
- **Meter:** The *Kurdish Shahnameh* predominantly uses a syllabic meter (typically ten syllables per hemistich, divided into two five-syllable parts), a common feature in Kurdish poetry, contrasting with the quantitative meter of Ferdowsi's work.<sup>13</sup>
- **Characters and Content:** The Kurdish versions include characters and episodes not found in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*.<sup>13</sup> There is also a body of work known as the *Razm-nama* or *Jang-nama* in literary Gurani which is considered largely independent of Ferdowsi's epic but shares features with other Sistani epic traditions.<sup>16</sup>
- **Religious Dimensions:** Some epic and romance narratives in Gorani from the 18th century exhibit a religious worldview with close ties to the Ahl-e Haqq faith, suggesting shared sources or formative impact during their oral phase.<sup>16</sup> Research by Chaman Ara highlights an original and independent textual tradition in the Gurani literary style for the Kurdish *Shahnameh*.<sup>17</sup>

Despite these differences, there are substantial thematic and narrative overlaps, particularly concerning the heroic deeds of figures like Rostam.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2.4. Cultural Significance

The *Kurdish Shahnameh* holds immense cultural value as a testament to the rich oral tradition of the Kurds and their distinct interpretation of shared Iranian epic heritage.<sup>13</sup> It has served as a vehicle for preserving Kurdish language, history, and cultural identity. The performance of these epics, often sung, has been a vital part of Kurdish cultural life.<sup>13</sup> The existence of numerous manuscripts and ongoing scholarly research underscores its importance.<sup>16</sup> Shahram Nazeri, a renowned Kurdish vocalist, has performed verses from the *Kurdish*

*Shahnameh* in his work *Avaze Asatir*, bringing these ancient poems to a wider audience.<sup>13</sup>

### **2.2.5. Versions and Translations**

As an orally transmitted tradition later documented by various individuals, the *Kurdish Shahnameh* exists in multiple manuscript versions and regional variations.<sup>13</sup> Collections of these epics have been published, and scholarly work continues to explore their diverse textual traditions.<sup>16</sup> While direct English translations of the entire corpus of the *Kurdish Shahnameh* are not as widely available as those for Ferdowsi's work, individual tales and scholarly analyses are accessible.<sup>15</sup> The term *Şahnameya Kurdî* itself indicates its Kurdish identity, and publications may specify dialects like Hawrami.<sup>14</sup>

## **2.3. Kela Dimdimê (Dimdim Castle)**

The epic of *Kela Dimdimê*, also known as *Xanê Çengzêrîn* (Golden-Armed Khan), is a powerful Kurdish heroic narrative rooted in historical events of resistance.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.3.1. Historical Basis and Origin**

*Kela Dimdimê* is based on a real rebellion that occurred in the 17th century (specifically around 1609-1610) in Iranian Kurdistan.<sup>19</sup> The focal point of this uprising was the Dimdim Castle, strategically located in the Mergever region, near Lake Urmia.<sup>19</sup> The epic recounts the struggle of the Kurds, led by Emir Xanê Lepzêrîn (Emir Khan the Golden-Armed), against the Safavid Shah Abbas I.<sup>19</sup> Feqiyê Teyran is credited with writing the first literary account of the Battle of Dimdim.<sup>22</sup>

### **2.3.2. Plot Summary**

The narrative typically begins with the Kurdish Khan, after years of wandering, approaching the Iranian Shah. In return for his services, the Khan requests a piece of land, often described as the size of an ox hide. On this land, he constructs the formidable Dimdim Castle.<sup>19</sup> As the Khan consolidates his power and asserts his sovereignty, his relationship with the Shah deteriorates.<sup>19</sup> Perceiving this as a challenge to his authority, Shah Abbas sends his armies to besiege Dimdim Castle.<sup>19</sup> The Kurds, under the leadership of Emir Khan, mount a valiant resistance against the overwhelming Safavid forces, holding out for a significant period, often cited as seven years.<sup>19</sup> During the siege, the Khan seeks assistance from the Ottoman Sultan and various Kurdish tribes.<sup>19</sup> The siege is characterized by immense hardship and bravery, but often, betrayal from within plays a role in the castle's eventual fall. One account mentions a traitor named Mehmûdê Melekanî (or Mahmoud Mukaryani) who reveals the castle's water source to Shah Abbas in exchange for his own safety, leading to the defenders being cut off from their water supply.<sup>23</sup> Despite their heroic efforts, the defenders are ultimately overcome, and the epic often concludes with the tragic demise of the Khan and his followers.

### **2.3.3. Main Characters**

- **Emir Xanê Lepzêrîn / Xanê Çengzêrîn (Golden-Armed Khan):** The central heroic

figure, the Kurdish prince of the Bradost clan, who builds Dimdim Castle and leads the rebellion against Shah Abbas I, aspiring for Kurdish independence.<sup>19</sup>

- **Shah Abbas I:** The Safavid Shah of Iran, who initially grants land to the Khan but later lays siege to Dimdim Castle to crush the rebellion.<sup>19</sup>
- **Kurdish Defenders:** The warriors and people within Dimdim Castle who exhibit immense bravery and resilience during the prolonged siege.<sup>19</sup>
- **Gûlbihar (Kolbhar):** The beautiful wife of Prince Xanê Lepzêrîn, whose beauty is also desired by a leader named Khan, potentially contributing to internal tensions or betrayals.<sup>23</sup>
- **Mehmûdê Melekanî / Mahmoud Mukaryani:** Often depicted as a traitor who reveals the castle's secrets to the enemy, contributing to its downfall.<sup>23</sup>

#### 2.3.4. Major Themes

- **Heroism and Resistance:** The paramount theme is the unwavering courage and resistance of the Kurds against a vastly superior imperial power, embodying the spirit of defiance in the face of oppression.<sup>5</sup>
- **Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence:** The epic reflects the Kurdish aspiration for self-rule and freedom from external domination.<sup>19</sup>
- **Betrayal:** The element of internal betrayal often features prominently, highlighting a recurring motif in narratives of failed resistance and adding a layer of tragedy.<sup>23</sup>
- **Sacrifice:** The defenders of Dimdim make the ultimate sacrifice for their cause, underscoring the high cost of freedom.<sup>5</sup>
- **Kurdish Unity (and its challenges):** While the epic showcases unified resistance, the attempts to seek aid from other Kurdish tribes and the presence of betrayal also hint at the complexities of achieving broader Kurdish solidarity.<sup>19</sup>

#### 2.3.5. Cultural Significance and Influence

*Kela Dimdimê* is a cornerstone of Kurdish heroic folklore and a powerful symbol of Kurdish resilience and the historical struggle for autonomy.<sup>5</sup> It serves as a historical narrative, preserving the memory of a significant event in Kurdish history, and as an inspirational tale that reinforces values of courage, honor, and resistance against injustice.<sup>5</sup> The epic has been passed down through oral tradition, particularly by *dengbêj*, and has also been documented in written forms and scholarly works.<sup>6</sup> Its story of defiance against overwhelming odds continues to resonate within Kurdish society, often invoked in contexts of political and cultural struggle.

#### 2.3.6. Different Versions and Translations

The epic of *Kela Dimdimê* exists in several variants, collected from different regions and periods. The scholar Ordîxanê Celîl notably compiled six such variants in his doctoral thesis, which were later published with Turkish translations.<sup>19</sup> These variants showcase regional differences in the telling of the epic while preserving its core narrative and themes. The story

has also been adapted into modern literary forms, including novels.<sup>24</sup> The Kurdish writer Jan Dost has also written an epic poem titled *Kela Dimdimê*, published in 1991.<sup>26</sup> While direct English translations of all variants might be limited, the story is known, and its themes are discussed in studies of Kurdish folklore and literature.<sup>5</sup>

## **2.4. *Siyabend û Xecê***

*Siyabend û Xecê* (Siyabend and Xecê) is one of the most beloved and poignant romantic epics in Kurdish folklore, celebrated for its themes of tragic love and heroism.<sup>3</sup> It is often ranked second in importance only to *Mem û Zîn* within the Kurdish oral tradition.<sup>29</sup>

### **2.4.1. Origin and Transmission**

The epic of *Siyabend û Xecê* originates from Kurdish oral tradition, meticulously preserved and transmitted through generations by *dengbêj*.<sup>3</sup> Its alternative title, *Siyabendê Sîlivî û Xecê Zerê* (Siyabend of Siliva and Xecê, daughter of Zerê), points to specific regional connections within the narrative.<sup>30</sup> The story is widely known across Kurdistan, with variations in names (Siyabend sometimes referred to as Siyamend or Siyamed) and plot details reflecting its oral dissemination and adaptation in different locales, particularly the Süphan region.<sup>29</sup> Over time, this folkloric epic has also been documented in written form, with at least three books by different authors dedicated to it, and adapted into film.<sup>29</sup>

### **2.4.2. Plot Summary**

The narrative of *Siyabend û Xecê* is a tale of profound love beset by hardship and culminating in tragedy. One prominent version begins with Siyabend, an orphan from a poor family, mistreated by his uncle, for whom he works as a shepherd.<sup>3</sup> After an incident where a sheep's leg is broken, Siyabend flees his uncle's wrath and seeks refuge in the Süphan Mountains.<sup>3</sup> He becomes a skilled hunter and a figure of justice, helping the oppressed.<sup>3</sup>

His life takes a fateful turn when he meets Xecê, a beautiful young woman living with her seven brothers in a makeshift tent near Süphan Mountain. They had been exiled from their village because Xecê refused to marry the local agha (chieftain).<sup>3</sup> Siyabend and Xecê fall deeply in love. In some versions, Siyabend must prove his worth or overcome obstacles set by Xecê's family or community. A notable variant describes Siyabend fleeing his aunt in Deşta Sîlivî, becoming a hero for Emer Axa, refusing Emer Axa's daughter Elîf, and eventually meeting Xecê among the Şikakan tribe in Eastern Kurdistan. There, due to Xecê, he wishes to marry all seven of her brothers (a symbolic gesture or misunderstanding), but Xecê is not given to him. In this version, he kills Xecê's seven brothers and takes her.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of the specific path to their union, their happiness is often short-lived. In the version where Xecê is kidnapped by the vengeful agha, Siyabend heroically rescues her, killing the agha during the forced wedding ceremony.<sup>3</sup> They return to the mountains, but tragedy looms. One day, as Siyabend rests his head on Xecê's lap, she sees a herd of deer and weeps, perhaps from a premonition or longing.<sup>3</sup> Siyabend, misinterpreting her tears as a sign of hunger or sadness, sets off to hunt the deer despite Xecê's (in some versions) attempts to



dissuade him.<sup>30</sup> He shoots a magnificent male gazelle (or the oldest deer) on the treacherous slopes of Mount Sîpan.<sup>3</sup> As he approaches the wounded animal, it makes a final surge, causing Siyabend to fall into a ravine or off a cliff, where he is fatally impaled by a sharp rock or a tree branch.<sup>3</sup>

Xecê, worried by his long absence, searches for him and finds him dying.<sup>3</sup> Overcome with grief and unable to save him, Siyabend implores her to live on, but Xecê, in her despair, ties her shawl around her eyes and throws herself from the cliff, dying beside him, sometimes impaled on the same branch.<sup>3</sup> The epic often concludes with the symbolic image of two roses blooming from their graves, with a thorny bush growing between them, signifying their eternal love and the enduring obstacles they faced.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.4.3. Main Characters

- **Siyabend (Siyabendê Sîlivî):** The brave, skilled hunter, and often orphaned protagonist. He is depicted as courageous, righteous, and deeply in love with Xecê.<sup>3</sup> His recklessness or lack of confidence can also be a contributing factor to the tragedy.<sup>31</sup>
- **Xecê (Xecê Zerê):** A woman of renowned beauty and strong will, who reciprocates Siyabend's love. She often faces pressure from her family or societal figures like an agha.<sup>3</sup>
- **Xecê's Father/Brothers:** Their role varies across versions, sometimes acting as obstacles due to Siyabend's poverty or other social reasons, or, as in one version, being killed by Siyabend.<sup>3</sup>
- **The Agha:** An oppressive local chieftain who desires Xecê and acts as an antagonist, representing societal injustice.<sup>3</sup>
- **Siyabend's Uncle/Aunt:** Often portrayed as cruel figures from Siyabend's early life, contributing to his flight to the mountains.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.4.4. Major Themes

- **Tragic Love:** The central theme is the passionate but ill-fated love between Siyabend and Xecê, a love that defies societal norms but ultimately succumbs to tragic circumstances.<sup>3</sup>
- **Heroism and Courage:** Siyabend embodies heroic qualities through his hunting prowess, his fight against injustice, and his devotion to Xecê.<sup>29</sup>
- **Social Injustice and Oppression:** The epic often depicts the harsh realities of feudal society, including the tyranny of aghas, poverty, and family pressure, which act as formidable barriers to the lovers' happiness.<sup>3</sup>
- **Fate and Destiny:** A sense of inevitability often pervades the narrative, suggesting that the lovers are star-crossed, and their tragic end is preordained.<sup>31</sup>
- **Nature as a Dual Force:** The mountains (especially Mount Sîpan) serve as both a refuge for the lovers and the setting for their tragic demise, highlighting nature's beauty and peril.<sup>3</sup>
- **Sacrifice and Devotion:** Both Siyabend and Xecê exhibit profound devotion, with Xecê

ultimately choosing death over life without Siyabend.<sup>3</sup>

- **Oral Tradition and Cultural Identity:** The epic is a key product of the *dengbêj* tradition, representing social and cultural identity and reflecting the collective emotions and historical readings of Kurdish society.<sup>3</sup>

#### 2.4.5. Symbolism

- **Mount Sîpan:** A majestic and treacherous mountain, symbolizing both a sanctuary and the site of ultimate tragedy.
- **The Gazelle/Deer:** The hunt for the gazelle acts as the catalyst for the tragic climax. The animal can symbolize elusive beauty, fate, or a test of Siyabend's prowess that leads to his downfall. Xecê's tears upon seeing them might symbolize a premonition or a deep connection to the natural world that Siyabend misinterprets.<sup>3</sup>
- **The Thornbush/Roses:** Similar to *Mem û Zîn*, the image of roses blooming from their graves, often separated by a thornbush, symbolizes their undying love and the persistent forces that divided them.<sup>3</sup>

#### 2.4.6. Cultural Significance and Influence

*Siyabend û Xecê* is a vital part of Kurdish cultural heritage, deeply embedded in the collective consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

- It is a testament to the richness of Kurdish oral literature and the enduring power of the *dengbêj* tradition.<sup>30</sup>
- The story reflects societal values, struggles against oppression, and the profound importance of love and loyalty within Kurdish culture.<sup>3</sup>
- Like *Mem û Zîn*, it has been compared to other great love epics of world literature, such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Layla and Majnun*.<sup>3</sup>
- The epic has been adapted into other art forms, including a film directed by Şahin Gök (1991/1992), which used the legend to explore the history and struggle of the Kurdish people.<sup>29</sup> This film was notably one of the first to feature Kurdish dialogue after years of prohibition in Turkey.<sup>30</sup>

#### 2.4.7. Different Versions and Translations

The oral nature of *Siyabend û Xecê* has led to numerous regional variations in plot details and character portrayals.<sup>29</sup> The core narrative of tragic love remains consistent. Written versions have been compiled by authors like M. Said Ramazan al-Bûtî.<sup>33</sup> While specific English book-length translations of the epic are not widely prominent in the provided materials, the story is known and discussed in collections of Kurdish folklore and academic studies.<sup>6</sup> The film adaptation has also contributed to its international recognition.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.5. *Zembîlfiroş* (The Basket Seller)

*Zembîlfiroş* is a renowned Kurdish folkloric tale, often presented as an epic poem, attributed to the classical Kurdish poet Feqiyê Teyran (1590–1660).<sup>22</sup> It is believed to be based on a true

story, passed down through oral tradition for generations, and holds a significant place in Kurdish mythology and moral narratives.<sup>35</sup>

### **2.5.1. Origin and Author**

The story of *Zembîlfiroş* is a well-known narrative within Kurdish oral literature, and Feqiyê Teyran, a pioneer of Kurdish Sufi literature, is credited with one of its most significant literary renditions.<sup>22</sup> The tale's themes of piety, renunciation, and the struggle against temptation align with Sufi ideals. Some efforts were made in 1930s Soviet Armenia to promote oral epics like *Zembîlfiroş* to the status of a national epic, though *Mem û Zîn* ultimately retained that prominence.<sup>8</sup>

### **2.5.2. Plot Summary**

The epic revolves around Prince Saed (*Zembîlfiroş*), the son of Prince Hassan, who ruled in Farqîn (near Amed/Diyarbakır).<sup>35</sup> Prince Hassan was reportedly an evil governor, a fact that deeply troubled his son.<sup>35</sup> One day, while hunting, *Zembîlfiroş* encounters a grave with skeletal remains, leading to a profound existential realization about death and the transience of worldly power.<sup>37</sup> This experience instigates a spiritual awakening, causing him to renounce his princely life, wealth, and status.<sup>37</sup>

He leaves his luxurious life, often accompanied by his wife and children, and migrates southward, eventually settling near Zakho or in Farkin (Silvan).<sup>35</sup> There, he adopts a humble life, making and selling *zembîl* (baskets) for a living, hence his name "*Zembîlfiroş*" (the basket seller).<sup>35</sup> He becomes a dervish, a man of God, devoted to a pious existence.<sup>37</sup>

The central conflict arises when Xatûn, the beautiful wife of the local Beg (governor/ruler) of Farkin (or Silvan), sees *Zembîlfiroş* and is struck by his handsome appearance and noble bearing.<sup>37</sup> She becomes passionately enamored with him and, under the pretext of buying baskets, summons him to her palace.<sup>37</sup> Xatûn declares her love for *Zembîlfiroş* and attempts to seduce him, offering him wealth and pleasure.<sup>37</sup>

However, *Zembîlfiroş*, steadfast in his piety and his love for his wife, rejects Xatûn's advances.<sup>37</sup> He emphasizes his commitment to God and his repentance from worldly desires. Xatûn, consumed by unrequited love and passion, persists relentlessly. In some versions, she even attempts to bribe *Zembîlfiroş*'s wife with valuable jewelry for a chance to spend a night in his bed.<sup>38</sup> When *Zembîlfiroş* discovers Xatûn in his bed (identifying her by her ankle bracelets, a mark of royalty), he immediately flees.<sup>38</sup>

The climax of the story varies in different tellings. In one version, unable to escape Xatûn's relentless pursuit and to preserve his virtue, *Zembîlfiroş* throws himself from the ramparts or a high tower of the palace (the *Zembîlfiroş* Bastion in Silvan is associated with this event) and dies.<sup>38</sup> In another version, he prays to God to take his life to escape the temptation, and his prayer is answered. Xatûn, witnessing his death or overcome by her unfulfilled desire, also dies, sometimes by throwing herself from the same tower or by a similar prayer.<sup>38</sup> The grave of *Zembîlfiroş* (Prince Saed) is believed to be in Batifa, Zakho District, Dohuk Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.5.3. Main Characters

- **Zembîlfiroş (Prince Saed):** The protagonist, a handsome prince who renounces his worldly life for piety and humility, becoming a basket seller. He is characterized by his strong faith, moral integrity, and devotion to his wife and God.<sup>35</sup>
- **Xatûn:** The beautiful and powerful wife of the local Beg. She becomes infatuated with Zembîlfiroş and relentlessly pursues him, representing worldly temptation and passionate, unrequited love.<sup>37</sup>
- **Zembîlfiroş's Wife:** A loyal and pious woman who shares her husband's humble life. In some versions, she is tempted by Xatûn's wealth but ultimately remains faithful or is part of the tragic circumstances.<sup>38</sup>
- **The Beg of Farkin/Silvan:** Xatûn's husband, a ruler whose presence underscores Xatûn's high status and the risks involved in her pursuit of Zembîlfiroş.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.5.4. Major Themes

- **Piety and Divine Love vs. Worldly Temptation:** The core theme is the struggle between spiritual devotion and the allure of worldly pleasures, particularly illicit passion. Zembîlfiroş embodies unwavering faith and resistance to temptation.<sup>22</sup>
- **Renunciation of Material Wealth and Power:** Zembîlfiroş's voluntary abandonment of his princely status for a life of poverty and humility highlights the Sufi ideal of detachment from the material world.<sup>37</sup>
- **Moral Integrity and Faithfulness:** The epic champions the virtues of steadfastness in one's beliefs, marital fidelity, and resistance to sin, even at the cost of one's life.<sup>37</sup>
- **Unrequited Love and its Consequences:** Xatûn's passionate but unreciprocated love drives the narrative to its tragic conclusion, illustrating the destructive potential of unchecked desire.<sup>37</sup>
- **The Transience of Life and Power:** Zembîlfiroş's awakening at the sight of a grave underscores the ephemeral nature of worldly existence and motivates his spiritual quest.<sup>37</sup>
- **Death as a Deliverance:** In some versions, death becomes the only escape for Zembîlfiroş from unbearable temptation, framing martyrdom as a triumph of faith.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.5.5. Symbolism

- **Baskets (Zembîl):** Symbolize humility, honest labor, and the simple, pious life Zembîlfiroş chooses over princely luxury. The act of selling baskets is his means of sustenance and a marker of his renunciation.
- **The Palace/Tower:** Represents worldly power, wealth, and the site of temptation. Zembîlfiroş's leap from the tower can be seen as a final rejection of these worldly trappings and a desperate act to preserve his spiritual purity.
- **The Grave (encountered by Zembîlfiroş initially):** A potent symbol of mortality and the vanity of earthly possessions, acting as the catalyst for Zembîlfiroş's spiritual transformation.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.5.6. Cultural Significance and Influence

*Zembîlfiroş* is a highly significant tale in Kurdish folklore, comparable in its regional renown to epics like *Mem û Zîn* and *Siyabend û Xecê*.<sup>6</sup>

- It serves as a moral and spiritual guide, imparting lessons on piety, integrity, and the importance of resisting temptation.
- The story has been a popular subject for folk songs, poems, and oral narratives, deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of Kurdistan.<sup>37</sup>
- Feqiyê Teyran's poetic rendition has cemented its place in classical Kurdish literature.<sup>22</sup>
- The association of specific locations, like the Zembîlfiroş Bastion in Silvan and the purported grave in Batifa, with the epic attests to its enduring presence in the collective memory and landscape of the Kurdish regions.<sup>35</sup>
- The tale is also listed among other important Kurdish epics like *Memê Alan*, *Siyabend û Xecê*, and *Kela Dimdim* in discussions of Kurdish folk literature products that represent social and cultural identity.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.5.7. Different Versions and Translations

As an orally transmitted tale later adapted into literary form, *Zembîlfiroş* likely exists in various regional versions, though the core elements of the prince-turned-basket-seller and the infatuated noblewoman remain consistent.<sup>35</sup> Feqiyê Teyran's version is the most cited literary adaptation.<sup>22</sup> The story is also part of collections of Kurdish epics and legends, such as the "Kurdish Epics Set" which includes a version by Gülistan Çoban.<sup>33</sup> While the Wikipedia page for *Zembîlfiroş* is available in Kurdish and Igbo, specific widely circulated English translations of Teyran's full poetic work are not detailed in the provided sources, though the story itself is known and retold in English-language collections of Kurdish folklore.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.6. Kawa the Blacksmith (Kawayê Hesinger)

The legend of *Kawa the Blacksmith (Kawayê Hesinger)* is a foundational myth for Kurds and other peoples of the region, symbolizing resistance against tyranny and the celebration of freedom, deeply intertwined with the festival of Newroz.<sup>39</sup>

### 2.6.1. Origin and Narrative

The story of Kawa is an ancient legend, with versions appearing in various cultural traditions, including the Persian epic *Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi, which recounts the tale of Kawa's rebellion against the tyrannical king Zahhak (also Dehak or Azhdehak).<sup>40</sup> While the *Shahnameh* provides a significant literary rendition, the legend has been told and retold orally for centuries, with variations specific to different communities, including the Kurds.<sup>39</sup> The core narrative revolves around a cruel and despotic king, Zahhak, who is afflicted with a curse: two serpents grow from his shoulders, demanding a daily tribute of the brains of two young people to alleviate his pain.<sup>39</sup> This horrific practice plunges the land into terror and despair. Kawa, a humble but courageous blacksmith, has already lost several of his own

children (often seven sons) to Zahhak's monstrous appetite.<sup>39</sup>

Driven by grief and a desire for justice, Kawa devises a plan to end the tyranny. In some versions, a compassionate cook at the palace secretly substitutes one child's brain with a sheep's brain each day, sparing some children who are then sent to the mountains, becoming the ancestors of the Kurds.<sup>44</sup> When it is the turn of Kawa's last child (sometimes a daughter) to be sacrificed, he refuses to submit.<sup>44</sup> Kawa rallies the oppressed people, using his skills as a blacksmith to forge weapons for an uprising.<sup>39</sup> He leads the rebellion, and in many versions, storms Zahhak's palace and kills the tyrant, often with his blacksmith's hammer.<sup>39</sup> To signal the victory and the dawn of a new era of freedom, Kawa lights a large bonfire on the mountainside.<sup>39</sup> In some tellings, he waves his blacksmith's apron, attached to a spear, as a banner of revolt and triumph.<sup>41</sup> This act of lighting the fire is directly linked to the celebration of Newroz.

### 2.6.2. Main Characters

- **Kawa the Blacksmith (Kawayê Hesinger):** The heroic blacksmith who embodies courage, resistance, justice, and the spirit of rebellion against oppression. He represents labor and the common people rising against tyranny.<sup>39</sup>
- **Zahhak (Dehak/Azhdehak):** The evil and tyrannical king, often depicted with serpents growing from his shoulders, symbolizing his monstrous nature and oppressive rule.<sup>39</sup>
- **The People/The Youth:** Those who suffer under Zahhak's rule and are mobilized by Kawa to join the rebellion.<sup>39</sup>
- **Faridoon (in Ferdowsi's version):** A prince who, with Kawa's help, overthrows Zahhak and becomes the new king.<sup>44</sup> In most Kurdish versions, Kawa himself is the primary leader of the revolt and refuses kingship.

### 2.6.3. Major Themes

- **Resistance against Tyranny:** This is the central theme. Kawa's uprising is a powerful symbol of the fight for freedom and liberation from oppressive rule.<sup>39</sup>
- **Justice and Freedom:** The legend champions the ideals of societal justice and the emancipation from slavery and oppression.<sup>39</sup>
- **Courage and Sacrifice:** Kawa's bravery in confronting Zahhak and the sacrifices made by the people are key elements of the narrative.<sup>42</sup>
- **Hope and Renewal:** The victory over Zahhak and the lighting of the Newroz fire signify the end of darkness and the beginning of a new, hopeful era, mirroring the renewal associated with spring.<sup>39</sup>
- **The Power of the People/Labor:** Kawa, as a blacksmith, represents the strength and agency of the working class and common people in overthrowing a tyrant.<sup>41</sup> His apron becoming a banner is a potent symbol of this.

### 2.6.4. Cultural Significance and Connection to Newroz

The legend of Kawa the Blacksmith is of paramount cultural significance for Kurds,

inextricably linked to Newroz, the Kurdish New Year, celebrated on March 21st (the spring equinox).<sup>39</sup>

- **Symbol of Newroz:** Kawa's revolt and the lighting of the fire are considered the mythological origin of Newroz celebrations. The fires lit during Newroz commemorate Kawa's signal of victory and freedom.<sup>39</sup>
- **National Identity and Resistance:** Newroz, through the Kawa legend, has become a potent symbol of Kurdish national identity, endurance, and continuous struggle for rights and recognition. It is a day of celebrating Kurdish culture and affirming Kurdish existence, often in the face of political repression.<sup>40</sup>
- **Modern Symbolism:** The figure of Kawa has been invoked in modern contexts of Kurdish resistance. For instance, Mazlum Doğan, a Kurdish activist who self-immolated in a Turkish prison on the eve of Newroz in 1982, is often referred to as the "Kawa of the modern era," his act reigniting Newroz as a symbol of defiance.<sup>40</sup>
- **Cultural Heritage:** Statues of Kawa have been erected in Kurdish regions, and their destruction, as seen in Afrin in 2018, is perceived by Kurds as an assault on their identity and heritage.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.6.5. Variations and Literary Presence

While the story is most famously recounted in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, various oral versions exist among Kurds and other peoples.<sup>39</sup> These versions may differ in details, but the core narrative of Kawa's heroic rebellion against Zahhak remains consistent. The legend is present in Kurdish songs and folklore.<sup>39</sup> There isn't a single, definitive "Kurdish epic poem" of Kawa in the same way as *Mem û Zîn*, but rather a pervasive legend that informs various artistic and cultural expressions, including poetry and songs that allude to or narrate parts of the story.<sup>45</sup> The story's structure is that of a heroic myth, detailing the rise of a hero against a monstrous tyrant, a popular uprising, and the establishment of a new order symbolized by fire and celebration.

## 2.7. *Shirin and Farhad (Şîrîn û Ferhad)* - Kurdish Adaptations

The romance of *Shirin and Farhad* is a celebrated tale with Persian origins, most famously poeticized by Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209) in his work *Khosrow and Shirin*.<sup>47</sup> While not originally a Kurdish epic, the story, particularly the figure of Farhad and his tragic love for Shirin, has deeply permeated Kurdish folklore, songs, and literary imagination, leading to distinct Kurdish resonances and adaptations.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.7.1. Origin and Core Narrative (Nizami's Version)

Nizami Ganjavi's *Khosrow and Shirin* is the second poem in his *Khamsa* (Quintet) and tells the fictionalized love story of the Sasanian King Khosrow II for the Christian Armenian princess Shirin.<sup>47</sup> The narrative is complex, involving political intrigue, rivalry, and enduring love. A key subplot, which often takes center stage in popular imagination and later adaptations, is the story of Farhad, a skilled sculptor or stonecutter.<sup>47</sup> Farhad falls deeply in love with Shirin and becomes Khosrow's rival. To rid himself of Farhad, Khosrow assigns him the impossible

task of carving a passage or stairs through the Behistun mountain.<sup>47</sup> Farhad undertakes this monumental labor, driven by the hope of winning Shirin. However, Khosrow, through a deceitful messenger, sends false news of Shirin's death to Farhad. Devastated, Farhad throws himself from the mountaintop and dies.<sup>47</sup> Shirin eventually marries Khosrow, but their story also ends tragically with Khosrow's murder by his own son, Shiroyeh, who also desires Shirin, leading to Shirin's suicide.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.7.2. Kurdish Resonance and Adaptations

The story of Shirin and Farhad, often referred to as *Şîrîn û Ferhad* or simply *Ferhad û Şîrîn* in Kurdish contexts, has been widely embraced and retold within Kurdish oral tradition.<sup>28</sup> The *Encyclopædia Iranica* notes that "The influence of the legend of Farhad is not limited to literature, but permeates the whole of Persian culture, including folklore and the fine arts. Farhad's helve supposedly grew into a tree with medicinal qualities, and there are popular laments for Farhad, especially among the Kurds (Mokri)".<sup>47</sup> This indicates a strong emotional connection and local adaptations of the Farhad narrative within Kurdish culture. Kurdish oral literature, including *lawk* (heroic or love epics) and *beyt* (love and tragedy epics), features the story of *Shirin and Farhad* alongside other prominent romances like *Xec û Siyamend*.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that the tale has been integrated into the repertoire of *dengbêj* and folk singers, adapted to Kurdish linguistic and musical forms. While specific textual Kurdish epic poems solely dedicated to *Shirin and Farhad* from classical Kurdish poets are less documented in the provided sources compared to *Mem û Zîn*, the thematic presence is undeniable.<sup>12</sup> The story is mentioned as one of the classic narrations known among Kurds, alongside *Mem û Zîn* and the *Kurdish Shahnameh*.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.7.3. Main Characters (in the context of the Farhad story)

- **Shirin (Şîrîn):** An Armenian princess of great beauty and intelligence, the object of both Khosrow's and Farhad's affections.<sup>47</sup>
- **Farhad (Ferhad):** A highly skilled sculptor or stonecutter, symbolizing pure, devoted, and ultimately tragic love. His monumental efforts and heartbreaking demise have made him a legendary figure of romantic sacrifice.<sup>47</sup>
- **Khosrow (Xusrew):** The Sasanian King, Farhad's powerful rival for Shirin's love. He is often depicted as jealous and manipulative in his dealings with Farhad.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.7.4. Major Themes in Kurdish Context

While the broader epic of *Khosrow and Shirin* deals with themes of kingship, war, and courtly love, the segments focusing on Farhad, which resonate strongly in Kurdish folklore, emphasize:

- **Unrequited and Tragic Love:** Farhad's selfless and unfulfilled love for Shirin is a central theme.<sup>54</sup>
- **Sacrifice and Devotion:** Farhad's willingness to undertake an impossible task and his ultimate death for love exemplify extreme devotion.<sup>54</sup>
- **Artistic Endeavor and Passion:** Farhad's skill as a sculptor is integral to his character



and his tragic fate, as his labor of love becomes the means of his destruction.

- **Injustice and Cruelty of Power:** Khosrow's deceitful actions towards Farhad highlight the abuse of power and the suffering of the common man at the hands of rulers.
- **Perseverance:** Farhad's relentless effort in carving the mountain symbolizes unwavering determination in the pursuit of love.

### 2.7.5. Cultural Significance and Influence

The story of Farhad's love for Shirin has become a significant motif in Kurdish culture, often used to express themes of deep sorrow, longing, and the pain of unattainable love.<sup>47</sup> The existence of "popular laments for Farhad, especially among the Kurds," points to a living tradition where this story is emotionally resonant and culturally embedded.<sup>47</sup> The tale's inclusion in the repertoire of *dengbêj* ensures its continued transmission and adaptation within the Kurdish oral tradition.<sup>28</sup> Its mention alongside indigenous Kurdish epics like *Mem û Zîn* and *Siyabend û Xecê* underscores its adoption and naturalization within the Kurdish literary and folkloric landscape.<sup>12</sup> The narrative, like other epics, contributes to the formation of aesthetic ideals and explores moral and philosophical dimensions through its characters and plot.<sup>50</sup>

While the provided sources do not detail specific, lengthy Kurdish epic poems solely focused on *Shirin and Farhad* with the same prominence as *Mem û Zîn*, the widespread folkloric presence, particularly of Farhad's tragic love, and its integration into Kurdish oral and musical traditions, confirm its status as a significant and beloved narrative within Kurdish culture. The story is also listed among Yezidi songs in the Kurmanji dialect, indicating its reach across different Kurdish communities.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.8. Derwêşê Evdî û Edûlê

The epic of *Derwêşê Evdî û Edûlê* (Dervish Evdi and Adula) is a renowned Kurdish heroic and romantic epic, deeply rooted in historical events and tribal dynamics, particularly reflecting the complex interplay of ethnic and religious identities within Kurdish society.<sup>6</sup> It is considered as famous and widespread as *Mem û Zîn* and *Siyabend û Xecê*, but with a stronger emphasis on real historical occurrences.<sup>59</sup>

### 2.8.1. Origin and Historical Context

The epic is based on actual events, primarily a major war that took place around 1780-1800 near Viranşehir between the Milli Kurdish Tribal Confederation and an alliance of Arab (Shammar and Gassan) and Turkmen tribes who had encroached upon Kurdish territories.<sup>59</sup> Derwêşê Evdî was the commander of the Milan (a prominent tribe within the Milli confederation) forces.<sup>59</sup> The narrative is set in a region characterized by diverse social groups, including Yezidi Kurds and Muslim Kurds, as well as neighboring Arab and Turkmen communities, and the epic reflects this multicultural and often contentious environment.<sup>58</sup> Oskar Mann collected an early version of the *Derwêşê Evdî* war epic in Urfa in 1906 from the singer Sheikh Bouzan, highlighting its presence in early 20th-century oral tradition.<sup>57</sup>

### 2.8.2. Plot Summary

The epic generally unfolds in two main parts. The first part details the tribal structures, customs, local conflicts, and the build-up to the great war.<sup>59</sup> When enemy tribes threaten the Milli Confederation's lands, their chief, Zor Temir Pasha, seeks a commander for his forces, offering his daughter Edûlê (Adula) in marriage, along with wealth and status, to the hero who accepts the challenge.<sup>59</sup> After Milan heroes hesitate, Zor Temir Pasha requests assistance from Derwêş, the chief of the Yezidi Şerqî (Sharki) tribe, and his father Evdê Milhim.<sup>59</sup> Derwêş, a valiant Yezidi hero, accepts the "Condition Coffee" from Edûlê, signifying his acceptance of the command and engagement to her.<sup>59</sup> This union is fraught with tension due to the religious differences – Derwêş being Yezidi and Edûlê (and the Milan) being Muslim – a marriage generally unaccepted by both communities.<sup>58</sup> Despite Edûlê's pleas for him not to go to a war where death seems certain, Derwêş insists it is honorable to fight for the occupied Kurdish lands.<sup>59</sup> He leads the Milan forces into battle against the Arab-Turkmen alliance. After ten years of fighting, Derwêş Evdî is martyred on the battlefield, often after his horse Hedban stumbles or is trapped.<sup>59</sup> Despite his death, the Milan forces ultimately defeat the enemy alliance, securing the Kurdish borders in the south.<sup>59</sup>

The second part of the epic focuses on the love between Derwêş and Edûlê and her profound grief. Edûlê arrives at the battlefield with reinforcements, finds Derwêş severely wounded (or dead), and lays his head on her lap, lamenting him with poignant songs often titled "Delal" (Beloved).<sup>59</sup>

### 2.8.3. Main Characters

- **Derwêş Evdî:** The central hero, a Yezidi chief of the Şerqî tribe, renowned for his bravery, national consciousness, and military prowess. He sacrifices his life for the Kurdish cause and becomes a symbol of Kurdish unity and resistance.<sup>57</sup>
- **Edûlê (Adula):** The daughter of Zor Temir Pasha, chief of the Muslim Milan tribe. She is beautiful and deeply in love with Derwêş. Her lamentations for him form a significant part of the epic.<sup>58</sup>
- **Zor Temir Pasha:** The Milan chief, Edûlê's father, who seeks a hero to lead his forces.<sup>59</sup>
- **Evdê Milhim:** Derwêş's father.<sup>59</sup>
- **Sadun:** Derwêş's brother.<sup>59</sup>
- **Hedban (or Luman/Noman):** Derwêş's mythological horse, often white or dark red-black, playing a crucial role in his battles.<sup>59</sup>
- **Tribal Leaders and Warriors:** Representatives of various Kurdish (Yezidi and Muslim), Arab, and Turkmen tribes involved in the conflict.<sup>58</sup>

### 2.8.4. Major Themes

- **Heroism and Sacrifice for the Homeland:** Derwêş Evdî embodies the selfless hero who prioritizes the defense of Kurdish lands and people over personal safety and even love.<sup>59</sup>

- **National Consciousness and Unity:** The epic, particularly in Yezidi variants, often portrays Derwêş as a figure who transcends tribal and religious divisions to fight for a broader Kurdish identity and unity against external enemies.<sup>58</sup> He is seen as a pioneer of Kurdish national leadership.<sup>59</sup>
- **Inter-Communal Relations (Yezidi-Muslim):** A significant theme is the tension and potential for alliance between Yezidi and Muslim Kurds. The forbidden love between Derwêş (Yezidi) and Edûlê (Muslim) highlights the religious boundaries, while their joint struggle against common enemies underscores shared Kurdish identity.<sup>58</sup>
- **Love and Loyalty:** The romance between Derwêş and Edûlê is a powerful element, with Edûlê's loyalty and grief being deeply moving. Derwêş's loyalty is to his people and his love for Edûlê.<sup>59</sup>
- **Tribal Warfare and Border Defense:** The epic provides a vivid depiction of tribal confederations, their conflicts, and the historical struggles to define and defend Kurdish territories.<sup>59</sup>
- **Religious and Ethnic Identity:** The epic serves as a platform for exploring how different Kurdish communities (Yezidi and Muslim) define themselves and interact with each other and with rival groups like Arabs and Turks. Yezidi versions often emphasize a broader Kurdish national struggle against combined Arab and Turkish adversaries, while Muslim versions may focus more on tribal conflicts.<sup>58</sup>

#### 2.8.5. Cultural Significance and Influence

*Derwêşê Evdî û Edûlê* is a vital part of Kurdish oral literature, reflecting historical realities, cultural values, and the complexities of Kurdish identity.<sup>6</sup>

- It preserves the memory of historical conflicts and heroic figures, contributing to the Kurdish collective historical narrative.<sup>59</sup>
- The epic is a powerful vehicle for expressing Kurdish aspirations for unity and resistance.<sup>59</sup>
- The figure of Derwêşê Evdî is celebrated as a national hero and a symbol of martyrdom for the Kurdish cause.<sup>59</sup>
- Variations in the epic across Yezidi and Muslim communities offer insights into the diverse perspectives and identity constructions within Kurdish society.<sup>58</sup> Yezidi bards, for instance, tend to elevate the narrative from tribal conflict to a national struggle, using it to assert their place within Kurdish nationhood while also highlighting their distinct ethno-religious identity.<sup>58</sup>
- The story is listed among the key Kurdish epics examined for their representation of social and cultural identity.<sup>6</sup>

#### 2.8.6. Different Versions and Translations

The epic exists in multiple oral variants, collected from both Yezidi and Muslim Kurdish communities across different regions, including the Caucasus, Shengal, and Urfa.<sup>57</sup> These versions show differences in emphasis, character portrayal, and the framing of conflicts (tribal

vs. national, inclusion of Turks as enemies, etc.).<sup>58</sup> For example, Sheikh Bouzan's version from Urfa names the hero "Derwêşê Evdî," while other regional versions use "Duriş Abdi".<sup>57</sup> Scholarly analyses, such as the one by Hikmettin Atli, compare these variants to understand their ethnic and religious dimensions.<sup>58</sup> While the epic is well-known in Kurdish, widely available English translations of full versions are not extensively detailed in the provided sources, though the story and its themes are discussed in academic works on Kurdish folklore.<sup>34</sup>

## **2.9. *Cembelî û Binevş***

The epic of *Cembelî û Binevş* (Cembeli and Binevsh) is a significant Kurdish love story, celebrated for its portrayal of romantic devotion, sacrifice of status, and the unique character of its protagonists. It is a well-established part of Kurdish oral literature, passed down by *dengbêj* for centuries.<sup>6</sup>

### **2.9.1. Origin and Transmission**

*Cembelî û Binevş* is an ancient epic with widespread diffusion across Kurdish regions, from Mosul to Serhat and Dersim.<sup>62</sup> Its endurance in the repertoire of Kurdish *dengbêj* highlights its cultural importance. The story is often known as *Cembelî Destanî* (The Cembelî Epic) and sometimes refers to Cembelî as the "Aşk Çobanî" (Shepherd of Love).<sup>62</sup> The narrative is set in the 16th century, involving Cembelî, the Emir of Hakkari, and Binevş, the daughter of Faris Bey of Karacadağ.<sup>65</sup>

### **2.9.2. Plot Summary**

The epic centers on the love between Cembelî, the son of a bey (chieftain) and heir to the chieftainship of Hakkari, and Binevşa Narîn (Delicate Binevş).<sup>62</sup> Unlike many epic lovers who resign to fate, Cembelî actively pursues his love in the earthly realm.<sup>62</sup> He prioritizes his love for Binevş over his inherited power and status, renouncing the privileges of his position until he can be with her.<sup>62</sup> In a remarkable act of devotion and humility, Cembelî works as a shepherd for Binevş's family.<sup>62</sup>

Binevş, a woman of high standing as an agha's daughter, reciprocates Cembelî's profound love.<sup>62</sup> However, she has been forcibly married to someone else due to tribal conflicts or pressures and has a child from this marriage, often named "Küçük Cembelî" (Little Cembelî) in a poignant nod to her true love.<sup>62</sup> Despite her marriage, Binevş's heart remains with Cembelî; she constantly dreams of him and cherishes the hope of their reunion.<sup>62</sup>

A significant moment in the epic occurs when Binevş sees Cembelî in his shepherd's attire. Overjoyed, she expresses her feelings in a *stran* (song), declaring her willingness to sacrifice her cousin Ahmed, her child Little Cembelî, and her entire tribe for the sake of Cembelî.<sup>62</sup> The epic often concludes tragically, with one theatrical adaptation depicting Cembelî's death and Binevş's subsequent suicide out of grief.<sup>65</sup>

### **2.9.3. Main Characters**

- **Cembelî:** The son of the Hakkari bey and heir to the chieftainship. He is portrayed as a "real lover" who is conscious, brave, self-confident, patient, and determined. He values love above power and status and uses reason in his pursuit of Binevş, avoiding violence associated with his father's influence.<sup>62</sup>
- **Binevş (Binevşa Narîn):** The daughter of Faris Bey of Karacadağ, an agha's daughter holding a respected position. She is deeply in love with Cembelî, even though she was forced into another marriage. Her devotion to Cembelî is absolute.<sup>62</sup>
- **Küçük Cembelî (Little Cembelî):** Binevş's child from her forced marriage, whose name reflects her enduring love for Cembelî.<sup>62</sup>
- **Ehmedê Pismam (Cousin Ahmed):** Mentioned in Binevş's song as someone she would sacrifice for Cembelî.<sup>62</sup>

#### 2.9.4. Major Themes

The epic of *Cembelî û Binevş* is distinguished by several key themes:

- **Love Transcending Status and Power:** Cembelî's renunciation of his princely status for love is a central theme, challenging conventional hierarchies.<sup>62</sup>
- **Active Pursuit of Love in the World:** Unlike epics where lovers passively accept fate or hope for reunion in the afterlife (e.g., *Mem û Zîn* to some extent), Cembelî actively strives for his love in the present world.<sup>62</sup>
- **Reason and Consciousness in Love's Pursuit:** Cembelî's approach is characterized by intellect and awareness, rather than impulsive or violent actions often associated with masculinity or power.<sup>62</sup>
- **Unwavering Devotion and Sacrifice:** Both Cembelî and Binevş exhibit profound loyalty and a willingness to make immense sacrifices for their love.<sup>62</sup> Binevş's declaration in her song is a powerful testament to this.
- **Forced Marriage and Tribal Conflict:** The backdrop of Binevş's forced marriage due to tribal issues highlights societal pressures that impede true love.<sup>62</sup>
- **Transformation of Love Narratives:** The epic is seen as transforming Kurdish love from a purely mythological concept into a tangible, worldly experience.<sup>62</sup>

#### 2.9.5. Cultural Significance and Influence

*Cembelî û Binevş* holds a significant place in Kurdish cultural heritage:

- **Ancient and Widespread Epic:** Its antiquity and broad dissemination across Kurdish lands attest to its deep roots and enduring appeal.<sup>62</sup>
- **Pillar of Oral Literature:** For centuries, it has been a staple of *dengbêj* performances, strengthening Kurdish oral literature and language. It is considered a cornerstone of this tradition and a vital source for written Kurdish literature.<sup>62</sup>
- **Embodiment of Ideal Love:** Cembelî is known as the "hero of Kurdish love," and the epic provides a model of devoted, active, and conscious love.<sup>62</sup>
- **Adaptations:** The story has been adapted into other forms, including a theatrical play that reportedly moved audiences to tears, underscoring its emotional power.<sup>65</sup>

- **Representation of Identity:** It is listed among the key Kurdish epics that are examined for their thematic content and representation of social and cultural identity.<sup>6</sup>

#### 2.9.6. Different Versions and Translations

As an orally transmitted epic, variations in the telling of *Cembelî û Binevş* across different regions are likely, though the core elements of the love story and the characters' defining traits remain consistent. The provided sources emphasize its oral nature and its documentation through collection efforts.<sup>62</sup> Specific English translations of the full epic are not extensively detailed, but its story and significance are noted in discussions of Kurdish folklore and literature.<sup>6</sup>

#### 2.10. Other Notable Epics from "Pênc Destanên Kurdî Yê Kevnar"

The collection titled *Pênc Destanên Kurdî Yê Kevnar* (Five Ancient Kurdish Epics), compiled by Mihemedê Pîrê, highlights several other significant narratives from Kurdish oral tradition.<sup>69</sup> These epics provide further insight into the diverse themes and rich storytelling heritage of the Kurds, often depicting daily life, historical events from a unique perspective, social customs, and cultural values of Kurdish society, particularly from the peripheries rather than the centers of power.<sup>69</sup> Each story is described as a long tale featuring numerous events and personalities.<sup>69</sup>

Besides *Sîyamendê Silîva xwedîyê tîr û kevanê ekfîyê zîvî* (which is *Siyabend û Xecê*, already discussed), the other epics in this collection are:

- **Destana Şah Bilbil û Mamedê kurê Mîrê Botan (The Epic of Shah Bilbil and Mamed, son of the Emir of Botan):** While specific plot details are scarce in the provided snippets, its title suggests a narrative involving royalty from the Botan region, a historically significant Kurdish emirate. The name "Şah Bilbil" (King Nightingale) hints at themes of eloquence, perhaps poetry or song, or a character known for a beautiful voice, intertwined with the story of Mamed, a prince of Botan.<sup>69</sup> Such epics often explore themes of love, heroism, and regional history.
- **Sînem û Mela Itman (Sinem and Mela Itman):** The title points to a story involving a female protagonist, Sînem, and a religious figure, Mela Itman. This pairing could explore themes of forbidden love, conflicts between secular and religious life, or social dramas within a community. The general context of Kurdish epics suggests it could be a tale of love, tragedy, or social commentary.<sup>2</sup>
- **Serpêhatîya Zîrek û Zelîxayê (The Adventure/Story of Zîrek and Zelikha):** This title suggests an adventurous narrative centered around two protagonists, Zîrek (meaning clever or agile) and Zelîxa (a name often associated with the story of Joseph and Zuleikha in Islamic tradition, though this could be a distinct Kurdish tale). It likely involves challenges, journeys, and perhaps a romantic element.<sup>69</sup> The name Zelîxa might hint at themes of intense love, temptation, or devotion, similar to the famous narrative, but adapted into a Kurdish cultural context.
- **Hesenê Alê û Têlî Eyşê (Hesen, son of Alê, and Têlî Eyşê):** This title indicates a story focused on Hesen, identified by his father Alê, and a female character, Têlî Eyşê. Epics

with such naming conventions often delve into familial relationships, tribal affiliations, love stories, or heroic deeds of the named individuals.<sup>67</sup> One snippet mentions a Biro HesNê Têlî as a famous fighter in the Ararat rebellion, suggesting that some figures from such epics might be linked to historical resistance movements, though it's unclear if this is the same Hesênê Alê.<sup>88</sup>

The collection *Pênc Destanên Kurdî Yên Kevnar* serves as an important resource for accessing these foundational narratives of Kurdish folklore, each offering a unique window into the cultural and historical tapestry of the Kurdish people.<sup>70</sup> Further detailed research into each of these specific epics would be necessary to fully uncover their individual plot intricacies, character developments, and thematic depths.

### 3. Thematic Analysis Across Kurdish Epics

Kurdish epics, as a collective body of literature, explore a range of recurring and deeply resonant themes that reflect the historical experiences, cultural values, and aspirations of the Kurdish people.

- **Love and Romance:** Perhaps the most pervasive theme is that of love, often tragic and star-crossed, as exemplified by *Mem û Zîn* and *Siyabend û Xecê*.<sup>2</sup> These epics delve into the intensity of romantic devotion, the pain of separation, and the societal obstacles that thwart lovers' unions. The love depicted is often pure and all-consuming, leading to ultimate sacrifice. Even in tales with different primary focuses, romantic subplots are common. The epic of *Cembelî û Binevş* further explores love transcending societal status and power.<sup>62</sup> The story of *Shirin and Farhad*, though Persian in origin, resonates deeply within Kurdish folklore for its portrayal of devoted, unrequited love and sacrifice.<sup>28</sup>
- **Heroism and Resistance:** Heroism is a central pillar of many Kurdish epics. Tales like *Kela Dimdimê* and *Kawa the Blacksmith* celebrate the courage of individuals and communities rising against tyranny and oppression.<sup>5</sup> *Derwêşê Evdî û Edûlê* portrays Derwêş as a national hero sacrificing his life for his people and land.<sup>59</sup> This theme often intertwines with the struggle for sovereignty and the defense of cultural identity. Rustemê Zal from the *Kurdish Shahnameh* is another archetypal hero, the "Kurdish Hercules".<sup>15</sup>
- **National Identity and Aspirations:** Several epics, most notably *Mem û Zîn*, are interpreted as allegories for the Kurdish nation's quest for unity, freedom, and statehood.<sup>2</sup> The tragic fate of the lovers often mirrors the perceived divisions and external pressures faced by the Kurdish people. The *Kurdish Shahnameh* also contributes to a sense of distinct cultural and historical narrative.<sup>13</sup> The epic of *Derwêşê Evdî û Edûlê*, especially in its Yezidi variants, strongly emphasizes Kurdish national identity in the face of external adversaries.<sup>58</sup>
- **Social Justice and Tyranny:** The fight against injustice is a powerful undercurrent. *Kawa the Blacksmith* is the quintessential story of overthrowing a tyrannical ruler.<sup>39</sup> *Siyabend û Xecê* often features oppressive aghas or beys whose actions drive the plot

and highlight social inequalities.<sup>3</sup> *Zembîlîfiroş* depicts a prince renouncing a potentially corrupt system for a life of piety.<sup>35</sup>

- **Fate and Destiny:** Many Kurdish epics grapple with the concept of fate. While heroes act with agency, there is often an underlying sense that certain outcomes are preordained, contributing to the tragic elements in love stories or the seemingly inevitable nature of certain conflicts.<sup>11</sup>
- **Moral and Spiritual Values:** Epics like *Zembîlîfiroş* explicitly explore themes of piety, renunciation of worldly goods, and moral integrity in the face of temptation.<sup>22</sup> *Mem û Zîn* also contains strong mystical dimensions, where earthly love can be seen as a metaphor for divine love.<sup>8</sup>
- **The Role of Oral Tradition (Dengbêj):** The epics themselves are a testament to the power of oral tradition and the crucial role of *dengbêj* in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, history, and societal values.<sup>2</sup> The very act of telling these stories is a theme of cultural continuity.
- **Betrayal:** As seen in *Kela Dimdimê* with figures like Mehmûdê Melekanî and in *Mem û Zîn* with Beko, betrayal often serves as a catalyst for tragedy and the downfall of heroes or communities, reflecting a painful aspect of historical and social experience.<sup>2</sup>

These themes are not mutually exclusive; rather, they often intertwine, creating complex narratives that have resonated with Kurdish audiences for centuries and continue to inform their understanding of their past and present. The epics provide a "society's general ideas, their readings of past events, as well as their hopes and dreams for the future".<sup>6</sup>

## 4. Cultural Significance and Legacy of Kurdish Epics

Kurdish epics are far more than ancient stories; they are living cultural heritage that continues to shape Kurdish identity, preserve language and history, and inspire artistic and social expression. Their significance is multifaceted and profound.

- **Preservation of Language and Oral Tradition:** In the face of historical pressures and restrictions on the Kurdish language, oral epics, meticulously maintained and performed by *dengbêj*, have been crucial for the survival and vitality of Kurdish dialects.<sup>2</sup> These narratives, rich in poetic language and traditional storytelling techniques, serve as linguistic reservoirs. The *dengbêj* tradition itself is a significant cultural institution, acting as a "living memory" and an "oral literature school".<sup>98</sup>
- **Repository of History and Collective Memory:** Kurdish epics often recount historical events, legendary figures, and societal transformations, offering a Kurdish perspective on the past.<sup>4</sup> Epics like *Kela Dimdimê* are based on real rebellions, while *Mem û Zîn* is said to be inspired by a historical episode.<sup>7</sup> They function as a form of collective memory, transmitting knowledge of ancestors, struggles, and cultural norms across generations.
- **Foundation of National and Cultural Identity:** Many epics, particularly *Mem û Zîn* and *Kawa the Blacksmith*, are deeply intertwined with Kurdish national consciousness.<sup>2</sup> They provide foundational myths and symbols that help define Kurdish identity, articulate



aspirations for freedom and unity, and foster a sense of shared heritage. The themes of resistance, love for the homeland, and the struggle against injustice found in these epics resonate strongly with the Kurdish historical experience.

- **Source of Moral and Social Values:** These narratives often embody and transmit core cultural values, ethical principles, and social conventions.<sup>2</sup> *Zembîlîfiroş*, for example, champions piety and moral integrity.<sup>37</sup> The epics explore complex human relationships and societal dynamics, offering reflections on justice, loyalty, love, and betrayal.
- **Inspiration for Arts and Literature:** Kurdish epics have been a perennial source of inspiration for subsequent literary works, music, visual arts, theatre, and film.<sup>2</sup> Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn*, itself a literary rendition of an oral tale, has spurred countless adaptations.<sup>2</sup> Modern Kurdish writers continue to draw upon folkloric motifs and epic themes in their contemporary works.<sup>100</sup>
- **Connection to Broader Literary Traditions:** While distinctly Kurdish, these epics also connect to broader regional and world literary traditions. Comparisons are often drawn between Kurdish love epics like *Mem û Zîn* or *Siyabend û Xecê* and other famous romances like *Layla and Majnun* or *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>3</sup> The *Kurdish Shahnameh* engages with the rich Iranian epic cycle.<sup>13</sup> This demonstrates the interconnectedness of cultures while highlighting unique Kurdish contributions.
- **Resilience and Continuity:** Despite periods of suppression and the challenges faced by the Kurdish language and culture, the enduring popularity and transmission of these epics underscore the resilience of Kurdish heritage.<sup>2</sup> The continued performance by *dengbêj* and the efforts to document and translate these works ensure their legacy for future generations.<sup>6</sup> The documentation of oral literature from regions like Urfa, even from the early 20th century, provides invaluable insights into this continuous tradition.<sup>57</sup>

The legacy of Kurdish epics is thus not static but is actively maintained and reinterpreted, reflecting their ongoing importance in the cultural and intellectual life of the Kurdish people. They are a testament to a rich narrative inheritance that continues to inform and inspire.

## 5. Challenges and Preservation of Kurdish Epics

The rich tradition of Kurdish epics, primarily sustained through oral transmission for centuries, has faced numerous challenges that threaten its continuity. However, significant efforts have also been made towards its preservation and revitalization.

One of the foremost challenges has been **political suppression and linguistic restrictions** in the nation-states where Kurds reside.<sup>2</sup> The Kurdish language itself has been banned or marginalized in various contexts, directly impacting the public performance and transmission of oral epics, which are intrinsically tied to the language. Epics like *Mem û Zîn* were at times labeled as harmful publications and banned.<sup>7</sup> The destruction of cultural symbols, such as the statue of Kawa the Blacksmith in Afrin, further illustrates the targeting of Kurdish cultural heritage.<sup>39</sup> This suppression aimed to assimilate Kurdish identity and erase distinct cultural markers, including their epic narratives.<sup>100</sup>

The **decline of traditional lifestyles** also poses a threat. The *dengbêj* tradition, central to the

life of these epics, flourished in specific social settings, often rural and communal.<sup>57</sup> Urbanization, modernization, and the disruption of traditional community life can lead to a weakening of the contexts in which these oral traditions are naturally passed down. As older generations of *dengbêj* pass away, there is a risk of losing invaluable knowledge and performance styles if younger generations are not actively engaged.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, the **dominance of national media and standardized education systems** in languages other than Kurdish can marginalize oral traditions. Young people may have less exposure to these epics and the *dengbêj* art form, leading to a decline in interest and active participation.<sup>101</sup>

Despite these challenges, there are concerted **preservation efforts**:

- **Documentation and Collection:** Scholars, folklorists, and cultural enthusiasts have been actively involved in collecting, transcribing, and publishing Kurdish oral epics.<sup>6</sup> Works like Ordîxanê Celîl's collection of *Kela Dimdimê* variants or Mihemedê Pîrê's *Pênc Destanên Kurdî Yên Kevnar* are crucial in this regard.<sup>19</sup> Early 20th-century collections by figures like Oskar Mann in Urfa also provide invaluable historical records.<sup>57</sup>
- **Academic Research:** Universities and research institutions are increasingly studying Kurdish folklore and oral literature, contributing to its analysis and understanding.<sup>6</sup> This includes examining themes, historical contexts, and linguistic features.
- **Cultural Revitalization Initiatives:** Cultural centers, festivals, and "Dengbêj Houses" have emerged as important spaces for the performance and promotion of *dengbêj* art and epic storytelling, particularly since the 2000s in Turkey and earlier abroad.<sup>101</sup> These initiatives aim to provide platforms for existing *dengbêj* and encourage new generations.
- **Modern Adaptations:** The adaptation of epics into modern literary forms, films, plays, and music helps to introduce them to new audiences and keep their stories alive in contemporary contexts.<sup>2</sup>
- **Translation:** Translating Kurdish epics into other world languages increases their visibility and accessibility, fostering international recognition and appreciation.<sup>7</sup> This not only preserves the epics but also contributes to a richer understanding of world literature.

The interplay between the rich oral tradition and the growing body of written Kurdish literature is dynamic. While oral tradition served as the primary mode of preservation for centuries, modern literature and documentation efforts now play a vital role in ensuring these epic narratives continue to inspire and inform.<sup>100</sup> The challenge lies in maintaining the authenticity and spirit of the oral performances while adapting them for new mediums and audiences.

## 6. Conclusion

The epic tradition of the Kurdish people stands as a vibrant and enduring testament to their rich cultural heritage, historical consciousness, and artistic prowess. From the poignant tragedy of *Mem û Zîn*, considered the national epic, to the heroic defiance of *Kela Dimdimê* and the symbolic resistance embodied in *Kawa the Blacksmith*, these narratives offer profound insights into the Kurdish experience. Rooted deeply in oral tradition and meticulously

preserved by generations of *dengbêj*, these epics have served as crucial vehicles for transmitting language, history, social values, and collective memory, particularly in times when written expression in Kurdish was suppressed.

Thematic concerns across these epics are remarkably consistent yet diverse, exploring the universal pangs of tragic love, the valor of heroes fighting against injustice, the complexities of ethnic and religious identity, the quest for sovereignty, and the moral and spiritual dimensions of human existence. Works like the *Kurdish Shahnameh* demonstrate a unique engagement with broader regional mythologies, while tales such as *Siyabend û Xecê*, *Zembîlfiroş*, *Derwêşê Evdî û Edûlê*, and *Cembelî û Binevş* each contribute distinct narratives of love, sacrifice, piety, and heroism to the Kurdish literary canon.

The cultural significance of these epics cannot be overstated. They are not merely historical artifacts but living traditions that continue to inspire artistic creation, inform Kurdish identity, and resonate with contemporary struggles and aspirations. Despite facing challenges related to political suppression and the erosion of traditional lifestyles, concerted efforts in documentation, academic research, cultural revitalization, modern adaptation, and translation are helping to preserve this invaluable heritage.

The study of famous Kurdish epics reveals a literary tradition of immense depth and resilience. These stories, whether sung by a *dengbêj* in a mountain village or read in a scholarly edition, continue to echo the enduring spirit of the Kurdish people, ensuring that their voices and narratives remain an integral part of world literature and cultural heritage.

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