

Zarbêj: Unveiling the Core of Kurdish Oral Tradition and Female Artistry

I. Introduction: Defining Zarbêj in the Kurdish Cultural Milieu

The Kurdish cultural landscape is rich with diverse forms of oral tradition, among which the figure of the Zarbêj holds a significant, albeit historically under-acknowledged, position. The term "Zarbêj" designates non-professional performers and purveyors of a wide spectrum of oral genres, deeply embedded within the fabric of Kurdish life.¹ These individuals, often described as "unsung," play a crucial role in the "vibrant role of a full range of language-based arts in household rhythms and the imparting of a worldview and historical consciousness".¹ This initial understanding immediately points to a sphere of cultural production that is both integral to everyday existence and fundamental to the transmission of cultural knowledge.

A pivotal aspect of the Zarbêj tradition is the prominent, if not exclusive, role of women. Evidence suggests that women have been the "sole actors for the tradition Zarbêj," primarily responsible for the creation and dissemination of works such as laments, songs, folk songs, tales, and stories.² This positions the Zarbêj tradition as a critical domain for female artistic and cultural expression, particularly in a societal context where more public performative roles may have been less accessible to women. The academic and cultural "adoption of the term zarbêj"¹ can be seen as a conscious effort to bring visibility to this vital, yet often private, sphere of cultural activity, moving beyond the more commonly valorized figures of Kurdish oral tradition.

The significance of Zarbêj within Kurdish heritage is profound. Alongside the more widely recognized Dengbêj (traditional bards or minstrels), Zarbêj are identified as keepers and resources for an "authentic method of musical production and transmission of the multi-layered oral culture, oral history, art, literature and musical memory in Mesopotamia".² They have been instrumental in transforming the "unofficial history and culture into melodies with special rhythms and music," thereby ensuring the continuity of these traditions across generations.² Understanding the Zarbêj, particularly their activities within "spaces of domestic seclusion"¹, is therefore essential for a comprehensive appreciation of the full spectrum of Kurdish oral arts. This report aims to explore the etymology of Zarbêj, delineate their multifaceted roles with a special focus on women, compare this tradition with that of the Dengbêj, examine its manifestations in folklore, discuss efforts towards its preservation, and consider its presence in contemporary settings, including literature and the diaspora.

II. Unpacking the Term: Etymology and Linguistic

Considerations of Zarbêj

The term "Zarbêj" is rooted in the Kurdish language, and its etymology offers clues to the functions of these cultural practitioners. It is likely a compound word. The first component, "zar," can have several related meanings in Kurdish, including language, dialect, mouth, or, significantly, lament or moan.³ The second component, "bêj," derives from the verb "gotin," meaning to say, to sing, or to tell.³ Thus, "Zarbêj" can be interpreted as "teller/singer of language/speech" or, more specifically, "teller/singer of laments/moans." The designation of Zarbêj as "afirîner û veguhêzên van berheman" (creators and transmitters of these works) strongly supports the "bêj" (teller/transmitter) aspect of the term.⁴ Furthermore, the characterization of their domain as "language-based arts" ¹ aligns with the "zar" (language/speech) component. The potential dual meaning of "zar" is particularly suggestive, as laments are explicitly listed among the genres created by Zarbêj women ², hinting at a possible specialization in emotionally charged expressive forms. The related term "Zarbêjî" refers to the practice or art of being a Zarbêj, appearing in phrases like "Zarbêjî, çîrokbêjî, dengbêjî jiyana gel ve girêdayine" (Zarbêj-ship, storytelling-ship, dengbêj-ship are connected to the life of the people).⁵

It is crucial to differentiate "Zarbêj" from terms that may sound similar but are culturally and etymologically distinct. For instance, "Zarabes" refers to the Muslim community of Réunion, whose origins are South Asian and whose name is derived from the French "les arabes" (the Arabs).⁷ This term has no connection to the Kurdish cultural figures. Similarly, the English word "bizarre," despite a superficial phonetic resemblance, is entirely unrelated in meaning and origin.⁸ Another distinct term is "Zerzar" or "Zerzari," which denotes a medieval Kurdish tribe whose name means "Golden child".⁹

In linguistic and cultural contexts, "Zarbêj" is consistently used to describe a "non-professional performer and purveyor of a spectrum oral genres".¹ The term features in contemporary academic discourse and cultural project descriptions focusing on Kurdish oral traditions.² Within the broader landscape of Kurdish oral artistry, "Zarbêj" is listed as one among many terms for performers, such as "serhatîbêj" (tale-teller) and "bendbêj" (ballad-singer), indicating that it represents a specific category.³ The existence of such a rich lexicon for oral performers points to a highly differentiated indigenous understanding of oral artistry. The scholarly adoption and definition of "Zarbêj" may represent an effort to systematically categorize and highlight a particular subset of these roles, especially those that were less public or professionalized and often situated within domestic spheres. This reflects a dynamic interplay between internal cultural categorizations and external scholarly analysis aiming for clarity and broader understanding.

III. The Essence of Zarbêj: Role in Kurdish Oral Tradition and Folklore

The Zarbêj are integral to the living tapestry of Kurdish oral tradition, functioning as versatile

purveyors of diverse oral genres. They are identified as "non-professional performer[s] and purveyor[s] of a spectrum [of] oral genres".¹ Their extensive repertoire includes, but is not limited to, "laments, songs, folk songs, tales, stories, etc.". ² This breadth underscores their versatility and central position in various forms of oral expression that permeate Kurdish life. Concrete examples of their role as storytellers ("çîrokbêj") are evident in documented performances, such as videos titled "Çîroka Keçelok Zarbêj: Zeyneba Hemed" (The Tale of Keçelok, Zarbêj: Zeyneba Hemed) and "Çîroka Nîsko Zarbêj: Kerîma Selîm" (The Tale of Nîsko, Zarbêj: Kerîma Selîm).¹² These recordings directly attribute the narration of tales to individuals identified as Zarbêj, offering tangible illustrations of their function.

Crucially, Zarbêj are not merely passive conduits of tradition but are recognized as active creative agents. They are described as "the source creators of works" ² and "afirîner û veguhêzên van berhemên" (creators and transmitters of these works).⁴ This emphasis on their role as "creators" challenges any simplistic notion of oral tradition bearers as mere rote memorizers. It suggests a dynamic process of re-creation, adaptation, and perhaps even new composition within established traditional frameworks, positioning them as artists in their own right. Through their creative and transmissive capacities, Zarbêj embody and preserve cultural memory. They are regarded as "the memory of their society and nation" ⁴, highlighting their indispensable role in safeguarding and conveying cultural heritage, historical consciousness, and indigenous worldviews.¹ Their dedicated work ensures that these rich oral traditions are "passed on from one generation to the next one that lasted for hundreds of years".²

The Zarbêj tradition is intimately woven into the fabric of domestic and community life. It is particularly associated with "spaces of domestic seclusion" and "household rhythms" ¹, indicating that their performances were, and often still are, integral to everyday existence and family settings. The profound connection of Zarbêj to daily life is poetically expressed by the assertion that Zarbêj, along with related oral arts like storytelling (çîrokbêj) and bardic singing (dengbêj), are as essential to the Kurdish people as "air, bread, and water" ("wek hewa, nan û avê").⁵ Furthermore, it is noted that "mothers put children to sleep with stories and songs" ("dayik bi çîrok û kilaman zarokan radizînin").⁶ These descriptions emphasize the deep embedding of Zarbêj traditions in the life cycle and social fabric, present in times of mourning ("şîn") and celebration ("şayî") alike.⁵ This intimate connection suggests that the Zarbêj tradition functions as a fundamental mechanism for emotional expression, social cohesion, and the intergenerational transfer of values and knowledge within the most fundamental unit of society—the household. It serves as a form of continuous, informal cultural education, shaping individual and collective identity from an early age. The act of recording Zarbêj, as seen with Zeyneba Hemed ¹², while crucial for preservation, also inherently transforms the tradition. It moves these oral expressions from a fluid, often ephemeral, and interactive context to a fixed, archivable format. This transition has significant implications, offering permanence and wider dissemination but also capturing only a single iteration of a living performance, potentially altering its reception and future evolution.

IV. Zarbêj and Dengbêj: A Comparative Analysis of

Performative Traditions

Within the rich soundscape of Kurdish oral heritage, the figures of the Zarbêj and the Dengbêj are prominent, yet distinct. The Dengbêj are often the more valorized and romanticized practitioners, recognized as the masters of a specific art form within Kurdish oral tradition, frequently associated with epic singing and bardic performance.¹ Dengbêj itself is defined as "a form of performance within Kurdish music"¹⁴, with the term "dengbêj" literally translating to "voice-teller" or "singer of voice/sound." Understanding the Zarbêj requires a comparative lens that highlights both their unique characteristics and their relationship with the Dengbêj. Several key distinctions emerge when comparing Zarbêj and Dengbêj. Firstly, their typical level of professionalism and performance settings differ. Zarbêj are generally characterized as "non-professional"¹ and their art is often practiced within "spaces of domestic seclusion" and household environments.¹ In contrast, Dengbêj have historically performed in more public or professionalized contexts, such as "dengbêj environments" or gatherings like the *dîwan* (audience hall or salon).² Secondly, their primary roles in the creative process appear to diverge. While Dengbêj are primarily known as performers, Zarbêj are explicitly described as "the source creators of works"² and "the creators of the back kitchen of music and klam (song/epic)".¹⁴ This suggests that Zarbêj are more deeply involved in the foundational, compositional aspects of the oral repertoire. However, the phrase "çend dengbêjen wî yên zarbêj hebûn û hew" (only a few of his Dengbêj who were [also] Zarbêj existed)¹⁵ implies a potential overlap or a fluidity between these categories. This suggests that some Dengbêj might also have been Zarbêj (source creators), or that Zarbêj represents a broader creative wellspring from which Dengbêj draw. This complicates a simple binary opposition and points to individuals who may have embodied both creative and performative capacities. Gender dynamics also present a significant point of differentiation. While Dengbêj environments have often been male-dominated, historically limiting the participation of women as professional performers², women are identified as the "sole actors for the tradition Zarbêj" itself.² This underscores the Zarbêj tradition as a primary sphere for female artistic creation.

Despite these distinctions, crucial interconnections and overlaps exist. Most notably, Zarbêj women are considered "the source of the dengbêj tradition".² This statement is fundamental, implying a foundational relationship where the creative output of Zarbêj, particularly women, feeds into and sustains the Dengbêj repertoire. This conceptualization positions the Zarbêj tradition, largely stewarded by women, as the "invisible" foundation or the "back kitchen"¹⁴ that underpins the more publicly visible, and often male-dominated, Dengbêj tradition. Such a dynamic suggests a form of gendered division of cultural labor in the production and perpetuation of Kurdish oral heritage, where the raw material—the stories, melodies, and emotional core—were often developed in domestic, female-centric spaces before potentially being adapted or performed by (often male) Dengbêj in public arenas. Furthermore, both Zarbêj and Dengbêj traditions are seen to hold an "egalitarian role and mission in the artistic production and performance of the society"², at least in terms of their cultural value, even if

social access to performance varied. Both are undeniably vital for preserving the "multi-layered oral culture, oral history, art, literature and musical memory in Mesopotamia".² The historical valorization and romanticization of the Dengbêj¹ in contrast to the "unsung" Zarbêj¹ likely reflects broader societal tendencies to privilege public, often male, performance over private, often female, creative labor. The scholarly "adoption of the term zarbêj"¹ can thus be interpreted as a corrective measure, aiming to rebalance this historical narrative and accord due recognition to all contributors to Kurdish oral heritage. To further clarify these roles, the following table provides a comparative overview:

Table 1: Comparative Overview of Zarbêj and Dengbêj

Feature	Zarbêj	Dengbêj
Primary Role	Source creator, foundational; "back kitchen of music and klam" ¹⁴	Performer, bard, often of epics and historical narratives
Professionalism	Typically non-professional ¹	Often professional or semi-professional
Typical Performance Context	Domestic, household rhythms, spaces of domestic seclusion ¹	Public gatherings, <i>dîwans</i> , dengbêj environments ²
Primary Gender Association	Predominantly female as "sole actors" and source creators ²	Historically male-dominated public performance, though female Dengbêj exist
Scope of Genres	Broad spectrum: laments, songs, folk songs, tales, stories ²	Often associated with epic songs (<i>klam</i> , <i>stran</i>), historical narratives
Relationship	Zarbêj women considered "the source of the dengbêj tradition" ²	Performers who may draw from Zarbêj-created material

V. Women as Zarbêj: Guardians of Mesopotamian Musical and Oral Heritage

The role of women in the Zarbêj tradition is not merely participatory but foundational and central. They are explicitly identified as the "sole actors for the tradition Zarbêj" and "the source creators of works such as laments, songs, folk songs, tales, stories, etc."² This unequivocal assertion highlights their primary agency in shaping and perpetuating a vast corpus of oral literature and music. Women as Zarbêj are the "keepers and resource of an authentic method of musical production and transmission" of Mesopotamia's rich and multi-layered cultural memory.² The significance of their contribution is underscored by initiatives such as the project "Zarbêj and Dengbêj Women whose voices resonate with music in Mesopotamia," which specifically aims to record and bring to light these "Female Voices of Mesopotamian Music".² An example of such a female artist is Îran Mucered, also known as

"Îran Hanım" or "Îran Han," from East Kurdistan, whose musical journey began in childhood and who is recognized within discussions of Zarbêj and Dengbêj women.¹⁴

Despite their pivotal role as the wellspring of these traditions, female Zarbêj, and indeed female Dengbêj, faced formidable challenges. Although they were "the source of the dengbêj tradition, a small number of Zarbêj women could participate in dengbêj environments where they were professional performers due to social traditions, religious reasons and dominant culture being a masculine one".² This exclusion from public professional spheres often relegated their immense creative output to more private domains. Consequently, many women "had to record their works under very difficult conditions, under different identities and pseudonyms due to national, religious and identity pressures".² The fact that Kurdish was often a "banned language," coupled with "religious and ethnic pressure," added further layers of adversity to their efforts to record and preserve Mesopotamian music.² The Zarbêj tradition, as primarily stewarded by women under such conditions, can thus be seen as a powerful form of cultural resistance and preservation. By continuing to create and transmit these oral arts within domestic spaces, even when public expression was curtailed, women ensured the survival of cultural identity and heritage, sometimes subversively through the use of pseudonyms, which hints at the risks involved and the courage displayed.

Nevertheless, the impact and legacy of these women are enduring. Many Yazidi, Yarsani, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish women succeeded in recording Mesopotamian music, thereby preserving numerous classic works on mediums such as vinyl records, radio broadcasts, reel-to-reel tapes, and cassettes.² The interfaith nature of these women Zarbêj is particularly noteworthy. The explicit mention of women from diverse religious backgrounds contributing to this shared musical heritage suggests that the Zarbêj tradition, especially in its female-led dimension, may have transcended or operated alongside religious divides, fostering a common Mesopotamian cultural layer, perhaps facilitated by women's networks and cultural exchange in domestic spheres that were less rigidly defined by religious boundaries than public, male-dominated forums. The "authenticity of these recordings and the positive social impact created by women's voices carried an encouraging mission for women of all peoples living in the Middle East," indicating a broader regional influence.²

Contemporary efforts to recognize and preserve this legacy are exemplified by the work of researchers like Zeynep Yaş Salam. Her extensive contributions to compiling and archiving Kurdish oral culture and music, with a particular focus on "feminine pedagogy in cultural heritage" and "The Role of Women in Kurdish Culture," are testament to this ongoing commitment.² She has compiled collections of notable female artists such as Elmas Muhamed, Meyrem Xan, Gulbihar, Nesrîn Şêrwan, and Ayşe Şan.² The emphasis on "feminine pedagogy" in such research implies a recognition that the methods of transmission and the content of Zarbêj traditions might possess distinct gendered characteristics. These characteristics may include unique ways of imparting knowledge, values, and artistic skills, or an emphasis on different themes or narrative styles, which conventional collection methods might overlook, thus necessitating gender-sensitive approaches to research and archiving.

VI. Documenting the Echoes: Preservation and

Archiving of the Zarbêj Tradition

The preservation and archiving of the Zarbêj tradition, along with broader Kurdish folklore, are recognized as endeavors of paramount cultural importance. Collecting this heritage is deemed "crucial for protecting Kurdish national heritage, revitalising the Kurdish language and establishing the basis for modern Kurdish knowledge and education".¹⁶ Beyond its foundational role in cultural identity, this body of oral tradition serves as an "important source of inspiration for Kurdish poets, writers, musicians, theatre, and film directors"¹⁶, demonstrating its living relevance. Specifically, the Zarbêj tradition, particularly the rich contributions of women, encapsulates "unofficial history and culture" that requires meticulous documentation to ensure its survival and accessibility.² This drive to collect and archive is intrinsically linked to broader Kurdish cultural and national revitalization efforts, where language and oral heritage are foundational to identity, especially in contexts of historical suppression.

Several key initiatives and methodologies are currently employed in this vital work. The project "Zarbêj and Dengbêj Women whose voices resonate with music in Mesopotamia" stands out for its comprehensive approach. It aims to compile existing collections from various archives, record the voices of female performers under their real names alongside their biographical and artistic narratives, conduct research informed by feminist pedagogy, and catalogue, protect, and disseminate these invaluable works using modern technology.² The extensive work of Zeynep Yaş Salam in compiling, archiving, and publishing materials on Kurdish oral culture and music, including her focus on female artists and Dengbêj, such as the "YADGARÎ/MEMORABLE SONGS" album and books like "Ez Eyşe Şan im," exemplifies dedicated scholarship in this field.² Institutional support is also evident through organizations like the Kurdish Heritage Institute (KHI) in Silêmanî. Founded in 2003, the KHI is dedicated to collecting, preserving, and developing the oral culture of all peoples of Kurdistan, boasting an archive, library, recording studios, and a publishing arm that specifically collects "sound, vision, text" for its oral culture archive.¹⁸ Furthermore, there is a noticeable increase in folklore collection among younger generations, who are employing "professional and technically advanced way[s]".¹⁶

The methodologies for collection also emphasize ethical engagement. Collectors are guided to build good relationships with Zarbêj, use local dialects rather than standardized language, listen actively, document the full performance context including gestures and place names, and, crucially, give full credit to Zarbêj as the creators and transmitters of these works, not merely as informants.⁴ This shift towards detailed ethical guidelines and approaches like "feminine pedagogy"² indicates a growing consciousness of power dynamics within the research process. It signifies a move towards more equitable and respectful documentation that acknowledges the intellectual property and cultural authority of the Zarbêj, particularly women, who may have been historically marginalized in documentation efforts.

However, the archiving process is not without its challenges. Many works were originally recorded under "very difficult conditions," with performers sometimes using "different

identities and pseudonyms" due to various pressures.² This complicates attribution and the reconstruction of accurate historical narratives. The inherent nature of oral performance means that any recording captures only a single iteration of what is often a fluid and evolving piece. Additionally, the sheer volume of material and its dispersion across numerous private collections, old radio archives, and other disparate sources present significant logistical hurdles for comprehensive collection.² The act of archiving and disseminating these traditions, especially through modern technological means², can paradoxically both preserve and transform them. While it offers wider reach and protection against loss, it may also decontextualize performances from their original, intimate settings, raising questions about how these traditions will evolve as they enter new media landscapes and interact with globalized cultural influences.

VII. Zarbêj in Contemporary Contexts: Diaspora, Literature, and Cultural Revitalization

The Zarbêj tradition, while rooted in historical practices, continues to resonate in contemporary Kurdish life, both within Kurdistan and in the diaspora, and its influence is discernible in literature and ongoing cultural revitalization efforts. The Kurdish diaspora, in particular, has emerged as a significant arena for cultural activity, playing a vital role in the "revival of the Kurdish language, literature, the development of Kurdish cinema, and new forms of youth culture".¹⁹ Within this dynamic environment, oral traditions like Zarbêj logically find a place in the broader efforts of cultural maintenance and revival. For instance, cultural production within diaspora communities, such as in Berlin, is utilized as a "sociopolitical strategy to maintain the Kurdish identity, address refugees' integration difficulties, form their cohesive and political community, and engage in homeland politics".²⁰ This production encompasses "ethnic food, circle dances, music, and religious melodies"²⁰—contexts where Zarbêj-style storytelling, singing, and the transmission of oral lore could naturally occur and be valued. Although the term "Zarbêj" itself is not explicitly named in all discussions of diaspora cultural activities, the described functions of maintaining identity and preserving heritage through cultural production align closely with the essence of the Zarbêj tradition. The diaspora has indeed "breathed new life into written Kurdish language, literature, and music, which were long banned" in parts of Kurdistan¹⁹, creating an environment conducive to valuing and potentially reinterpreting Zarbêj traditions. This new setting, while presenting challenges of integration, may also offer unique spaces for the re-evaluation and even re-invention of traditions like Zarbêj, potentially freer from some of the homeland's traditional social constraints, such as those historically limiting women's public performance. In the realm of literature and publications, the term "Zarbêj" is increasingly present in academic discourse and discussions of Kurdish folklore. It appears in scholarly journals such as *Folklor û Ziman*⁴ and *the world of music (new series)*¹, indicating its acceptance and utility as an analytical category. The term "zarbêj" is also discussed in the context of oral storytellers or bards who existed before the widespread prominence of written Kurdish novels, as noted in a critique of a television program about the novelist Mehmed Uzun.¹⁵ This situates Zarbêj

within the historical trajectory of Kurdish literary forms, as precursors or foundational elements to written literature. However, it is important to clarify that despite some incidental mentions (e.g., a YouTube video title ²¹ or an article title ¹⁴ that includes the word), there is no evidence in the provided materials to support the existence of a specific, established literary magazine titled "Zarbêj." While significant Kurdish literary magazines like *Hawar* ²², *Nûdem* ²³, and *Fritillaria Kurdica* ¹⁶ have played crucial roles in Kurdish literary development, none are named "Zarbêj." One analysis explicitly states that a document discussing Zarbêj makes no mention of a "Zarbêj magazine".⁴ The absence of such a dedicated periodical, despite the term's cultural significance, might suggest that "Zarbêj" as a concept is more deeply integrated into broader folklore studies and research on women's cultural contributions rather than representing a distinct literary movement or school that would typically warrant its own journal, unlike, for example, the influential *Hawar* school.²³

Modern revitalization efforts are actively engaging with and promoting the Zarbêj tradition. The collection and publication of folklore by younger generations, often utilizing "professional and technically advanced way[s]," indicate a vibrant contemporary engagement with these oral heritages.¹⁶ Projects such as "Folklor a Gundê Bafê" (Folklore of Bafê Village), which involve recording Zarbêj narrating traditional stories like "Çîroka Keçelok" and "Çîroka Nîsko," supported by cultural organizations like CultureCIVIC, are direct examples of these revitalization activities.² Furthermore, the use of Zarbêj material as a source of inspiration for modern Kurdish arts, including literature, music, and theatre ¹⁶, demonstrates its enduring relevance and adaptability. This academic and cultural interest in Zarbêj is part of a broader global movement towards recognizing and preserving intangible cultural heritage. However, in the Kurdish context, these efforts are also profoundly intertwined with critical issues of cultural survival, language rights, and the assertion of national identity, particularly given the historical suppression faced by Kurdish culture and language.²

VIII. Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy and Future Trajectories of Zarbêj

The exploration of the Zarbêj tradition reveals a vital and multifaceted dimension of Kurdish cultural heritage. Defined as primarily non-professional, and often female, creators and purveyors of a diverse spectrum of oral genres, Zarbêj are foundational to the preservation and transmission of Kurdish cultural memory, worldview, and historical consciousness.¹ Their role, frequently enacted within the intimate confines of domestic life, has been crucial in shaping household rhythms and imparting knowledge across generations.¹ While distinct from the often more public and professionalized Dengbêj, the Zarbêj tradition, particularly through its female practitioners, is considered a primary source from which the Dengbêj repertoire itself has drawn.² The centrality of women as the "sole actors" and "source creators" within the Zarbêj tradition cannot be overstated; they have been the guardians of this heritage despite facing significant social, political, and cultural challenges, including restrictions on public performance and the suppression of the Kurdish language.² Ongoing efforts to

document, archive, and disseminate their works are therefore not only acts of cultural preservation but also of recognizing and rectifying historical marginalization.²

The importance of the Zarbêj tradition endures. It remains a vital link to Kurdish cultural identity, a repository of historical narratives, and a testament to the resilience and richness of the Kurdish linguistic heritage. The academic and cultural recognition of Zarbêj, especially the contributions of female Zarbêj, significantly enriches the broader understanding of Kurdish culture, offering a more nuanced and inclusive perspective. These traditions continue to serve as a profound source of inspiration for contemporary Kurdish artistic expression, demonstrating their living relevance in a changing world.¹⁶

Looking towards the future, the Zarbêj tradition is likely to navigate a hybrid space where traditional modes of oral transmission coexist and interact with modern forms of archiving, artistic reinterpretation, and digital dissemination. This dynamic presents both immense opportunities for wider reach and preservation against loss, and challenges related to maintaining contextual authenticity and the potential decontextualization of performances.²

Continued support for archiving initiatives, scholarly research, and educational programs that integrate Zarbêj material is essential. Furthermore, exploring how Zarbêj traditions can be further leveraged for community empowerment, fostering intergenerational connections, and contributing to cultural diplomacy, especially within the Kurdish diaspora, represents a promising avenue for their continued vitality. The increased focus on Zarbêj, and particularly the pivotal role of women within this tradition, is more than an academic or archival endeavor; it is a significant act of reclaiming and re-centering marginalized voices within the narrative of Kurdish cultural heritage. This process has profound implications for how Kurdish history, culture, and identity are understood, both by Kurds themselves and by the wider global community, fostering a more complete and equitable appreciation of this enduring legacy.

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