

Mihemed Elî Tico: The Enduring Voice of a Kurdish Dengbêj from Afrin

I. Introduction: Mihemed Elî Tico – A Voice of Kurdish Oral Tradition from Afrin

A. Introducing Mihemed Elî Tico (El Tico): A Seminal Figure in Kurdish Dengbêjî

Mihemed Elî Tico, widely known as El Tico (Elî Tico or El Tîco), stands as a seminal figure in the rich tapestry of Kurdish oral tradition. He was a prominent Dengbêj—a traditional Kurdish storyteller, singer of epic tales, and bard—hailing from the historically significant Afrin (Efrîn / Çiyayê Kurmênc) region in northwestern Syria.¹ For over half a century, his voice resonated within the Kurdish communities of Jabal al-Akrad (the Kurdish name for the Afrin region), embodying the artistic spirit and cultural memory of his people.³ Elî Tico's legacy, though primarily transmitted orally during his lifetime, endures through invaluable sound recordings and the collective remembrance of those who experienced his art, ensuring his contributions to Kurdish culture continue to be recognized and studied.

B. The Dengbêj Tradition: Keepers of Kurdish Memory and Culture

To understand the magnitude of Mihemed Elî Tico's role, one must first appreciate the profound cultural significance of the Dengbêj tradition. Dengbêjs are more than mere singers or storytellers; they are the living archives of Kurdish society, the "keepers of Kurdish memory and history".⁴ In a culture that has often faced political suppression and lacked state-supported institutions for the preservation of its language and heritage, Dengbêjs have been instrumental in transmitting history, epic poems (kilams), myths, legends, social realities, and collective memories across generations, often solely through the power of the unaccompanied voice.⁴ They are, in essence, a "living library," embodying the archival memory of the Kurdish nation, its traditions, and its rich oral literary works spanning centuries.⁴ Their art form is a testament to the resilience of Kurdish identity, a "song of an oppressed people long denied a voice, a place, and the right to their very existence".⁴

The Dengbêj tradition, while deeply rooted in specific localities, also demonstrates a capacity for adaptation and trans-regional engagement. Figures like Elî Tico, through their travels and interactions in urban centers such as Aleppo, where he co-owned a coffeehouse that served as a performance venue¹, and his international exposure via organizations like UNESCO¹, exemplify this dynamic. The very term "dengbêj" has seen an evolution in its usage, broadened by such inter-regional interactions, including those between Afrin and other Kurdish areas.⁶ This suggests that the tradition is not static but rather a living, evolving

practice. The career of an artist like Elî Tico thus provides a valuable lens through which to observe the ways oral traditions navigate and respond to the complexities of urbanization and global cultural flows in the 20th and 21st centuries.

C. Navigating Names: Identifying the Artist

Across various Kurdish, Arabic, English, and Turkish sources, Mihemed Elî Tico is referred to by several names and transliterations. To maintain clarity and consistency throughout this report, the primary designation "Elî Tico" will be used, while acknowledging other common forms.

Table 1: Names and Aliases of Mihemed Elî Tico

Common Name in Report	Kurdish Spelling(s)	Arabic Spelling(s)	Other Transliterations/ Variations	Nickname(s)
Elî Tico	Elî Tico, El Tîco	محمد علي تجو (Muhammad Ali Tajo/Taju)	M-Elî Tico, Mohammed Ali Te'djo	Bavê Alî, Ebû Elî (Abu Ali)

Sources for names: ¹

This variety in nomenclature is common for figures whose renown spreads across linguistic and cultural boundaries, particularly when an oral tradition intersects with written documentation and international archiving efforts. Establishing these variations at the outset is crucial for accurate attribution and comprehensive understanding.

D. Scope and Objectives of the Report

This report aims to provide an expert-level examination of the life, artistry, and cultural significance of Mihemed Elî Tico. Drawing upon available multilingual sources, it will delve into his biography, his development as a Dengbêj and tanbur (saz) player, his distinctive performance style, an analysis of his notable kilams and songs, his international recognition, and his enduring cultural legacy, particularly within the context of Afrin and the broader Kurdish heritage. The report will culminate in a Works Cited section, referencing all consulted materials.

II. The Life and Times of Mihemed Elî Tico: From Afrin's Hills to International Stages

A. Birth, Early Life, and Formative Influences in Afrin

Mihemed Elî Tico was born in the village of Hasan Derli, situated near Naza village within the Afrin region, also known as Jabal al-Akrad.³ While his precise birth date is not definitively recorded in all sources, his passing in February 2012 at the age of 82 indicates his birth occurred around 1930.⁹

His artistic inclinations were kindled during a period of global turmoil, World War II. His mother

would sing poignant, often improvised, songs lamenting the absence of his two brothers who had enlisted in the English army to fight in North Africa and Palestine. These deeply emotional and personal musical expressions profoundly shaped young Tico's emotional landscape and fostered his love for singing and storytelling.³

Further shaping his nascent talent was the rich musical environment of his locality. He was significantly influenced by renowned singers from the nearby Naza village, such as Abdou Malhasan (also known as rê'Şe Evdê) and his brother Hasan (Nazî Hes). From these local masters, Elî Tico learned numerous songs and absorbed the intricate musical scales (maqams) that characterize Kurdish folk music.³ Hesên Nazî is also noted elsewhere as one of the famous Dengbêjs of the Afrin region.¹ His instrumental skills were also cultivated within the family; he learned to play the tanbur (tembûr), a long-necked fretted lute central to Kurdish music, from his father and brother, both of whom were skilled players.³

B. Artistic Journey: Emergence as a Dengbêj and Tanbur Player

Elî Tico developed a distinctive artistic persona, characterized by an attractive and dignified presence that was said to mirror the "beauty and majesty of Mount Hawar," a prominent geographical feature of the Afrin landscape. His eloquent speech and confident tone were seen as reflective of the bold and frank nature of the people from the Amkan district of Afrin.³ A hallmark of his artistry was his exceptional improvisational skill. He was described as "îrtîcalî bû, ji mêjî bû," meaning he improvised, performing from memory without reliance on written texts.¹ This ability to spontaneously create or adapt lyrics for traditional folk songs and occasional pieces was a unique talent that distinguished him as a master Dengbêj.³ His proficiency extended to language; he was adept at speaking and singing in Turkish, an ability influenced by his exposure to Kurdish artists from the Antep region of Turkey who would adapt Kurdish song lyrics into Turkish while preserving the soulful Kurdish melodies.³ This linguistic versatility suggests a broader cultural awareness and adaptability. His fame as a Dengbêj was not fleeting; he was a celebrated figure in Jabal al-Akrad (Afrin) for over half a century.³

C. Key Relationships: Contemporaries, Masters, and Collaborators

Elî Tico's artistic journey was interwoven with a network of fellow musicians, masters, and collaborators who shaped and were shaped by his presence.

- **Mecîdê Hemgulî:** A significant contemporary Dengbêj, also from the Afrin region. The relationship appears complex; one account describes Hemgulî as a "friend and master" to Dengbêjs like El Tico, and notes Hemgulî's influence on him.¹ However, Hemgulî himself, along with his nephews, recounted that Elî Tico struggled to learn specific kilams directly from him, such as "Meyremê, Meyrema Miho Begê," even after six months of instruction. Hemgulî remarked that "kilams that you try to master on your own get lost" ¹, perhaps alluding to Tico's more improvisational approach.
- **Cemîl Horo:** Another highly respected Dengbêj from Afrin, known for not playing an instrument himself.⁶ Elî Tico, Mecîdê Hemgulî, and Cemîl Horo jointly established a coffeehouse in Aleppo named "Qehweya Xirîsto" (Christo's Coffeehouse), which

became an important venue for their performances.¹ Wehîd Xelîl, a tanbur player, recalled seeing El Tico performing alongside Cemîl Horo at weddings.¹

- **Bavê Selah:** Mentioned as another contemporary Dengbêj alongside Elî Tico and Mecîdê Hemgulî.¹¹
- **Mehmed Şerîf:** In a notable collaboration in 1973, Elî Tico played the saz (tanbur) to accompany singer Mehmed Şerîf during his performance of the renowned Kurdish epic "Dewrêşê Evdî".¹⁰ This highlights Elî Tico's skill not only as a lead Dengbêj but also as a proficient instrumental accompanist (sazbend).
- **Said Hassan:** Collaborated extensively with "Mohammed Ali Te'djo" (Elî Tico) on tracks recorded for the UNESCO "Kurdish Music" album, released in 1974. On these recordings, Said Hassan typically played the tanboursa (a type of tanbur) and provided vocals, while Elî Tico played the Meydan Saz (a larger type of baglama or tanbur).⁸
- **Nouri Iskandar:** A fortuitous encounter occurred in the late 1970s when Elî Tico met the Syriac-Syrian composer and musicologist Nouri Iskandar in a Damascus restaurant located in the Midan neighborhood of Aleppo. Iskandar, impressed upon hearing Tico humming with his tanbur, approached him. They discussed music, and Iskandar invited Tico to the Cultural Center for a potential collaboration, an invitation Tico did not pursue.⁹
- **Apê Xelîl Osman ("Cebeli"):** Identified as a close friend of Elî Tico, hailing from the village of Kharzan in the Afrin region.¹³

These relationships underscore the vibrant, interconnected community of artists within which Elî Tico honed his craft and shared his music.

D. Later Life, Passing, and Enduring Legacy

Mihemed Elî Tico remained dedicated to his art throughout his long life, continuing to perform at special occasions even when he was over eighty years old.³ His artistic lineage showed signs of continuation within his own family; some of his children reportedly sing and play the tanbur. Notably, his daughter Araz is mentioned as having a beautiful voice, and her son, Muhammad (Elî Tico's grandson), is also recognized for possessing a powerful and beautiful voice.³ This familial transmission of artistic talent is a common and vital aspect of sustaining oral traditions.

Mihemed Elî Tico passed away on the evening of **February 16, 2012, at the age of 82.**⁹ (A comment on a YouTube video¹⁴ mentions a death date of April 13, 2024, but this is uncorroborated by more reliable journalistic and academic sources and likely refers to a different individual, especially given other news from Afrin around that time¹⁵).

Despite his profound contributions to Kurdish culture and his international exposure through UNESCO, Elî Tico, like many folk artists in the Jabal al-Akrad region, did not receive the official national (Syrian) or broader ethnic recognition and attention that his artistic stature merited.³ This disparity between grassroots cultural importance and international artistic validation on one hand, and the absence of official state-level acknowledgment on the other, reflects a common experience for many folk and minority artists within centralized nation-states. Official

cultural narratives often marginalize or overlook regional and ethnic artistic expressions, even when these expressions possess demonstrable local and international value. This situation can impact artists' livelihoods and the formal institutional support for their work. Nevertheless, Elî Tico's legacy is far from forgotten. It is actively preserved and disseminated through his existing recordings, the cherished memories of those who knew his work, and a vibrant ongoing engagement with his music, particularly on digital platforms. Numerous YouTube channels, such as those managed by Jindires, Reşîd Redwan, Salih Bakir, and Mîran Efrînî, host his performances, and a Facebook page ("elticobaveali") is cited as an official presence, further extending his digital footprint.¹⁶

Table 2: Chronology of Key Life Events and Artistic Milestones of Mihemed Elî Tico

Year/Period	Event/Milestone	Significance	Key Source(s)
c. 1930	Birth in Hasan Derli, Afrin region	Beginning of a life dedicated to Kurdish oral tradition	³
Early 1940s (WWII)	Mother's improvised songs about absent brothers	Early, profound emotional and artistic influence	³
Youth	Learns tanbur from father/brother; influenced by singers from Naza village	Acquisition of foundational musical skills and repertoire	³
Mid-20th C. onwards	Gains fame as a Dengbêj in Jabal al-Akrad (Afrin)	Establishment as a significant local cultural figure	³
1972	Field recordings by Christian Poché & Jochen Wenzel in Afrin/Aleppo for UNESCO	Initial documentation of his music for international archive	²⁰
1973	Performs in France/Germany with Seîd Yûsiv & Mûnîr Beşîr at UNESCO's request	First international performances, showcasing Kurdish music	²²
1973	Accompanies singer Mehmed Şerîf on saz for the epic "Dewrêşê Evdî"	Demonstrates skill as an instrumental accompanist (sazbend)	¹⁰
1974	Release of "Kurdish Music" album (Philips 6586 019) featuring his	Formal international release of his music as part of the UNESCO	¹²

	performances	Collection	
1976	Invited by UNESCO to France; begins five-year stay in France/Holland	Sustained international engagement, performances, and further recordings of his kilams	¹
Late 1970s	Meets composer Nouri Iskandar in Aleppo	Encounter with a prominent figure from Syrian classical music, though collaboration did not materialize	⁹
1980-1981	"Strana Zênebê" (Song of Zeyneb) attributed to this period in one reference	Possible dating for a significant song in his repertoire	⁷
1990-2002	Period of professional recording of his works (alongside contemporaries)	Suggests further recording activity beyond UNESCO projects, likely for regional distribution	¹
February 16, 2012	Passes away in Afrin at the age of 82	End of a long and influential artistic life	⁹

III. The Artistry of a Kurdish Dengbêj: Elî Tico's Repertoire, Style, and Performance

A. Elî Tico's Place in the Dengbêj Tradition of Çiyayê Kurmênc (Afrin)

Mihemed Elî Tico was unequivocally a product of and a master within the Dengbêj tradition specific to Çiyayê Kurmênc, the Kurdish name for the Afrin highlands. He is consistently identified as one of the "dengbêjên serdema xwe" (Dengbêjs of his time) and a "dengbêj master" from this region.¹ The broader Berferat region, which encompasses Afrin, is noted as a fertile ground where numerous famous Dengbêjs, including Elî Tico, "grew up" and developed their art.¹ His music and even his personality were seen as intrinsically linked to the character of Afrin, its evocative landscape, such as "Mount Hawar," and the distinct traits of its inhabitants.³

The Dengbêj tradition in Afrin, as in other Kurdish areas, was deeply embedded in the social fabric. Performances were integral to various communal events, including *şevbuhêrk* (evening gatherings), *dîwanxane* (traditional guest houses or reception rooms where men would gather), *qehwexane* (coffeehouses), *dawet* (weddings), and *şahî* (festivities and celebrations).¹ These venues provided the natural context for Dengbêjs to share their epics, songs, and stories, reinforcing communal bonds and cultural knowledge.

B. Characteristics of His Performance: Voice, Tanbur, and Improvisation

Elî Tico's performances were distinguished by a combination of vocal delivery, instrumental skill, and a remarkable capacity for improvisation.

- **Vocal Style:** While detailed technical analyses of his vocal timbre are not abundant in the available textual materials, the general characteristics of Dengbêj singing involve a powerful, often unaccompanied, and highly emotive vocal delivery. This style is designed to convey the grandeur of epic narratives, the depth of human sorrow, and the passion of heroic tales.⁴ The reverence in comments on his online recordings, such as one praising him with "God have mercy on you, Uncle Ali Tajo, you lived as a man and died as a man"¹⁸, suggests a voice that commanded respect and moved listeners.
- **Tanbur (Saz) Accompaniment:** Elî Tico was acclaimed as a "first-class tanbur player".³ He typically accompanied his own singing with the tanbur (also referred to as saz or tembûr). On the UNESCO "Kurdish Music" album, he is specifically credited with playing the Meydan Saz, a larger variant of the baglama or tanbur, which provides a resonant drone and melodic counterpoint.⁸ His instrumental prowess was also evident in his role as an accompanist, such as when he played the saz for Mehmed Şerîf's rendition of "Dewrêşê Evdî".¹⁰
- **Improvisational Prowess ("ji mêjî bû"):** This was a defining feature of his artistry. The description "îrtîcalî bû, ji mêjî bû" (he improvised, from memory) signifies his ability to perform spontaneously, drawing from a vast mental archive without reliance on written texts.¹ He possessed a "unique talent for improvising the lyrics of his beautiful folk songs and occasional songs".³ This capacity for improvisation is a core skill of a master Dengbêj, allowing for the adaptation of traditional material to specific audiences and occasions, and the personalization of ancient tales, thereby keeping the tradition vibrant and relevant.⁴
- **Performance Contexts:** His art was shared in diverse settings. He was a regular performer at weddings and dances, often appearing alongside other prominent Dengbêjs like Cemîl Horo.¹ The coffeehouse "Qehweya Xirîsto" in Aleppo, which he co-owned, also served as a vital urban stage for his music.¹

The fluidity between roles, such as being a primary Dengbêj (singer-storyteller) and a Sazbend (instrumentalist, often accompanying others), is notable in Elî Tico's career. While renowned for his vocal narratives, his exceptional skill on the tanbur³ and his documented role accompanying Mehmed Şerîf¹⁰ illustrate this versatility. The terminology itself—"dengbêj," "sazbend," "mitirb," "kilamcî"—can have layered and regionally specific meanings within Kurdish oral traditions, with "dengbêj" sometimes overshadowing more localized terms.⁶ Elî Tico's embodiment of both masterful vocal storytelling and instrumental skill suggests that in the Afrin tradition, these capabilities were often intertwined, reflecting a holistic musicianship rather than rigidly separate artistic categories. This challenges any overly strict classification of performers and points to the comprehensive artistic talents of

figures like Elî Tico.

C. Analysis of Notable Kilams (Epics, Songs, and Narratives)

Elî Tico's repertoire was extensive, encompassing ancient narrative songs (kilams), lighter rhythmic songs for social and national occasions, and poignant laments.³ He is even credited with composing and singing 103 original songs, indicating a significant creative output beyond the interpretation of traditional material.³

- **"Yara Milîsa" (Melissa's Friend/Beloved):** This is one of the most significant and celebrated kilams associated with Elî Tico. It is described as a Kurmanji epic originating from the Çiyayê Kurmênc (Afrin) region, a tragic and heroic Kurdish tale.¹⁸ The title "Yara Milîsa" is reportedly linked to the "Milis," or popular militias composed of local Kurd Dagħ (Afrin) inhabitants during the period of French Mandate rule, who were particularly fond of listening to this epic during wedding celebrations.¹⁸ This connection provides a fascinating historical context for the song's themes and popularity. Numerous recordings of Elî Tico performing "Yara Milîsa" are available on platforms like YouTube.¹⁸ It is also listed as a widespread kilam in the region, performed by other Dengbêjs such as Mecîd Hemgulî.¹
- **"Zeynebê" (or "Strana Zênebê" - Song of Zeyneb):** Another well-known kilam in Elî Tico's repertoire. One source refers to a "Strana Zênebê 1980-1981 M-Elî Tico tribute," underscoring its importance.⁷ It is featured in several online recordings.³¹ Like "Yara Milîsa," "Zeynebê" is also mentioned as a kilam sung by Mecîd Hemgulî, indicating its traditional currency in the region.¹
- **"Dinya" (World/Life):** This song appears to be a popular piece by Elî Tico, with multiple uploads available on YouTube, often titled with his Arabic name, "محمد علي تاجو" (Muhammad Ali Tajo).¹⁶
- **"Dewrêşê Evdî" (Dewresh, Son of Evdi):** While Elî Tico is not primarily known as the lead performer of this monumental Kurdish epic, his involvement in its performance is significant. In 1973, he accompanied the singer Mehmed Şerîf on the saz during a rendition of "Dewrêşê Evdî".⁶ This epic is a cornerstone of Kurdish oral literature, and various academic studies have focused on different versions, such as those performed by Baqî Xido.¹
- **National and Commemorative Songs:** Elî Tico's role extended beyond ancient epics to encompass contemporary concerns and historical memory. He was reportedly considered the finest performer of the national song about Sheikh Said, the leader of the 1925 Kurdish revolution against the Kemalist Turkish state.³ Furthermore, he composed, sang, and performed songs mourning the passing of significant Kurdish figures such as Mustafa Barzani, Dr. Nuri Dersimi, and Dr. Abdul Rahman Qasimlo, as well as the martyr Leila Qasim Hasan. He also created a song concerning the abduction of Abdullah Öcalan.³ This engagement with contemporary Kurdish political and historical events firmly establishes the Dengbêj as a social commentator and oral historian, actively chronicling and interpreting matters of national importance for their

community. This adaptability ensures the Dengbêj tradition remains a living art form, addressing current realities rather than being a static repository of ancient tales. His 103 "original songs" ³ further underscore his creative agency in this domain.

- **Other Recorded Kilams/Songs from UNESCO "Kurdish Music" Album (with Said Hassan):**
 - **"Naghma Jabali wa Binafshé" (Mountain Tune and Violet):** A lengthy piece (over 23 minutes) featuring instrumental sections and vocal parts, showcasing the interplay between Elî Tico's Meydan Saz and Said Hassan's tanboura and voice.⁸
 - **"Lo Delal Sherin Hayat" (Oh Beloved, Sweet Life):** Another significant track from the UNESCO album, featuring Said Hassan's vocals and tanboura with Elî Tico's Meydan Saz accompaniment.⁸
- **"Bada O Jane" (Oh Beloved Cupbearer/Wine):** This song was performed by "Mohammed Ali-Tedjo" (Elî Tico) on a UNESCO recording titled "Iran, Turkey, Syria : traditional music." It is sung in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish, with saz accompaniment.²¹
- **Other Attributed Songs:** His repertoire also included songs such as "Lê Şawîyê" ¹⁶, "Helwecî Güzel" (Beautiful Sweet-seller) ¹⁸, and pieces titled "Titij Efrîn" and "Tirij Efrîn".³⁷ The kilam "Meyremê" is also mentioned in the context of Mecîd Hemgulî attempting, unsuccessfully, to teach it to Elî Tico.¹

This diverse repertoire illustrates Elî Tico's mastery over various forms of Kurdish musical and narrative expression, from epic storytelling to lyrical songs and contemporary commentaries.

IV. Recordings, Recognition, and International Presence: Elî Tico on the World Stage

A. Early Performances and Local Renown

Before gaining international attention, Mihemed Elî Tico was a deeply respected and widely recognized artist within his local milieu. He performed extensively at a myriad of community events in the Afrin region and the city of Aleppo, including weddings, dances, and traditional evening gatherings (*şevbuhêrk*).¹ A significant hub for his artistry was the coffeehouse "Qehweya Xirîsto" in Aleppo, which he co-owned with fellow Dengbêjs Mecîdê Hemgulî and Cemîl Horo. This establishment served as a regular performance venue for them, indicating an important urban presence and a center for Dengbêj culture.¹ His fame in the Jabal al-Akrad (Afrin) region was profound and enduring, spanning over half a century.³ This long-standing local acclaim formed the bedrock of his artistic career.

B. The UNESCO Connection: Performances and Recordings

Elî Tico's artistry eventually transcended local and regional boundaries, largely through his association with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), which played a crucial role in documenting his music and introducing it to a global audience.

- **Initial UNESCO Engagement and Recordings (1972-1974):**
The journey towards international recording began in 1972. Ethnomusicologist Christian Poché and sound technician Jochen Wenzel conducted fieldwork in the region, including Aleppo, Afrin, Beyrouth (Beirut), and the village of Kafar-Safra near the Turkish border, specifically to make recordings for UNESCO.²⁰ It was during this period that Elî Tico's tracks, which would later appear on the "Kurdish Music" album, were likely recorded.
In 1973, this engagement deepened when UNESCO requested Mihemed Elî Tico, alongside fellow Kurdish musician Seîd Yûsiv and the renowned Iraqi oud master Mûnîr Beşîr, to perform a series of concerts in France and Germany.²² During this tour, UNESCO also produced a recording of Seîd Yûsiv's tanbur playing.²²
The culmination of these early efforts was the release of the album "Kurdish Music" (Philips 6586 019) in 1974. This seminal record was part of the prestigious "UNESCO Collection: Musical Sources" series, edited by the influential ethnomusicologist Alain Daniélou, and featured two significant tracks showcasing Elî Tico's artistry in collaboration with Said Hassan.¹²
- **Extended UNESCO Invitation and International Presence (1976 onwards):**
The connection with UNESCO continued and expanded. In 1976, Elî Tico received a formal invitation from UNESCO to visit France. This led to a more sustained period of international activity, during which he spent five years residing and performing in France and Holland. Throughout this time, he presented his distinct style of singing and tanbur playing to European audiences, and further recordings of his kilams were made.¹ This five-year engagement signifies a deeper level of international recognition and provided an extended platform for his music.
- **Specific UNESCO Recordings Featuring Elî Tico:**
 - **Album: "Kurdish Music"** (Original release: Philips 6586 019, Netherlands, 1974; Reissue: Auvidis D 8023, France, 1989). This album is a key document of his recorded work.
 - Track A1: **"Naghma Jabali We Binafshé"** (Mountain Tune and Violet) – Duration: 23 minutes and 27 seconds. Performers: Mohammed Ali Te'djo (Meydan Saz) and Said Hassan (Tanboursa and vocals).⁸
 - Track B2: **"Lo Delal Sherin Hayat"** (Oh Beloved, Sweet Life) – Duration: 11 minutes and 51 seconds. Performers: Mohammed Ali Te'djo (Meydan Saz) and Said Hassan (Vocals and Tanboursa).¹²
 - **Recording: "Iran, Turkey, Syria : traditional music = Iran, Turquie, Syrie : musique traditionnelle"** (UNESCO Collection, reference UN-COMM-CD-08025-9 in archival documents, original material likely pre-1989).
 - This compilation features a track titled **"Bada O Jane"** (Oh Beloved Cupbearer/Wine) performed by "Mohammed Ali-Tedjo" (Elî Tico), who sings in the Kurmanji dialect and accompanies himself on the saz.²¹

The involvement of UNESCO was undeniably pivotal. It not only led to the preservation of Elî Tico's music through high-quality recordings but also brought his art, and by extension

Kurdish Dengbêjî from Afrin, to an international stage. However, this process is not without complexity. While such archival projects are crucial for preservation and wider recognition, the act of selecting, recording, and presenting folk music within a "world music" framework (as exemplified by the "Kurdish Music" album) can also lead to a degree of decontextualization. The music, originally performed in specific social settings like weddings or intimate evening gatherings in Afrin ¹, is transformed into a cultural product for an external audience, framed by liner notes from ethnomusicologists.¹² This transformation, while offering global visibility, may alter the perception and reception of the music from its original, localized, and often participatory experience. The curatorial choices inherent in such projects—what to record, how to edit, how to present—also inevitably shape the listener's understanding. This reflects a broader discussion within ethnomusicology regarding the impact and responsibilities of external archival initiatives on living traditions.

C. Other Professional Recordings and Archival Presence

Beyond the internationally distributed UNESCO recordings, there is evidence that Elî Tico's works were also professionally recorded during the period between 1990 and 2002.¹ While this information is primarily linked to his contemporary Mecîdê Hemgulî in the source material, the context suggests similar recording activities for prominent Dengbêjs of that era, including Tico. These recordings were likely intended for regional markets and audiences. In the contemporary digital era, Elî Tico maintains a significant archival presence, largely through the efforts of individuals and cultural organizations dedicated to preserving Kurdish heritage. YouTube, in particular, hosts a vast collection of his performances, with numerous videos uploaded by channels such as Jindires, Reşîd Redwan, Mîran Efrînî, and Salih Bakir. These digital archives feature renditions of his famous kilams like "Yara Milîsa," "Zeynebê," "Dinya," and "Lê Şawîyê," among others.¹⁴ Furthermore, a Facebook page named "elticobaveali" is mentioned as an official page dedicated to his work, contributing to his online legacy.¹³ Websites like Jindires.com and Tirejafrin.com also play a role in hosting or promoting his music.¹³

This informal, decentralized digital archiving by community members and enthusiasts is of immense significance. Alongside formal recordings, these online collections constitute a vital, accessible repository of Elî Tico's work. They potentially capture a wider range of performances, including live recordings and versions not found in official archives. In an era where official archives may be incomplete, inaccessible, or at risk, especially for minority cultures or those from regions affected by conflict (such as Afrin), these grassroots digital platforms become crucial tools for cultural memory, continuity, and dissemination, driven by the community itself. While they offer invaluable access, such informal archives also present challenges regarding metadata accuracy, recording quality, and long-term digital preservation.

Table 3: Selected Discography and Notable Recorded Works of Mihemed Elî Tico

Title (Kilam/Song/A	Year of Recording/Rel	Label/Archive Source	Key Collaborators	Role of Elî Tico	Notes
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Album)	Release	(Platform)			
Album: <i>Kurdish Music</i> (UNESCO Collection)					
Track: "Naghma Jabali We Binafshé"	1972 (rec) / 1974 (rel)	Philips 6586 019 / Auvidis D 8023	Said Hassan	Meydan Saz	Lengthy instrumental and vocal piece; ~23:27 min ¹²
Track: "Lo Delal Sherin Hayat"	1972 (rec) / 1974 (rel)	Philips 6586 019 / Auvidis D 8023	Said Hassan	Meydan Saz (vocals by Hassan)	Vocal and instrumental piece; ~11:51 min ¹²
Album: <i>Iran, Turkey, Syria : traditional music</i> (UNESCO)	Pre-1989 (material)	UNESCO UN-COMM-CD -08025-9 (archival ref.)	-	Saz, Vocals	Track: "Bada O Jane"; sung in Kurmanji ²¹
Kilam: "Yara Milîsa"	Various	YouTube (e.g., Jindiress channel, Mîran Efrînî)	-	Vocals, Tanbur	Epic narrative from Afrin ¹⁸
Kilam: "Zeynebê" / "Strana Zênebê"	Various (c. 1980-81 ref.)	YouTube (e.g., ALYENLÎ TV)	-	Vocals, Tanbur	Traditional song ⁷
Kilam: "Dinya"	Various	YouTube (e.g., Reşîd Redwan channel, M-ELTICO channel)	-	Vocals, Tanbur	Popular song ¹⁶
Performance: "Dewrêşê Evdî"	1973	Academic reference (oral performance)	Mehmed Şerîf (singer)	Saz accompaniment	Accompanied lead singer on this epic ¹⁰
National/Com memorative Songs	Various	Oral tradition / Potential unarchived recordings	-	Vocals, Tanbur, Composer	Songs about Sheikh Said, Barzani, etc. ³

V. The Cultural Legacy of Mihemed Elî Tico

A. Contribution to the Preservation and Transmission of Kurdish Oral Heritage

As a master Dengbêj, Mihemed Elî Tico was a vital link in the unbroken chain of Kurdish oral transmission. He embodied the Dengbêj's role as a repository of cultural knowledge, memorizing and performing a vast array of tales, historical accounts, poems, and epics that form the bedrock of Kurdish oral literature.⁴ His renowned improvisational skills—performing "ji mêjî bû" (from memory)¹ and adeptly "improvising lyrics"³—were crucial. This ability meant he did not merely reproduce traditional material; he creatively adapted, personalized, and potentially added to the repertoire, ensuring the tradition remained a living, dynamic force rather than a static collection of artifacts.

His recordings, both the formal productions facilitated by UNESCO¹² and the extensive informal archive available on platforms like YouTube, now serve as invaluable resources. They offer a window into the specific dialect, musical style, and narrative themes prevalent in the Afrini Kurdish folklore of his era, preserving this heritage for future generations of Kurds, as well as for researchers and ethnomusicologists worldwide.

B. Impact on the Cultural Landscape of Afrin and the Broader Kurdish Community

For over five decades, Mihemed Elî Tico was a celebrated and defining artistic figure in his native Afrin (Jabal al-Akrad). His music was not just entertainment; it was said to reflect the very character and spirit of the region and its people.³ He was unequivocally one of its "famous dengbêj"², a cultural touchstone for the community.

His performances in the urban center of Aleppo, particularly at the "Qehweya Xirîsto"¹, and his subsequent travels and performances abroad under the aegis of UNESCO¹, helped to carry the distinct cultural expressions of Afrini Kurds to a wider audience, both within Syria and internationally. Moreover, his repertoire included songs addressing national themes and commemorating significant figures in Kurdish history.³ These performances resonated with a broader Kurdish historical and political consciousness, contributing to a sense of shared identity and collective memory that transcended regional specificities. The reported continuation of musical talent within his own family, with children and grandchildren possessing vocal and instrumental skills³, also points to a localized, familial impact on the continuity of this cultural practice.

C. Elî Tico as an Emblem of Kurdish Artistic Identity and Resilience

The Dengbêj tradition itself has been powerfully described as "the song of an oppressed people long denied a voice, a place, and the right to their very existence".⁴ Mihemed Elî Tico, as a prominent and lifelong practitioner of this art form, inherently embodies this spirit of resilience and cultural affirmation. His unwavering dedication to his craft for more than half a century, often in the absence of official state recognition or support³, speaks volumes about the deep-seated cultural importance of Dengbêjî for the Kurdish people. It highlights an

artistic practice sustained by communal value and individual commitment rather than institutional patronage.

His international recognition through UNESCO, however limited in scope it might have been, provided a significant platform for Kurdish artistic expression on a world stage. This exposure, documented in recordings and performances, subtly challenged the marginalization often faced by Kurdish culture within the nation-states where Kurds reside. Today, the ongoing efforts by community members, cultural activists, and family to preserve and disseminate his music digitally further underscore his enduring value as a symbol of Kurdish cultural heritage, particularly that of Afrin.

The historical and ongoing political instabilities and conflicts affecting Kurdish regions, with Afrin having faced particularly acute upheaval in recent years (a general knowledge context, though not specifically detailed for Tico's active period in the provided sources), render the role of figures like Elî Tico as carriers of cultural memory exceptionally poignant. In such circumstances, Dengbêjs and their art become more than entertainment or historical record; they become vital symbols of cultural continuity and identity for communities whose heritage is under threat. Elî Tico's artistic legacy, therefore, represents not just a collection of songs and stories, but a testament to cultural survival and a touchstone for identity, especially for the people of Afrin facing displacement and the potential erosion of their cultural heritage. The fact that an artist of Elî Tico's local stature and international exposure still lacked official national (Syrian) recognition ³ points to systemic issues regarding how minority cultures are valued and supported by state apparatuses. This represents a missed opportunity by the state to acknowledge, celebrate, and support a significant contributor to the country's diverse cultural tapestry. This lack of official backing often means that the primary burden of cultural preservation falls upon the community itself, dedicated individuals, and occasionally external bodies like UNESCO or diaspora initiatives. It can also mean that artists like Elî Tico may not have had access to resources, pensions, or state-sponsored platforms that such recognition might have afforded, impacting their livelihoods and the formal, systematic archiving of their invaluable work during their lifetimes.

VI. Conclusion

A. Recapitulation of Mihemed Elî Tico's Multifaceted Contributions

Mihemed Elî Tico was a multifaceted artist whose contributions to Kurdish culture are undeniable. As a master Dengbêj from the Afrin region, he was a powerful singer, a skilled tanbur player, a gifted improviser, a composer of original songs, and a compelling performer of traditional epics and contemporary national narratives. His life was dedicated to the practice and propagation of Kurdish oral heritage, particularly the distinct traditions of Çiyayê Kurmênc. Through his voice and instrument, he encapsulated the sorrows, joys, histories, and aspirations of his people.

B. Reflection on His Lasting Significance in Kurdish Folk Music and Oral Tradition

The lasting significance of Mihemed Elî Tico in Kurdish folk music and oral tradition is profound. His enduring legacy, now primarily accessible through precious sound recordings and the continued engagement with his work by Kurdish communities and researchers, ensures that his voice will not be silenced by time or adversity. He stands as a vital figure whose art provides deep insights into Kurdish culture, history, identity, and resilience. The study of Elî Tico's life and work offers more than just an appreciation of a regional folk artist; it provides a rich case study for understanding the complex dynamics of oral traditions in the modern world. His career illuminates the interplay between deeply rooted tradition and individual creative agency, the connections and tensions between localism and global engagement, and the persistent challenges of cultural preservation in an era of rapid technological change and often fraught political landscapes. His journey from the hills of Afrin to international stages, and his subsequent digital afterlife, encapsulates many of the key transformations and ongoing dialogues relevant to the study of oral cultures globally. A detailed examination of his contributions can thus enrich broader theoretical discussions in ethnomusicology, folklore studies, and cultural studies concerning the agency of traditional artists and the enduring power of the human voice to narrate a people's story.

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