Neither Âşık nor Dengbêj – The Lament Singers from Dersim (Tunceli)

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Until the late twentieth century, the most important literary and musical form in the region of Dersim (roughly today’s province Tunceli) were laments. While also other songs used to be sung in this region, both the aesthetic emotional value and the large number of laments have led to a widespread equation of sung poetry in Dersim with laments, both in research literature and in the region itself.

Figure 1: Silo Qiz (b. 1918, official name Süleyman Doğan), singer-poet from Mulo, a village near the city of Tunceli. Photo: www.dersim37-38.org/silo-qiz-dersim-agidi-klama-dersim/ (accessed 18 May, 2018)
Within the culturescape of Anatolia, the lament singers from Dersim do not fit into the common narratives of singer-poets. In close proximity north of the region, the tradition of Turkish-speaking âşık is flourishing (Şenel, 1991). A great number of well-known singer-poets lived (and still live) in the region of Erzincan-Sivas, many of them Alevi (and some even of Dersim origin), including nation-wide famous singers such as Davut Sulari (1925–1985), Âşık Daimi (1932–1983), and Ali Ekber Çiçek (1935–2006). Northeast of Dersim, from Erzurum up to Kars, another style of âşık predominates, with mostly Sunni singer-poets, and a popular tradition of song duelling (karsîlama; Özarslan, 2001; Erdener, 1995). Finally numerous âşıks lived west and southwest of Dersim in the region of Elazığ-Malatya.

The tradition of dengbêj, on the other hand, is wide-spread east of Dersim beginning in the neighboring province of Bingöl, as well as south-east of Dersim, in the region of Diyarbakır. Common language of the dengbêjs is Kurmanji. Even Zaza living in close contacts with Kurmanji speakers, obviously do not have their own dengbêj tradition; Zaza-speaking dengbêjs as in Kığı (Bingöl), or Varto (north of Muş), often sing in Kurmanji. In Dersim, however, until at least the 1980s, the term dengbêj seems hardly to have been in use.

Ali Baran, Kurmanji speaking singer, b.1956, Hozat:


Peter Bumke, anthropologist, talking about his fieldwork in the late 1970s in Kurmanji-speaking villages in Mazgirt-Darîkent:

(Question: Did the singers call themself dengbêj?)

No. Yes. Sometimes they used this word, but they called their songs kilaman. They could refer to the singers as kilaman, those who transmitted them – sometimes with saz, sometimes without. (Interview 16 June, 2015, Berlin)

Likewise, the Turkishs terms âşık or ozan probably only exceptionally were used among the Zaza-speaking people in Dersim, as for example for Âşık Yusuf Kem-ter Dede (1928–2015, born in Ovacık; see below). I do not know of any source that mentions the term ozan (or as hozan) as used in Dersim before the later twentieth century (e.g. for Ozan Serdar, b. 1955). In his memories (written in Turkish language), Nuri Dêrsimi (1892/93–1973) refers to his father Milla İbra-him as halk şairi (“folk poet”; 1952/ 2014: 13). However, we do not know if (or to what extent) this term was used in Dersim itself.

Whereas in Dersim no general term exists for the singers of laments, their po-ets are called sa or sayîr (literally: poet), reminding of the nominations as şair in some Kurmanji-speaking regions such as Botan and Hekari/Hakkari (Turgut, 2010: 29). Only in regions east of Dersim, however, rather the term dengbêj was common (Çakır, 2011: 52). Similar to the practice among Kurdish singer-poets of
several regions (Turgut, 2010: 29), also Kurmanji-speaking singers in Dersim (remarkably no Zaza-speaking singer) hence recently began to call themselves *dengbêj*, therewith adopting the recent spread of this term among Kurds.

At first sight, than, the tradition of singer-poets in Dersim might be seen as a phenomenon of transition between the larger traditions of *âşık* and *dengbêj*. A second conceivable model would interpret the tradition of the mostly Zaza-speaking singers in Dersim as an independent “Zaza tradition”, parallel to both the “Turkish *âşık*” and the “Kurmanji *dengbêj*”.¹ In the present articles, however, I will argue that none of both models describes the situation in Dersim properly. The singer-poets in Dersim do not present a homogeneous style, nor a clear transition form *dengbêj* to *âşık*. In terms of performance practice and musical style Dersim rather gives us insights into the complex, inconsistent and highly creative singer-poet landscape before the emergence of nationalistic narratives, which only since the early twentieth century formed the perception of discrete and homogeneous “Turkish” and “Kurdish” folk music styles in Anatolia.

Sources

Today, hardly anything is known about music and music life in Dersim before 1937,² and even about the time after that, until the 1970s, we have very little information. Some rare recordings, made under unclear circumstances, and today stored in state or private archives (most of them closed for the public), preserve some older melodies and songs. Almost no written sources reliably report from music life in Dersim, no notations from the region (as for example Armenian notation) have been discovered yet.

Official Turkish folklorists of the early Republican time such as Muzaffer Sarıöz (1899–1963), Sadi Yaver Ataman (1906–1994), Halil Bedii Yönetken (1899–1968) and Mahmut Ragıp Gazimihal (1900–1961) several times visited neighboring provinces of Dersim, including Erzincan and Elazığ (1929, 1937), recording and transcribing hundreds of songs (Kaya, 2014; Elçi, 1997). Similar to other regions with mainly non-Turkish populations, as for example Bingöl, Şırnak or Hakkâri, also Dersim was mostly excluded from official research. Until 1937, Dersim was an almost autonomous region, protected by surrounding mountains and rivers, and for state officials and official researchers the access

¹ Between both traditions of course numerous transitions exist. Hande Sağlam (2013: 96) for example mentions in Sivas *Âşık Şentiürk* (Sivas, Zara), who sang *âşık* songs in Zaza; on the otherhand, a number of Kurdish *âşık* sang in Kurmanji.

² Historically important, though unfortunately not investigated yet are memory books and transcriptions of folk music made among Armenian refugees and migrants from Dersim in France and America. Most well-known is the collection of Gomitas’s student Mihran Toumajan (1972). In addition Hovhannes Acemyans small book on Armenian songs in the region of Çemişgezek need to be mentioned (1955).
was difficult. In the years 1937–1938 a large military operation of the Turkish army finally brought the region under complete control of the government (Bilmez, 2011). In official Turkish historiography this operation was described as a reaction to the so-called “Seyit Rıza Rebellion” (or “Dersim Rebellion”), while local memory refers to the events as “tertele”, a Zaza word akin to “chaos”. In fact the operation led to massacres on civilians. According to official reports, approximately 14 000 persons were killed, and 11 000 forced to move to western Turkey. A local researcher on oral history of the tertele, Cemal Taş (2016), estimates the real figures of victims about three times higher. As a result, a decimated and traumatized population remained in what became a regular province of the Republic of Turkey, which from 1936 on was renamed Tunceli instead of Dersim.

It was during these crucial years, that the first official collection of folk music in the region was conducted. At that time, M. Ferruh Arsunar (1908–65), an experienced folk music researcher, was based at the “People’s House” (Halkevi) in Elazığ (Özcan, 2014; Emnalar, 1998, 41; Altınay, 2004: 99ff, 156–165). Beginning on 26 August 1936, Arsunar traveled through some south, central and western districts of Tunceli (Pertek, Hozat and Ovacık) and transcribed deyiş’s and folk songs. Due to the lack of a phonograph he did not record music but rather notated them on the spot. In 1937, Arsunar published two almost similar small booklets dealing with his fieldwork in Dersim (Arsunar, 1937a, 1937b). His articles on Dersim and Elazığ, which he published already one year earlier, clearly exhibit the nationalistic ideology of this period. All lyrics printed in these booklets are in Turkish. The languages Zaza, Kurmanji and Armenian (the latter might still have been spoken at that time by remaining Armenians) are not even mentioned. It is hence unclear if he included songs of the lament tradition or not.

In 1944, seven years after Arsunar, another group of folklorists, now in charge of the State Conservatory Ankara, and including Muzaffer Sarıözsen, Halil Bedii Yönetken and Rıza Yetişen collected in total 293 songs from Elazığ, Tunceli, Bingöl and Muş (Elçi, 1997: 61–64; Yönetken, 2006: 106–109). This time, the researchers recorded the songs on a phonograph. Unfortunately, similar to most officially recorded collections, the recordings are still closed for research, only undocumented copies are spread unofficially among musicians and musicologists. Also Sarıözsen published all songs exclusively in Turkish. Transcriptions based on the recordings made in 1944 were published several times later.3 However, in an interview with Mesut Özcan, Silo Qız (Süleyman Doğan) confirmed

3 For a list of the recording see Elçi, 1997: 128ff. In 2012, the province government of Tunceli published the book Folk Music from Tunceli (Tunceli Halk Müziği, Turhan & Kantar, 2012) edited by Salih Turhan, folk music collector and member of the Ankara State Choir for Turkish Folk Music of the Ministry for Culture and Turizm. The songs in this volume include only Turkish lyrics, most were collected by Sarıöszen and other collectors. Özcan, 2003.
that some of the recordings were made in Zaza. “The song which Sansözönen mentioned as Seýit Şah Haydar’s song for example, was a lament which Sîlemano Qız created as his son Sa Heyder died in the army. The song is entirely in Zaza.” (Özcan, 2003: 57).  

After 1944 no further official music collections were ever conducted in Dersim (Özcan 2003). At that time the entrance to the province of Tunceli was still restricted. In 1947, however, when the ban ended, the efforts for the creation of a national Turkish music repertoire had already diminished. In 1952, the “Peoples Houses” were closed.

Beginning in the late 1960s, with the availability of mobile tape recorders, and even more of mobile cassette recorders, a growing number of private, local folklorists, researchers and collectors began to record proverbs, tales, oral history and songs. Some published their findings in the first journals in Zaza, which were published in this time, including Hêvi, Berhem or Piya (Selcan, 1998). Most of these collectors had no academic background, they collected what seemed to be of cultural value. Noteworthy most of these researchers were based in Europe and recorded during their regular trips home.

Hidir Dulkadir, collector:

Ibrahim Gök came from Germany for holidays. He brought with him a tape recorder from “Grun-dig”. He called me: Come with me, let’s go to your uncle Hasan Arslan [Hesê Kêk]. He took the tape recorder over his shoulders and together we went to his house in the neighborhood of Şêjeru. This was in 1967... In an amateurish way we recorded his voice on tape. The voices that are on the market today belong to these days. (Dulkadir, 2011: 22; similarly Kilh, 2008)

Ozan Serdar, singer, b. 1955, central Tunceli:

In this time, everyone had a tape recorder and recorded. We liked that. We encountered a tape recorder in every village and every house we went to. In this way we saw that our voice spread in Dersim. (Interview October 29, 2015, Bonn, Germany)

The first private collectors recorded non-Turkish songs without any kind of official support by the Turkish state under difficult conditions. In particular after the coup d’état on 12 September, 1980, when the use of non-Turkish songs was forbidden, researchers secretly recorded songs under great personal risk. In addition, during the 1990s, fights between the Turkish army and the PKK in Dersim esca-

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5 Private collectors active in Dersim include Zilfi Selcan (Berlin, today Tunceli), Musa Canpolat (Stuttgart, today Tunceli), Munzur Çömerd, Daimi Cengiz (Duisburg), Hawar Tornêcengi (Frankfurt), Munzur Çem (Berlin), Çemal Taş (Istanbul), Metin Kahraman (Pülümür / Istanbul), Mesut Özcan (Ankara, today Tunceli), Seyfi Müxûndi (Konya), Mehmet Yildirim (today Istanbul), and many others.
6 Several reasons might explain the pioneering role of researchers from the diaspora. First, some “guestworkers” in Germany (or elsewhere) where able to bring together the money for a tape recorder earlier than those in Tunceli, where the economical situation was still difficult. In addition, the longing for a lost home might have motivated expatriates to record at least songs from there. Finally discourses of Zaza or Dersim identities forbidden in Turkey were first discussed in Europe, and only later in Turkey (Greve & Şahin, 2018).
lated; in 1994 a great number of villages were evacuated and destroyed by the Turkish army. Research in this region hence was dangerous. From 1976 until 1979, as the first foreign researcher in Dersim, the German ethnologist Peter Bumke stayed several times for months in Mazgirt-Muxundi/Darîkent and recorded laments, which he mainly used as sources for local history (Bumke, 1979).

Consequently, the first anthologies of lyrics of traditional laments from Dersim were published as late as 1992 (Düzgün, 1992).7 Its first and largest part contains laments on the massacres of 1937/38. In 2002, a much larger collection was published in two volumes by Mesut Özcan. In 2011, Hidir Dulkadir (living in Duisburg, Germany) published a booklet on some selected poets (in particular on his elder relative Hesê Kêk), based on historical recordings made in 1967/68. The book from Daimi Cengiz (2010, also based in Duisburg) on the famous singer-poet Sej Qaji presented a large collection of Sey Qajis poems, together with a description of the long search for songs, family members of the poet and his pupils.8 Until today two CDs and one book including three CDs with recordings of lament singers have been published. The earliest, “Elders sing songs from Dersim” (Yaşlılar Dersim Türküleri Söylüyor, Lızge Müzik) was released by Metin and Kemal Kahraman in 2002. Only one year later the less well documented CD “Kurdish Bards. Traditional Music from Dersim” was released by the Austrian label Extraplatte, edited by Mehmet Emir, including recordings of Zeynel Kahraman, Mursaê Silêmani and Hidir Akgün. In addition a number of historical recordings were spread among musicians from Dersim and on the internet. For example Alaverdi (Ali Çawdar, 1921–1983), who in his lifetime never produced any official cassette, gained fame among musicians after his death, and a number of his private recordings became widely known in Dersim.

**Lyrics and Poets**

Unfortunately no research has been published yet on the literary form, language and aesthetic of the lyrics. Already the terminology of this rapidly disappearing tradition is unclear. Several words in Zaza language are in use inconsistently, including lawke / lawuka, hewa or kilam, which all have the (unspecified) meaning “air”, “song”. The term hewa is related to the Turkish word hava, similarly meaning

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7 Other, smaller collections of songs lyrics from Dersim of this time include Uşên, 1992; Çem, 1993.

8 While several Turkish âşiks of other Turkish regions published their own lyrics, I never came across any similar publication by a folksinger from Dersim. The only comparable book was edited by singer Mikail Aslan, also based in Germany, who remarkably edited not only his own lyrics but also their melodies in western notation (Aslan 2012). The collection also includes some notated songs either from field collections (without clear information about circumstances of collections) or other composers (as recorded on of Mikail Aslans CDs), e.g. Ahmet Aslan (Nî Adîrî), Âşık Daimi (Oy melene), Zeynel Kahraman (Sevê) and Firik Dede (Efendim Efendim).
“air”, as in uzun hava, “long melody”, which is a general term for free metered vocal forms. The term kılam on the other hand, is widely used in Kurmanji, probably originating from the Arabic “kelam” which means “word” (Çaçan, 2013: 25). The songs of the dengbêjs as sung east and southeast of Dersim are generally called kılam, while the similar term kılám or kelam is furthermore used for, for example, religious hymns of the Ahl-e Haqq / Yaresan in Iran (and Iraq) (Hooshmandrad, 2014; 2013). The Zaza word şêwarı / şuar is mainly used for lamentations as improvised by women at funerals in Dersim, but only rarely refers to poetic laments.

Although most laments were sung in Zaza, in Mazgirt and in the south of Dersim also Kurmanji was used for laments. The most well-known Kurmanji singer was Mahmut Baran (1923–1975), a member of the Kurmanji-speaking ocak family Ağuçan, who lived in the village Bargini (Karabakır) between Hozat and Pertek. Mahmut Baran also sung in Zaza. Already his father Mehmet Baran is known to have been a singer, and at present Mahmut Baran’s son Ali Baran (b. 1956) is one of the few remaining singers of more or less traditional songs.

Different from âşik songs and similar to the kılams of the dengbêjs, laments in Dersim are not structured in stanzas with a fixed number of syllables but rather use changing numbers of lines of different length in free meter. Hence, neither the fixed rhymes of âşik poetry are used nor the traditional āruz prosody (Düzgün, 1992: 51). Free rhymes, however, are used frequently, in several existing rhyme schemes. As Düzgün (1992: 50f) pointed out, many Zaza words end on vowels, which simplifies the formation of rhymes.

Again different from âşiks, neither dengbêj nor the singer-poets of Dersim mention their own name in their lyrics. Consequently, today the poets of many laments are unknown. Only locally some historical poets from Dersim are still remembered, including Sey Qaji (?1871–1936), Sa Heyder (d. 1917), Hesê Kêk (1889–1974), Hesenê Gaj (1889–1982), Sey Weliyê Kupikey (Sey Weli Kemaneci) (1900/05–1980) and Apê Keko. A great number of songs has been transmitted anonymously. Due to the exclusively oral transmission, songs obviously could change over time. From some famous songs, including Silo Feqir, Welat Welat, Sah Haydar or Setero, recordings exist of different singers, such as Alaverdi, Silo Qiz, Said Bakşi, Ibrahim Güler, Hidir Malkoç, Mehmet Çapan and Ismaile İmami, often in slightly different versions.9

Similar to other singer-poet traditions, also in Dersim, lyrics and music form one unity, and every lyric is connected with its own melody (Düzgün, 1992: 45).

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9 Variants of several laments in Çem, 2003; Özcan, 2002, the well-known lament Çuxure (name of a village near today’s Tunceli) one by Hesê Fate, another one by Silo Qiz (Özcan, 2002: 93ff); sometimes even different versions of the same singer-poet exist (Özcan, 2002: 27); e.g. Hewa/Xelvey (from Sey Qaji) two different variants sung by Silo Qiz, one recorded by Musut Özcan, one by Mehmet Yıldırım (Özcan, 2002: 365ff).
Sait Bakşi:

(To what extend is the singer free in his interpretation? Can you change anything?)
Now for this music, for a given work there is one music, an instrumental form. We definitely have to play that. Except for that, no other instruments can be used anyway.
(That means the way you sing Sey Qajis kilams is one hundred percent like he sang them?)
Exactly my friend. And it has to be like that. (Interview 2 December, 2015, Istanbul)

In the same interview, Sait Bakşi referred to “melody” with the term makam, similar to the use of this term in Anatolian folk music (Şenel, 2007: 52; Neubauer, 1971):

(How many makams do you know?)
Well as makams, every song has its own makam. You have to remain in the same makam, and with that I mean the same measure (ölçü). In every song there is one makam. So in one makam you can not adopt a second song.

The spread of this term at least in northern Dersim (similar to the region further north of it) deserves particular research.

On the other hand, in practice, singers seem to have had some degree of artistic freedom in their interpretation of older songs.

Hıdır Akgül:

There are very old songs, which I heard from ear to ear, and I liked them. A man sings five kilam, the music of these five kilam is the same. I said to myself: ‘It can’t be like that. So if the music of a given kilam is like this, it must be changed a bit.’ So I arranged this music, I gave it a form. So it became more beautiful, the people liked it. (Interview 27 December, 2015, Övacık)

Looking at the lyrics, striking in almost all types of songs and laments in Dersim is the strong presence of Alevi elements. Whatever the content tells, the names of spiritual persons, places (ziyaretis) or other Alevi topics are frequently mentioned (ÖZcan, 2002: 25). Since by far most dengbêj are Sunni, nothing comparable can be found in their songs. In the lyrics of Alevi âşiks, however, Alevi references are common, and the same holds for âşiks of Sunni or Christian origin (see also Hande Sağlam in this volume).

Probably all laments (as all other song types) in Dersim are based on true incidents rather than on invented stories or general religious or natural issues. In this aspect, the Kurdish dengbêj tradition is again comparable, which songs similarly mostly deal with historical events and which protagonists are known persons (at least known by name; Hamelink, 2016, Çaçan, 2013). Different from the dengbêj tradition, however, most songs in Dersim deal with personal issues. Only few praise tribal leaders or other historic heroes. Some laments are created about the death of close relatives of the poet, or they lament the poet’s own fate. As Hıdır Çavdar, son of the singer-poet Alaverdi told me in an interview, his father created his first lament when he became blind.10 Sibo Qız sung laments about the death of two of his sons (lament Sabheyder), and similarly Hesê Kêk about two of his sons

10 Interview in Tunceli on May 28, 2015; lyrics of this lament in Özcan, 2008: 190.

While songs, including laments, in Dersim could be made at any time by anybody, some persons became known as gifted poets, being remembered even long after their death. Less gifted villagers, in fact virtually everyone (depending on financial means), could order personal songs from locally well-known poets.

Hıdır Çavdar, son of the poet-singer Alaverdi (1921–1983), central Dersim:

For example the son of someone here goes to the army, steps on a mine and dies. My late father would immediately make a song about him, and record the composition on a cassette. The man would take it and go, and he would listen to it for years. [...] For example, a man shook a walnut tree, fell down and died. So they come to my father and told him what happened: ‘so and so, my son went to the garden like this, climbed on a walnut tree and shaking it he fell down and died.’ My father of course made a lament of 5–10 verses, and the man listened to it from time to time. [...] On whatever comes into one’s mind, whatever happens, he definitely made a new song.

Most songs are laments on individuals who were killed violently, in fights with the Ottoman or Turkish army respectively, in fights between local tribes (aşiret) or (less frequent) as a result of accidents (avalanches, persons drowned etc.). By far most of the laments still remembered today deal with the massacres of 1938. On some particular events of this period even several laments have been made, as for example “Setero” by Memed Çapan and Silo Qiz (Özcan, 2008: 23). The lyrics tell the circumstances leading to a person’s death and thereby turn the pain into a narrative. The personal memories of incidents and people killed hence became more public as they were shared with others, spread over the region, and therewith kept memories alive over a longer time. However, instead of describing exactly what happened, songs transform events into a poetic form, which can be memorized better. Due to the poetical form, the actual story the lament is dealing with does not always become clearly understandable. As historical sources, laments hence require further knowledge on the circumstances of their production. Cemal Taş for example, conducted in-depth interviews with numerous witnesses of 1937/38, which he published in several books and articles. Recently

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11 The genre of laments, Turkish ağıt (in addition to several other names), is known in a large range of literal and musical styles all over Anatolia. Naskali, 2011; Başgöz, 2008; Bayrak, 1996; Boratav, 1996, 1986; Özdemir, 1994; Esen, 1982.

12 Other example include “Çixure” by Hesê Fate and Silo Qiz; “Sonde Sonde”, one anonymous, one song by Hesê Fate and Silo Qiz (Özcan, 2002: 118ff); “Hewa Zegerye” (a village in Nazimiye) by Mehmet Kılç / Mehmet Coşkun, another one by Silo Qiz. Also on the massacre of “Lac derei” two different laments are known (Dulkadir, 2011: 75ff, 96ff).

13 Dalkılıç, 2015; Saltık & Taş, 2016. For oral history of Dersim see Bilmez et.al. In fact many Anatolian folk songs obviously may ground on a concrete event, without, however, narrating it in a comprehensible way. This transformation from historical facts to poems and

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Nilüfer Saltık and Cemal Taş published an encompassing collection of laments on 1938 including numerous historical documents, interviews on oral history, lyrics with comments and three CDs with the original recordings of the laments (Saltık & Taş, 2016).

Older songs by formerly known or unknown poets were thus transmitted orally and are therefore about incidents that happened long ago, and which otherwise would have been forgotten.

Peter Bumke, ethnologist, speaking on villages in Mazgirt / Darıkkent in the 1970s:

*Partly these where events which had happened in the immediate surroundings, in the villages of Hacı Yusuf or in Karasakal, or the violent death of a boy in the nearby Perisu river. There was also a story which took place in Bingöl, in Varto, but almost always it used to be Alevi-Kurdish regions. [...] Some of the songs must have been quite old. [...] At the same time I did my standard ethnology work, that is record genealogies. [...] At a certain point I found that people talked about a certain Süley, some three or four generations ago, who came up in both a genealogy and one song. In this way I could find out some things about conflicts that happened around the 1880s, and about the persons in the genealogies, hence the great-great-great-grandfather of someone of the village.*

Only some few songs known today go back before 1900, printed exceptions include the songs *Hewa Kalax* and *Hewa Ağdat* which tell stories that happened during a struggle between tribes in 1850–1860. Sa Heyder is known to have been killed during the first World War. Furthermore, some surviving songs of Sey Qaji deal with World War I. In many cases, the age of the laments and the names of the poets are unknown. This loss of older laments might also explain the lack of Armenian poets known in Dersim, and the small amount of Armenians mentioned in the lyrics, although many Armenians used to live in this region, according to oral history in good terms with their Alevi neighbors. If any Armenian singer-poets might have sung in either Armenian or Zaza in the Dersim singer-poet tradition, their songs where forgotten just as almost all other songs created before 1915.

We may conclude that the laments of Dersim are mostly younger than many songs of *dengbêj*, which often refer to the late nineteenth century, as an idealized, past social and political world: „*they speak of caravans, horse riders, past tribal alliances and other features that no longer exist.***“ (Hamelink, 2016: 62; Çaçan, 2013). Songs of *âşık* might even be older, several going back centuries ago.

songs is hardly studied in Turkey. Often stories are told in addition to particular folk songs, even sometime in different variants.

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15 Dalküç, 2015: 98ff; some more songs of this period in Özcan, 2002; *Herbê Cihani, Hewa Domonê Sowesênê Kali, Guli Beg* (Düzgün, 1992: 115ff; 157ff; 205ff).

Only few laments created later than 1938 are included in anthologies, as for example *Hewa Qore* (Lawa Xidir) or e.g. *Atvasê mi* telling a story from the Korean war (1950–1953), where some soldiers from Dersim have been sent to (Düzgün, 1992: 207f; Özcan, 2002: 153f); or *Sayidê Mi*, a lament on Dr. Sait Kurmizitoprak, leader of the Turkish Kurdistan Demokrat Party, who was killed in 1971 (Özcan, 2003: 208f).

In her master thesis completed in 2010, Aylin Demir describes another related tradition of Dersim, that is lamentations improvised privately by women. No standard terminology refers to these laments, which do not have any fixed literary or musical form. The women rather claim to “sing on her own” during the daily work, and only when they are alone. These spontaneous lamentations could be sung in either Zaza, Kurmanji or even in Turkish—weeping in Dersim (just as everywhere) normally happens in one’s mother tongue. Actually these secretly sung lamentations remind one of those which are improvised during funerals, although they are less emotional. The number of syllables per line is again free, reaching from seven to fifteen. Remarkably, political or historical topics such as 1938 are not mentioned here, but rather issues of the women’s personal lives, such as forced marriages (at an early age), former unhappy love affairs, general discontent, loneliness, poverty, or the pain of a lost child. Again, Alevi spiritual figures or places of pilgrimage such as Düzgün Baba, Hızır or Munzur Baba are mentioned regularly.

Kemal Kahraman, singer from Pülümür, northern Dersim.

*My mother sang, what we in Zaza used to call “lorlaene”; […] You speak and sing spontaneously. You sing in a simple melody but at the same time you tell a story of your own. Your attitude, your situation. But they do that more often while working. Whenever my mother did that I cried. I was a child. I never wanted her to do that. This used to happen to my mother at home. For me, my mother was a thousand year old woman. […] It was done over long tones, in a form without clear ending. […] (So she tells from her own life?) Yes, it could be about anything. “My son went away, if he only could have stayed” for example. Ok? “How beautiful he looked when he left”; something like that. Her mother died about 40 years ago. But until today she could sing something like “my mother was so beautiful”, or “my fate is so bad” and so on. […] You know the melody is in fact static. Everyone sings with the same melody. (Interview March 5, 2014, Berlin)*

Estelle Amy de la Bretéque (2012) found similar female vocal forms, to which she referred as “melodized speech”, spread in a wide region including Azerbaijan, Yezidi in Armenia, and Kurds in Istanbul and Diyarbakır.
Always associated with feelings of loss and self-sacrifice, melodized speech resembles a chant: an indefinite number of syllables and words are uttered on a limited range of notes. This monotonous or sing-song intonation in speech is a liminal form between music and language and considered locally not as song but as speech.\footnote{2016: 29. According to Amy de la Bretéque, the melodies are characterized by groups of three or four sonic plateaus, “each plateau contains syllables uttered flowing fast within a single breath over one or two notes” (2016: 47), partly accompanied by beating on knees, or a series of plateaus and a descending path” (p.48), sometimes “large vibratos on word-ending vowels” (an element which is also known from most dengbêj styles).}

Different from many laments, the women do not achieve catharsis, they do not expect any relief (2016: 52).

The main difference between the melodized speeches of men and women, therefore, seems to revolve around the degree of involvement by the speakers in the utterance. Women melodize mainly what they see as their own “black” destinies (or those of their children and brothers), while men relate stories of tragic heroes whom they have in most cases never met. (2016: 51)

In terms of musical style, however, female lamentations in Dersim do not differ substantially from the laments by men as described before.

Local researchers such as Mesut Özcan (2002) and Mustafa Düzgün (1992) suppose funeral lamentations sung by women to be the origin of the k làms. “Laments as performed by lament singers are similar in content and form to the laments as sung by women” (Özcan, 2002:17).

When someone dies, the women call for a woman with a ‘burning’ voice [sesi yanik bir kadın] and ask her to come to the funeral. They say: ‘Come and sing some laments and let’s cry.’ These women who sing laments upon the deceased, the şen-şiwan (lamentations) singers are no poets, and after the funeral is done, their work ends. It is not the task of women with burning voices to make songs. A poet will take part at the funeral of a friend just like anyone, but in general he will not sing songs at the funeral. If he makes a song for someone, he will go home and prepare, and sometimes several years after the deadly incident he will make a song and sing it. However, before singing his song the poet will gather information on the deceased, on his friends and enemies, the reason and the way of his dying, the situation of his family, his mother and father, and on his wife and children. Then he will take his saz or violin and sing his song” (Düzgün, 1992: 46)

Noteworthy, a similar wide-spread narrative attributes the origin of dengbêj songs to lamentations as sung by women during funerals (see Schäfers in this volume; Hamelink, 2016). However, since no research on funeral lamentations sung by women in Dersim has been conducted yet, this theory can neither be confirmed nor rejected. The melodies of laments sung by Kurdish-Alevi women in Marash-Elbistan and Koçgiri (hence in a linear distance of 300 and 200 km respectively) as recorded by Besê Aslan (CD, 2011) and Ayfer Düzdaş (CD, 2012), remind one of those of the k làms in Dersim. In this context, (music) historical connections with Dersim would deserve further research. Interviews conducted with singers in Tunceli by the present writer, however, clearly demonstrate that at least during the last fifty years k làms where created without any connection to lamentations of women (Greve & Şahin, 2018).
As mentioned before, while most songs from Dersim were laments, a much smaller amount of songs tell different stories including love affairs (Özcan, 1995).

Hıdır Akgül, singer, b. 1957, Ovacık:

*For example someone said: „There is a girl I am in love with. Make a piece on her.”
We talked a bit like that, I immediately began, played and sung while he recorded it.*

In particular Sa Hâyder (d. 1917?), is known as a poet of love songs (of which some few survived in the repertoires of Silo Qız, Sait Bakşî and others).

While also songs of aşiks and dengbêjs might include ağîts (Artun, 2014: 186ff), the amount of songs dealing with death in Dersim is significantly higher. The outstanding importance of deads in the literature and music from Dersim might be explained by Alevism (which dominates the society of Dersim) with its general emphasis on suffering and dead. As generally known in cems vocal forms such as mersiye lament on the death of Ali and Hüseyin and intend to arouse commiseration for them.

A second explanation is more speculative. Due to the lack of sources (in particular of field recordings) the question about a possible influence of the massacres of 1937/38 in Dersim on the tradition cannot be proved. Among the oldest kilams the proportion of laments is obviously lower. Arsunar in 1937, does not mention laments explicitly, but rather states “with exceptions folk songs from Tunceli deal with heroism, while also there are many songs on love and nature.” (Arsuner, 1937 b: 10). Probably only after 1938 the number of laments increased and gained a higher proportion among the kilams. In this time almost no topic was used for songs except laments. Before the traumatic events, kilam (and similar terms) might have been a much more general tradition of epic and even love songs. With the massacres the psychological and social demands for laments possibly changed the tradition.

**Performance Practice**

Our knowledge on the singers is again limited. Some of the singers of historical recordings obviously were locally well-known in their time, others not. In Dersim, obviously everyone could sing kilams, on private occasions, before their relatives, friends or neighbors. However, singers with an extraordinary good voice and strong memory could regionally become well-known, either for their poems, or their voice (even if they would not create poems themselves, such as Sait Bakşî), in most cases, however, for both together. After the 1970s, private recordings spread the fame of individual singers, after the 1980s recordings were

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produced professionally on commercial audio cassettes or later on CDs. Well-known singers of the late twentieth century include Sülo Qız (Süleyman Doğan, b. 1908), Mahmut Baran (1923–1975), Alaverdi (Ali Çavdar, 1925/6–1983), Seyfi Doğanay (1940–2005), Mehmet Çapan (d. 1945), Hozan Serdar (d. 1955) and others. Similar to singer-poets in other parts of Anatolia, most sang both their own songs and those of former poets. Most of these semi-professional singers had additional jobs.

Ali Baran, singer, son of Mahmut Baran, Hozat:

In my first memories, Mahmut Baran was a blacksmith. He learned that during his military service. Later he sold cows to slaughterhouses and the army in Hozat. Again later he did smuggling of tobacco. But do not misunderstand smuggling: he sold tobacco. (Interview 17 November, 2015, Istanbul)

Several late poet-singers from Dersim were known to have been blind, hence seriously handicapped regarding rural work, including Sej Qaji (?1871–1936), Alaverdi (1921–1983), Hüseyin Doğanay (1940–2005), Âşık Yusuf Kemter Dede (1928–2015, Ovacık), Mehmet Erdoğmuş (b. 1947, Çemişgezek)–just as several âşık (most well-known Âşık Veysel19) and dengbêj (including Evdalê Zeynikê or Hesen Cizrawî; Ceren, 2014). Some singers were members of ocak families, including the Barans (ocak Ağuíçen), Sey Qaji or Sey Weliyê Kupikey (both Bava Mansur), or Weliyê Wûsenê Yimami (1889–1958), Bava Bulisk, Hesenê Şîxali (b. ca. 1920) and Pir Ahmet Taş (1918–2008), who were members of the Kureyşan ocak (Dulkadir, 2011: 74ff). Hüseyin Doğanay’s grandfather Baba Kazım was a pir of the Dervis Cemal ocak, but also played violine and cura (short long-necked lute). Similar to other singer-poet traditions, also in Dersim only few female poets are known from the past–and hardly any today.20 In her time, Wakile, the sister of Hese Fate was a well-known poet.21 Similarly most protagonists of the lamentations were men, as were most of the singers.

Sait Baksi, singer, Nazimiye:

There are female poets in Dersim. One of them is Xime [a daughter of Sey Qaji]. She is one. Before her in a village in Tunceli, Dersim there was someone called Maâ Sîle Sûrî, hence mother of Süleymanê Sîle Sûrî. Someone who was called ‘red Süleyman’; his mother. Aliye Hese


20 In the tradition of âşiks women seem to be slightly more active. Hande Sağlams (2013: 226ff) found 32 female âşık in the province of Sivas, of whom only five also played bağlama, while the others used to be accompanied on a lute by close relative men. Though there where Kurdish female singers (such as Meryem Xan (1904–1949), Eyêşe Şan), Wendelmoet Hamelink wrote, “the material I collected is predominantly a male repertoire in which men generally are much more present than women.” (Hamelink, 2016: 64). See also Schäfers in this volume.

21 Furthermore, a recording of the wife of Zeynel Kahraman, Fadime, was published privately on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/Mameki.Dersim/videos/455163121357602/ (last accessed 4 May 2018); Another recording of the mother of Ali Baran, Besi Baran recorded on Roj TV in 2002 was published at www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_FhtQgONkk; Interview with Ali Baran, 17 November, 2015, Istanbul.
Kur was a singer, from the Demanan tribe, also his wife sang. She was a poet. Also in the village Çukur there is a female poet called Vakile. In this aspect, Dersim is extremely rich and full. (Interview December 2, 2015, Istanbul)

In general, no formal education existed for the singers, however, in some cases singing and poetry was transmitted within families, as for example in the Baran familie who had singers over three generations (Mehmet, Mahmut and Ali Baran). Sey Qaji’s grandson Ismaili Imam and his daughter Xime also sang (Interview Sait Bakşi, 2 December, 2015, Istanbul; Cengiz 2010). Hüseyin Doğanay’s grandfather Baba Kazım played violin and thembur and was a singer, too, such as again Hüseyin Doğanays nephew Seyfi Doğanay and the latter’s daughter Eda Doğanay. Also the father of Bava Bulisk played thembur (short long-necked lute). Eventually Silo Qız’s family is said to have been of singer-poets since seven generations, his father was the (in his time) well-known singer Hasan Doğan. Almost all family members of Zeynel Kahraman later became musicians, though not professional, and today, his grandson Özcan Kahraman is a saz-maker.

Also villages with well-known singers could become informal centers for the tradition of singer-poets.

Sait Bakşi:

In this time [of my childhood] in our village lived many important singer-poets. There were good singers and poets. Of course, I only saw them as elderly people. In particular in our central village Çıvrak, there was a singer called Apo Hüseyini Kalmen. This poet sang all works from the late Sey Qaji, whom he had known and listened to from childhood on. He always played and sang. He played thembur. In this time a thembur was rare, it could not be find in every house. There was one in the house of one of our relatives there. Every now and then I went there and played. [...] Of course the man we called Hüseyin Kalmen or Ap Huseni impressed me a lot. I remained under his influence. In addition there was a nephew of him, Mehmet Aslan, who also sang very good. The tradition continued. Besides, there was a person called Sa Gal, he just sang, he also was a good dengbêj but he did not play thembur. [...] I can say about our village that it was a singers’ village (ozanlar köyü). Let’s stay with Sey Qaji... Ap Huseni Kalmen, Ismaili İmami, İmami Sey Qaji, Humare, who was the daughter of Sey Qaji, Saydel Arik, who was called Saydere Say Gal, or Yusuf Güler, who was called Yusuf Cerg. All of them were educated in Cıvarık. Mehmet Aslan is the nephew of Uncle Hüseyin. As I told you, I can call our village Cıvarık a singers’ village. (Interview 2 December, 2015, Istanbul)

Similarly under the influence of Hese Kêk, the village Kortu (today: Meşeyolu, between Tunceli center and Nazimiye), hosted several singer-poets, including Kekil Arslan (Kêkê Durş, 1333–1987), Musa Yılmaz (1933–2004) and Mustafa Dulkadir (1915–1989) (Dulkadir, 2011)

Ozan Serdar, singer:

I learned by heart as much as I could (…). In our region there was an elderly poet called Silo Qız. He came frequently to our village. Our villages are near to each other, not very far. For example I learned almost all the songs I heard from him by heart. It came so far that since my youth I can’t stand without singing. (Interview 29 October, 2015, Bonn, Germany)
Transmission from master to regular pupils (as it was common practice within the âşık tradition) is documented only in some few cases from Dersim. We know that the eminent singer-poet Sey Qaji had two pupils, that is Memedo Dereğ’in (d. 1938) and Bava Bulisk (1328/1912–1989). Others just learned by their own, for example we don’t know about any teachers of Alaverdi.

Likewise, our knowledge on the performance practice of earlier periods is limited. Most recordings do not inform us about where and why the singers normally used to sing. Most recordings were made on the wish of researchers, most contain several songs directly after another, often even without any break, making it difficult to find the end of one, and the beginning of the next kilam. Obviously no clearly established situation existed, where songs were expected to be sung. Nothing indicates the existence of anything comparable to âşık cafés (such as in Kars, Erzurum or Sivas; Kaya, 1994; Sağlam, 2013) in Dersim. Similarly, at least in the 20th century in Dersim, no divzan houses or regular gatherings of rich ağas existed, who regularly engaged dengbêjs. As Mehmet Yıldırım (2013: 63) points out, „in inner Dersim, the institution of ağa [influential landowners] such as in other parts of Anatolia was never an issue“. 22

Ali Baran proudly distances his tradition from the dengbêjs, referencing to a common stereotype of Kurdish singers:

*These dengbêj […] sang songs at the table of tribal leaders (ağa). They sang only songs which praise the tribe and his leader. Why? Because it was him who gave them bread. They did not sing anything for the people who opposed the pashas and ağas or on the suppressed farmers. Not all of them but the most dengbêjs were like that. But they told about the massacres of Ottomans, Iranians and Arabs, even about wars between tribes. Dengbêj hence means living history. Mahmut Baran was not like that. Mahmut Baran made independent songs by himself, he was nobody’s dengbêj. He was a singer (ozan) of his own people. He spoke about the massacre of Dersim, love, separation and living abroad (gurbet). (Interview 17 November, 2015, Istanbul)*

In most cases, hence, the performances in Dersim remained completely private. The tradition of public singer contests, such as among âşıks in particular in the region of Kars-Erzurum spread at least as westward as to Sivas, is called atışma or karşılama, atışma or tartışma (and according to Erdener (1995) was adopted from Azerbaijan). 23 Among dengbêjs this practice is unknown, and I never came across any indication of comparable performances in Dersim.

Most important setting for the singing of laments were the long winter days and evenings in the villages. Until the late twentieth century, hence before the

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22 In his memories, Nuri Dersimi (1892/93–1973) mentions that his father Milla Ibrahim, who was a singer and played both violin and “tambur” (i.e. thembur) served as secretary (hence not primarily as a singer-poet) for Seyid Ibrahim Ağa (Hozat) (Dêrsimi, 1952 / 1997: 13).

23 According to Hande Sağlam this particular performance was practiced in Sivas common practice in some coffee shops among Sünni âşıks, while Alevi âşıks regarded this practice as not being part of their own tradition. In the villages of Sivas it therefore does not exist.
modernisation of infrastructure (better streets, public transportation, radio, television and internet), each winter, mountain villages in Dersim were buried under snow for several months. Often, even neighboring houses could only be reached by digging tunnels through the snow. During the long, lonely and dark winter nights, no distraction existed except for telling each other stories and singing kirams, the longer the better.

Sait Bakși:

For example, when this man, Apo Hüsen […] came, everyone was curious, went to him and we gathered. When he came as a guest, they sat together, talked, and sang. And then the friends, people from around came to him, and when they said: “Uncle, sing for us!”, he took the thembur in his hands and began. So, in this way there was the tradition. (Interview 2 December, 2015, Istanbul)

Singers such as Sey Qaji and Bava Bulisk, both members of respected oacak families only sang privately, while other singers such as Alaverdi, Mahmut Baran (though also member of an oacak, that is the Sarısaltuk), Sılo Qız, Zeynel Kahraman or Hıdır Akgül regularly sung at weddings.24

The Sound

The most characteristic element of the laments is the often melancholic sound of the singer’s voices. Well-known singers such as Alaverdi, Hüseyin Doğanay or Sait Bakși, but also many unknown local amateur singers share the expression of heavy and sad emotions, enforced by the almost always descending melodies. Even endnotes of longer phrases are sung relaxed without pressed voices or vibrato. Only later singers such as Hüseyin Doğanay or Ozan Serdar adopted a soft vibrato throughout the melody.

Not all singers, however, used this soft singing style. Hese Kêk (Hese Fate) for example had a unique high and powerful voice with strong vibrato, as well as (though less developed) the singer Ali Doğan, whom Mesut Özcan recorded in in central Dersim in 1992 (audio cassette MÖ 24). Also Sılo Qız’s characteristic sharp and high voice, sounds less sad than others. Likewise, the absolute pitches of the singers vary considerably.

In terms of musical structure, recordings made from the 1970s on show a remarkably wide spectrum. Most widespread in central Dersim obviously were descending melodic patterns within an ambitus of a third or fifth, sometimes with characteristic short intermediate leaps to the upper fifth or octave. The fourth is often (though not always) missing, which reminds us of Arsunars (1937) theory of pentatonicism in Dersim. The second degree is often emphasized (e.g. record-

24 Interview with Zeynel Kahramans grandson Özcan Kahraman in Hozat, 27 May 2015; Interview with Ali Baran, November 17, 2015, Istanbul. While his grandfather was a dervish and his father a singer, Sılo Qız began already in his youth to sing kirams on weddings.
ings with Alaverdi, Silo Qiz or Sait Bakşı). In most laments, short melodic patterns are repeated without substantial changes, and only the different length of the text lines leads to variants, such as the frequent change to double tempo for short passages. Within this general melodic structure, mainly changes of rhythm, tempo, the sound of voice and the absolute pitch lead to individual and recognizable songs. In some laments, however, these melodic patterns are enlarged to descending melodic sequences with an overall ambitus of a sixth or more, which is reminiscent of melodies of âşık. Some songs, in particular from Hozat display wide melodies, almost like uzun hava songs as being sung north and west of Dersim (Erzurum, Erzincan, Sivas). The most frequently used makam (melodic mode)—just as in most âşık songs of the region Sivas-Erzincan—is hüseyni.

A second performance type is nearer to recitation. While some recordings contain rhythmic speech (e.g. by Hese Fate or Ismailê Imami), in some cases the lament is presented almost spoken. Often singers even change between both styles (singing and speaking) or remain somewhere in between, as for example Silo Qiz, or Ibrahim Güler (audio cassette MÖ 70), Nazimiye, who sang several songs of Sey Qaji. Qemero Areiz (b. 1934, Karvan-Morarike, Nazimiye; official name Kamer Demir) sang/spoke with the accompaniment of a bağlama with an unforced, unaccented voice, though with a wide pitch range.

Likewise, most songs of dengêjs are near to recitation. The long stanzas of the dengêjs are normally recited in long recurring melodic patterns, however, different for the laments in Dersim mostly closed by long, vigorously and consciously shaped tones, typically with long and strong vibrato. Also, for dengêj the sound of the voice is of major importance, yet with a clear aesthetic preference of powerful voices.

Finally, some rare recordings from Dersim contain a form of story-telling which is reminiscent of the tradition of destin (epics).

In Dersim, laments were regularly sung without any instrumental accompaniment, often simply because no instrument is available in every village—or no one to play it. At least most semi-professional singers, however, preferred to accompany their voice with an instrument. Today in Dersim, the violin (of Western origin) is seen as the most traditional instrument for the accompaniment of kılam, played upright like the Back Sea kemençe rather than held horizontally on the neck such as in Western music (see figures 1 & 2). Main factor for this important role of the violin might be the person of Silo Qiz (Süleyman Doğan, b. 1908?), who over the later twentieth century was the most well-known folk poet.


26 E.g. Memê Alan destin by Silo Qiz recorded in 2002 by Mesut Özcan (MÖ 8 A 1), or a recording by Seyfi Muxundi (MÖ 4 A) of Seyit Süleymanê Axce (1912–1995; Kupik / Gelincik, Mazgirt), in this case with a basic accompaniment by a bağlama (Başgöz, 2008; Kahraman, 2013; Özcan, 2008: 352).
In addition to Silo Qız, further recordings of violinists include Sey Weliyê Kupikey’in (Sey Weli Kemaneci, official name Veli Yılmaz, 1900/05–1980), Mahmut Baran (1923–1975, Bargini), Hıdır Malkoç (1924–2017) and Ali Bava Bedri (b. 1927 in Arphepug; official name Riza Caglayan). According to oral history, also in other districts of Dersim, including Pülümür, Ovacık and

in Dersim. In addition to Silo Qız, further recordings of violinists include Sey Weliyê Kupikey’in (Sey Weli Kemaneci, official name Veli Yılmaz, 1900/05–1980), Mahmut Baran (1923–1975, Bargini), Hıdır Malkoç (1924–2017) and Ali Bava Bedri (b. 1927 in Arphepug; official name Riza Caglayan). According to oral history, also in other districts of Dersim, including Pülümür, Ovacık and

[Mandatory]
Hozat, violins were played. As Özcan Kahraman told, his grandfather, Zeynel Kahraman (1930–2012) played both, violin and cura, his violin is said to have had only three strings, hence similar to a cura (Interview May 27, 2015, Hozat). Most violinists mainly play drones (long notes) as accompaniment to the voice, only adding short melodic phrases between sung lines.

It is unclear when, from where, and how, the Western violin found its way to the mountains of Dersim. I could not find any written or iconographic source which could enlighten its local prehistory. At least three theories concerning the origin of the violin in Dersim are conceivable. On the one hand the instrument might have been introduced by Armenians from Harput (Elazığ), where in the late nineteenth century several Armenian school orchestras of Western style are well documented (see figure 3).

According to Sungurluoğlu, until 1915, most instrumentalists in Elazığ were Armenians:

*But in this aspect in Harput Armenians supplied superiority. Turks were leading in singing, they with instruments. In every Armenian house there was a violin, a kanun and a piano or harmonium.* (Sungurluoğlu, 1968: 14).

Ali Baran:

*My grandfather Mahmut Baran played saz, and he played violin. Later I saw the violin he had played. It was a bit big, the Armenians called it “biraça”. As you know also the Germans call it “biraça” [Bratsche, i.e. viola]. Because he was tall, a massive man. [...]*
(From where might the violin have come to Dersim?)

Many people have asked that to me. I heard it like this: at that time our people had close relations with Armenians. The Armenians had close relations with Russians, and with Syria and Iraq. For example they talked about Bagdad and Aleppo, and only little about Istanbul. Most of their trading they did with Aleppo.

(Were there Armenians in your village?)

In the villages near to our village there were many Armenians. (Interview 17 November, 2015, Istanbul)²⁹

This second theory, the import of the violin by Russian soldiers during World War I, is much less likely considering the short time of direct contact and the fact that tribes from Dersim fought against the Russian army. Following both theories, the practice of playing the violin upright, than, probably developed in Dersim. As Ali Baran remembered from his father, in the village of Bargini (Karabakır)–only 50 km from Elazığ with his Western educated Armenian musicians, the violin was still played in Western technique.

Finally, the violin might have simply replaced an older tradition of bowed fiddles as it still remains in Koçgiri, which is situated west of Dersim. The photograph on the cover of this book depicts Âşık Revani (1898–1968, sitting, second from left, official name Kurtveli Bozkurt), who lived in the village Mamaş near Kangal in the province Sivas, west of Dersim. Revani in 1931 played violin in a technique similar to that in Dersim.

Today, the violin in Dersim is played again almost exclusively with western technique.

Hüseyin İnler, violin teacher Ovacık:

Also my father used to play violin, he played it upright. He said to me: ‘Don’t play like this, the way I play is primitive. Play modern, learn it in a school. I did not have the means, I couldn’t learn it, it came to me like this.’ (Interview May 14, 2013, Tunceli)

Another instrument used frequently to accompany laments is the small long-necked lute thembur (Turkish: dede sazı, cura sazı, ruzba), which in Dersim also was regularly played during Alevi cem rituals. The thembur was played by hands, hence without plectrum. Just as the violin, also the thembur mainly provides drones during the vocal passages, in between the lines short patterns are repeated, as also âşık singers regularly use them. Obviously only few singers (at least before the 1980s) played developed melodies on their instruments, in particular Zeynel Kahraman (Hozat) who displayed remarkable virtuosity on his three-stringed cura. In general, however, we may conclude that for laments, instruments mainly served as a kind of sound background for the voice, rather than gaining any musical character by their own.

²⁹ As mentioned before, also Nuri Dersimi’s father Milla İbrahim around 1900 played violin in the village Ağızunik, close to Ali Barans village Bargini, hence again only a few kilometers north of Harput (Dërsimi, 1952 / 1997: 13).
Since about the 1980s, most musicians left the small *thembur* for the larger *bağlama*. Singers including Hüseyin Doğanay or Sait Bakşi hence mainly played *bağlama*. And many musicians adopted the playing technique of the Arif Sağ school (who was born in Aşkale, northeast of Dersim), as for example Hüdîr Akgül or Yılmaz Çelik (both from Ovacık). Hardly any other instrument than the *bağlama* was used for the accompaniment of the laments, only Mahmut Baran sometimes played *çimbüş*, which he had brought from Istanbul.

Recent studio productions, however, beginning with Özan Serdar and Ali Baran, continued by younger singers including Metin Kemal Kahraman, Mikail Aslan, or Ahmet Aslan, further use instruments such as the guitar, *mey*, *kaval*, *zurna*, percussion, violin (in Turkish-Western style), flute, clarinet, saxophone and others, similar to the contemporary practice in professional Turkish folk music.
Regional and Individual Musical Styles

Due to the lack of research, the regional scope of the tradition described here as well as its supra-regional interrelations due to individual travels and migration can hardly be estimated. In particular traditions in the larger Dersim region, including Koçgiri, Tercan, Kemah, Kemaliye (Ağın), Kığı, Bingöl and Varto-Hınis deserve detailed fieldwork and comparative analysis with central Dersim. Unfortunately, even the stylistic scope within Dersim is largely unclear. For a stylistic map of laments in Dersim, a linguistic analysis of the used dialects would be necessary. Available recordings do not cover the whole area of Dersim equally, in particular very little research has been conducted (and recordings been made) in Pertek and Çemişgezek in southern and southwestern Dersim.

In fact before 1937, Dersim was divided in territories of a great number of tribes (aşirets), between which relations fluctuated, and combats regularly took place. As Nuri Dêrsimi points out in his memoir: “In Dersim there are 60 tribes and between the tribes there is no communication and no sincere relation” (1952/1997: 105). The fact that moving within Dersim seems to have been possibly only to a limited degree (with the exception of Alevi leaders, pirs) might have led to the establishment of regional musical / literary styles. Since 1938, however, and hence over the full period documented by the sources, singer-poets could travel at least throughout the province of Tunceli (and even beyond). Silo Qiz for example (born in central Dersim) performed also in Erzincan, Pülümür, Hozat and Mazgirt; Hüseyin Doğanay sang in Hınıs/ Varto, later he went up to Erzincan, Denizli, Aydın, Kayseri, Maraş and Europe (CD Kılâmê Dêrsîmi, 2004). Consequently, also songs spread over different regions, and laments, both on 1937/38 and older ones, found their way into the repertoire of singers all over Dersim.

As far as we can see at present, at least in the second half of the twentieth century, the tradition in Dersim was not standardised but rather open to both individual creativity and influence from outside. Recordings, made since the 1970s, show an unexpected musical variety, including varied individual styles. The main region for this tradition of laments was central Dersim, from today’s Nazımiye over Tunceli until Hozat and Ovacık. Well-known singer-poets include:

- Sey Qaji (1860–1936), Civarik, Nazımiye.

Singer-poets of Dersim origin, such as Âşik Nesimi Çimen (Kayseri-Maraş), Âşik Sadık Doğanay (Çorum), or Cafer Tan (Kayseri, Sarız), who were born and lived outside of this region are not discussed in the present article. In these cases later musical influences are difficult to separate from a possible ongoing musical tradition from Dersim.
From Ovacık, in particular laments from Hesenê Gaj (1307/1892–1982), who was born in the village Örtünük (Yoncalı), have survived. In the collection of Mesut Özcan, recordings of both Hesenê Gaj himself and his son Ahmet Şan can be found. At present Hıdır Akgül (b. 1957, village Kozluca; Satun, 2014: 22) is known for a rich and characteristic personal style. The most well-known past poet-singers from Hozat are Zeynel Kahraman (1930–2012), Hüseyin Doğanay (1940–2005) and Mahmut Baran (1923–1975). Some laments from Hozat, and partly also in Ovacık, exhibit similarities with aşk songs (sometimes even with uzun hava-styles), as for example sung by Zeynel Kahraman. Also a certain Haydar Uçar, whom Mesut Özcan recorded in 1979 in Ovacık, sang songs with an unusual wide ambitus. Also Mahmut Baran had an individual musical style, which might have been influenced by Kurdish singers further south of Dersim up to Diyarbakır.

Two recordings of songs (accompanied by bağlama and reminiscent of Alevi aşk songs) which are said to have been performed by the well-known political activist Nuri Dêrsimi (born 1890 in Ağzunîk / Akpınar, Hozat; died 1973 in Syria), are available on youtube,31 posted by Ali Baran, who was born in a neighboring village. In his notes to the recording, Ali Baran informs us that the recordings were made by a friend called Alixasi.32 However, a musical evaluation of these undated recordings is difficult. Nuri Dêrsimi studied in Istanbul, later lived in Elazığ, and on the eve of the massacres of 1937/38, he escaped to Syria. He hence might have heard (and was influenced by) a number of other regional musical styles.

Unfortunately, I had only limited access to laments from northern Dersim, most probably the archive of Metin and Kemal Kahraman offers more recordings.33 Recordings from the district of Mazgirt, in the south-east of Dersim display different, seemingly individual performance styles, often near to the recitation style of central Dersim. Recorded singers include:

31 “Dağlar dağlar” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=KY5CDNRCL2c, last accessed 4 May 2018); Kieser, 1997; Dêrsimi, 1952/1997; Düzugün, 1992: 363ff.
33 For lyrics collected in Pülümür see Dalkılıç, 2015: 99ff; 152f; Çem, 2003.
– Sey Weliyê Kupikey (1900/05–1980; Sey Weli Kemaneci, official name: Veli Yılmaz), Kupik / Gelincik, eastern Mazgirt, Kurmanci (Mûxûndî, 2011; Özcân, 2008: 46ff).
– Ali Barut (?1900–1938), Lodek, eastern Mazgirt (Özcân, 2008: 50, 351)
– Seyiz Süleymanê Ana Nur – Seyit Sülemanê Qurqurik (recorded by Seyfi Muxundi, MÖ 11 A).

Transition to Dêngbej and Âşık

The widespread practice of lament songs in Dersim, of singing without instrumental accompaniment, is reminiscent of dengbêjs. Due to the lack of serious research, however, a direct comparison with related Kurdish traditions is at present impossible. Unfortunately no musicological analysis of dengbêj songs has been published yet. On the dengbêj tradition in Bingöl, close to Dersim and hence most interesting for a comparison, almost nothing has been published at all (except for the anthology of lyrics edited by Karasu, 2007). In particular, the musical relationship of kâlam from Mazgirt and Nazîmiye and those in Western Bingöl needs to be researched in detail.

The most obvious difference between the performance style in Dersim and that of the dengbêjs is the vocal technique and the resulting timbre of the voice. The strong vibrato, typical for most dengbêjs, for example does not exist on any historical or recent recording from Dersim. Here, the voices generally display a soft and melancholic character, which is clearly different form vocal styles as used by dengbêjs.

However, several singers display individual combinations of or transitions between different vocal styles.34 Mome Kule for example, recorded in the late 1970s by Peter Bumke in Ricik (Geçitveren), eastern Mazgirt, sings with the accompaniment of a bağlama, while his vocal style is near to that of dengbêj including the strong tones at the end of phrases sung with growing vibrato.35 Kekê Fatî, on the other hand, who in the same time lived in the neighboring village Kârdere (Sülûntaş), sang without instrumental accompaniment, but in melodic patterns typical for central Dersim, and with a soft and melancholic voice. (Apê) Keko

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34 Wendelmoet Hamelink (2016: 25) found âşiks who were influenced by dengbêjs (or vice versa), also in other regions, including Adiyaman, who used to accompany themself on a bağlama. Transitions between âşiks and dengbêjs might also exist in Kocgiri.

Figure 5: Dawudê Memedi (b. 1922, official name Davut Teke), village Çala Heru, recorded by Cemal Taṣ in 2016 (Photo: Saltık & Taṣ, 2016: 316). Noteworthy the singer holds his left hand to his ear while singing, a gesture common for denbêjs, but unusual in central Dersim—and impossible for singers who accompany themself by an instrument. Although Dawudê Memedi sang with a strong voice, he only rarely used (soft) vibrato, while the developed melody is more reminiscent of songs of āşık (CD 2, Tr. 9).

(?1915–1992, Keko Demirkiran), from the village Goman (Yaşaroğlu) again in eastern Mazgirt, sang in Kurmanji, like the before mentioned singers. He accompanied himself with a lute, using a high voice and clear vibrato, but sometimes changed to a recitation style during the song, which than reminds us of dengbêjs (Mûxûndi, 2001; Özcan, 2008: 214ff, 349; MÖ 12 with a recording made by Seyfi Muxundi in 1987).
In the northern region of Dersim, on the other hand, several singers sung and still sing in the style of âşık. Here the bağlama clearly dominates as the accompanying instrument, reminiscent of the performance practice of âşık. Some singer-poets, singing in Turkish, can entirely be regarded as traditional âşık. Several âşiks from Erzincan are known to be of Dersim origin. Pir Kaltuk / Kaltık Mehmet, for example, grandfather of the famous Davut Sulari (official name Davut Ağbaba, 1925–1985) moved with his tribe from Püpülmür (northern Dersim), originally from Nazimiye, to Çayırlı (Mans) in the district of Tercan (province Erzincan), where Davut Sulari was born. Davut Sulari travelled for his dede duties (he was a member of the Kureyşan ocağ) to his talips in Erzincan and around, while at the same time he gave concerts as an âşık and released records (Özdemir, 2017: 95ff).

In the northern part of Dersim singers show almost the same musical style as âşiks in Erzincan, even if singing in Zaza. In these cases both, voice technique and melodies differ substantially from central Dersim singers such as Alaverdi or

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36 Also the case of Aşık Mahzuni Şerif (1940–2002) demonstrates the affinity of Dersim musical tradition to that of the âşiks. Mahzuni's ancestors moved around 1800 from Hozat via Antakya to the village Berçenek in Afşin, Elbistan (Dalkılıç, 2015: 52), from here Mahzuni became one of the most well-known âşık of his generation.
Sılo Qız. Ahmet Sangül (1937–2015) for example, lived in Kırmızıköprü, a village south of Pülümür. After having stayed in exile in Samsun, the family returned to Dersim in 1952 (Taş, 2009). His most important musical influence was Davut Sulâri. In 1955 he began to give concerts. Over 40 years he lived in Istanbul. Numerous musicians sung his songs, including Sezgin Çoşkun, Yılmaz Çelik, Hıdır Akgün, Enver Çelik, Ozan Rençber, Metin-Kemal Karaman, Nilüfer Akbal.

Further singers of the âşık tradition in Dersim include:

- Âşık Kemter Yusuf Dede (1928–2015) from Ovacık, who sang in the style of âşıks, and played short necked bağlama. From 1938–47 he was sent to forced exile to Balıkesir, later he returned to Erzincan (Ceren, 2014).
- Âşık Zamani (b. 1948), village Kuşluca in Ovacık.37
- Ali Cemal Çetinkaya (b. 1941) Akpazar, close to Elazığ.38

The use of long-necked lutes by both âşıks and contemporary singers in Dersim is another common musical element. Introductory formulas as well as the repetitive strikes of the final tone used by âşıks north of Dersim reminds us of the singers in Dersim. Besides, the melodies of âşık songs exhibit a wider range of melody types, in addition to the existence of different regional styles.39 Alevi âşıks from Sivas-Erzincan, in particular during performances of semâbs and deyîs, are known for a particular strike plectrum technique called “âşık style” (aşıklama tavri”), over all strings from below up (Sağlam, 2013: 155, 165ff) which was also used by bağlama players from Dersim (although I never heard this technique on historical recordings of themburs from Dersim).

Hıdır Akgün accompanies himself on a short-necked bağlama, and his playing technique reminds us of that of Erzincan. Even some songs of Hüseyin Doğanay (Hozat) are reminiscent of melodies of âşıks. Today the only active female âşık is Şavâlî Ayşe (b. 1979), who lives in the village of Celedor (Bulgurtepe), in the district of Pertek. Again some singer-poets from Dersim are in between styles, as for example Usênê Pardiye (b. 1935, official name Hüseyin Celiç), recorded in 2008 in Adaköy 2008 by Cemal Taş (CD 1, Tr 12). Accompanied by a short necked bağlama, he changes between recitation, narrow melodic patterns as typi-

39 Reinhard & de Oliveira Pinto 1989; Şenel, 1991: Âşık melodies might be uzun havâ or kırık havâ, hence metrical free or with meter, resitâtif; melodic patterns called âşık havâları, âşık makamları, âşık hacavatları and others in Kars-Erzurum; cf. Said Bakşi; several forms including ağıt, baş-ayak, destan, divan, lebdeğmez, divâk kapma and others.
cal for central Dersim, and long descending melodies over the range of an octave reminiscent of âşık songs.

Decline of the Tradition

Today, the tradition of laments and the numerous personal performance styles are in serious danger to get lost. Silo Qız is about 108 years old, Said Bakşi, still active, recorded 13 CDs with his laments, financed by himself, but unfortunately they were never released officially (interview December 2, 2015, Istanbul). Silo Qız hardly gave any concerts, not even during the annual Munzur Culture and Nature Festival in Tunceli. In Ovacık the poet-singer Hıdır Akgül is still creating and singing kilams. In Germany the singers Ali Baran and Ozan Serdar for some time were active in Kurdish organisations, and later returned to traditional kilams. Ozan Serdar (b. 1955, official name Zîlfi Engin) was a founding member of the famous Kurdish music group Koma Berxwedan. On his recent album Klašikê Dersimî 1 (Lawîk û Klalmê Dersimî), however, he sings kilams from well-known Dersimian singer-poets including Alaverdi, Silo Qız and Hüseyin Doğanay. In 2015, Ozan Serdar published a video with his interpretation of the well-known lament Setero. Initially, Silo Qız sings alone, and only later Serdar continues, hence giving a reference to the legendary singer from whom he once learned numerous laments.40

Since the late 20th century, new kilams are hardly made and the majority of historical laments is lost. Mehmet Capan (in a style deeply influenced by Ruhi Sü) sang many laments and transmitted the tradition at least partly to younger singers. Only few singers, such as the brothers Metin and Kemal Kahraman on their last (at present still unreleased) album focus on this repertoire, others only from time to time include new versions of old laments (Greve, 2014). As a rare exception, Kadir Doğan (b. 1969 in Soğukoluk, south Erzincan) recently released a CD with laments and religious songs (beyt) created anew by himself.41 The youth in Dersim is rarely interested in the kilams.

Several reasons might explain the decline of laments in Tunceli: Due to the depopulation of the villages, and the migration to larger Turkish cities and abroad, village life in Dersim almost came to an end, in particular during the winter. While in the past during the winter, snow cut off many villages, nowadays, modern snow-clearers keep most main streets open. Radio, later tv and today the internet provided new forms of entertainment, reducing the desire for common conversation, story-telling and singing.

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40 www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEgNg2xcXO0 (accessed 7 November 2017).
Peter Bumke:

*In these days these songs provoked the imagination of the people. They in fact relived it. In spite of the revived dengêj culture in Diyarbakir and elsewhere, I assume that due to television and other entertainment media this form of evoking pictures and events of the past has lost its fundamentals, the precondition of their perception. You would use the songs at the most as quotes or as fragments of memory, and thereby possibly keep them alive.* (Interview June 16, 2015, Berlin)

Furthermore, among younger generations the Zaza language gets more and more lost. While most youngsters in Tunceli at least still understand Zaza, it is only rarely used for daily conversations. Media such as radio and TV broadcasts in Turkish, in addition to school education, enforces Turkish, leaving Zaza only for internal family communication. All over Turkey, the market for non-Turkish folk songs is limited, and in order to address a larger number of listeners, musicians need to sing in Turkish. Finally, nowadays, together with the first generation of 1938, also the psychological need for laments, namely to find relief for the experienced terror, fades away, giving way to new forms of expression that fit contemporary issues. Laments nowadays are mostly sung as nostalgic relics of a lost past. In 2012, the left-wing singer Ferhat Tunc (of Dersim descent) for example, produced his album “Dersim” (Kirkelig Kulturverksted) which contained among others a new arrangement of the well-known lament *Cuxure* in the style of electronic ambient music.\(^{42}\) The cover photo shows Seyid Riza, and inside another historical photo of 1938 is printed. His next album “Kobani”, however, was intended as a musical comment on the war of this north-Syrian Kurdish city against the ISIS. This politically topical CD contains exclusively songs in the style of Turkish left-wing political groups, rather than newly composed traditional laments on these tragic events.

The commercialization of music in Turkey, including of folk music, deeply changed this music. The emergence of commercial music production since the 1980s (Greve & Sahin 2018), enforced a much stronger awareness for sound, recording technique, instrumental accompaniment and vocal technique, as can be seen for example in the CDs of Ozan Serdar. The long traditional laments are too long for the mainstream music market, which generally prefers shorter songs. Likewise, weddings today, even in Tunceli, are much louder than ever before, and younger generation prefer to dance to the sound of small bands, including keyboard, amplified *bağlama* and singer, than to listen to traditional singers and sad, melancholic laments.

Naturally, most of these factors similarly affected other singer-poet traditions in Turkey. However, different from both *âşiks* and *dengêjs*, the laments from Dersim never gained symbolic value for nationalist movements (Turkish or Kurd-
ish respectively), which could have led to a reinvention or revival of the tradition. Âşiks (as generally known) even benefited from the strong state support, though for the price of ideological loading, control and standardization. Âşık Veysel (1894–1975), for example, was only 14 years older than Silo Qız (born in the village Şarkışla, Sivas). In 1931 during the folk poet festival in Sivas, he attracted attention for the first time, later he played and sung at Radio Istanbul, and taught başlama and interpretation in several “Village Institutes” (Köy Enstitüleri). Âşık Veysel gave concerts all over Turkey, and eventually in 1963 was received by President Cemal Gürsel. His works became part of the repertoire of TRT, and today are considered as the most important classics of Turkish folk music (CD Kalan, 2001). His rise hence began at the very time of the massacres in Dersim, which Silo Qız only survived because he could (and had to) entertain the soldiers (who killed his neighbors and relatives) with his violin (Soltuk & Taş, 2016: 56). None of his songs in Zaza ever had a chance to be broadcasted or produced in Turkey.

The history of the dengbêj tradition during the twentieth century clearly reminds us of that of the singer-poets from Dersim. Similar to all non-Turkish musicians, also dengbêjs where widely discriminated. In particular after 1980, also this tradition was in danger of getting lost (Hamelink, 2016). Even the Kurdish movement initially criticized dengbêjs as singers for ağas, emîrs, and sheikhs, regarding them as part of the feudal and tribal system. Beginning in the 1990s, however, the Kurdish movement intensified its interest in cultural issues. Political music groups (komas) appeared, and became interested in the tradition of the dengbêjs. In 1994 the Dicle Firat Culture Center opened in Diyarbakır. In 2003 in Van, and in 2007 in in Diyarbakır, new dengbêj houses were founded. An encompassing research project on the tradition of dengbêjs (“Dengbêj ve Dengbêjîk Gelenegi Projesi”) was co-financed by the European Community, and the municipality of Diyarbakır (Hamelink, 2016; Scalbert Yücel, 2009). Though the importance of the dengbêjs for Kurdish nationalism never reached the level of the support for âşiks by Turkish nationalism, they still benefited from Kurdish festivals and television programs, which influenced and changed their performance practice (Hamelink, 2016). The singer-poets from Dersim, on the other hand, never obtained any comparable political support and influence from any kind of nationalism, and consequently no revival happened.43 Only from time to time on memorial days of the massacres in 1938, laments are again sung, and obtain a politically symbolic meaning.

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43 Another difference between Kurdish and Zaza singing is the fact that in Turkey much more speakers of Kurmanji live than of Zaza. Furthermore Zaza never benefited from international Kurdish broadcasting such as on Radio Yerevan.
Conclusion

The laments from Dersim might be described as a rural musical-poetical tradition within an Alevi community with a poorly developed feudal structure. Poems and performance practices show several similarities with other singer-poet traditions, such as âşıkları (in particular those from Erzincan) and dengbêjs. The textual structure of the laments for example is much more reminiscent of the kulams of dengbêjs than of the songs of âşıklar, while the instrumental accompaniment is often close to that of âşıklar. No consistent tradition developed in the villages of Dersim, but rather, if it concerns the instrumental accompaniment (violin, bağlama, thembur) or vocal techniques, a field for individual creativity existed, open for influences from outside. The case of Dersim, unaffected by the standardization of TRT and nationalistic discourses, hence offers us an impression of how the musical situation in Anatolia might have looked like before or without the impact of Turkish nationalism and state engineering: an inconsistent field of small regional and individual musical styles, mutually influencing each other.

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NEITHER AŞIK NOR Dengbêj – THE LAMENT SINGERS FROM DERSIM (TUNCELI)


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Cds / Videos


Nuray Canerik (n. d.), Abmet Sargül, documentary


