

A brief history of Kurdish music recordings in Turkey

ROBERT F. REIGLE

Centre for Advanced Studies in Music, Istanbul Technical University,
Istanbul, Turkey
rreigle@gmail.com

ABSTRACT | This article delineates the complex history of Kurdish music recordings in Turkey by dividing it into seven periods. The first period begins with the very first recording of Kurdish music, in 1902. Political events demarcate the remaining periods, embracing the founding of the Turkish Republic, three military coups, the initial legalization of Kurdish language use and further easing of restrictions on broadcasting. The recordings discussed here include those recorded in, manufactured in, or imported to Turkey, both legally and illegally. In addition to the legal environment, the evolution of sound recording and distribution technology also shaped access to and use of Kurdish musics. It is hoped that further research be undertaken urgently, before the remaining sound recordings of the 20th century disappear, and the people who understand their history leave us.

Keywords: Dengbêj, Kurdish music, sound recordings, Turkey

The purpose of this article is to delineate periods in the complex history of Kurdish music recordings in Turkey. As in every society, the forms of mediation – the types of commodification – shaped the distribution, use, and impact of music, one of society's most powerful forces. For Kurdish-language speakers in Turkey, however, language restrictions led to an extraordinary gap in the recording of everyday music practice. This article should also call attention to important lacunae in the literature, including a rigorous discography, and documentation of performers and performance practices.

1. DEFINING TERMS

The term “Kurdish” first of all stems from a group of four closely related languages (and many dialects). *Ethnologue* describes Sorani (“Central Kurdish”) as having 3,500,000 speakers in Iraq and a similar number in Iran; Kurmanji (“Northern Kurdish”) with 15,000,000 in Turkey, 2,800,000 in Iraq, 1,000,000 in Syria, and 350,000 in Iran; “Southern Kurdish” (no alternative names are given) with 3,000,000 in Iran; and “Laki” with 1,000,000 in Iran (Lewis, et al., 2013).

Ethnicity, of course, is a complex and contentious subject that is not simply coterminous with language. In *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*, Peter Andrews (2002) points out that Kurdish people identify themselves in terms of both linguistic and religious heritage. Many other factors shape identity as well (Sheyholislami, 2011, p. 47-77). People may identify themselves with Kurdish culture through either bloodline or social relationship (for a view of genetic history, see Nasidze et al., 2005). A case in point is the large Zaza population of Turkey, estimated at 3-4 million speakers. The Zazaki and Kurdish languages are classified as "Iranian/Northwestern" (a group of 54 languages, consisting of nine subgroups), but Northern and Southern Zazaki are part of the "Zaza-Gorani" subgroup, not the "Kurdish" subgroup (Lewis, et al., 2013). Nonetheless, many Zazaki speakers identify themselves as Kurdish (Gratien, 2011).

Despite the problematic nature of mapping ethnicity to language, and in order to remain focused on music recordings within the scope of a short paper, I focus mainly on music sung in Kurdish languages, while acknowledging that there is also a large body of recordings sung in Turkish, made by Kurdish musicians. Furthermore, the main religious groups with which Kurds in Turkey identify, namely Sunni, Alevi, Êzîdî (Yezidi), Zoroastrian, and Christian, each have their own musical repertoires.

I use the term "**Kurdish music**" to designate music identified as Kurdish by the person who performs it. Kurdish traditional music has unique qualities in terms of scales, melodies, forms, ornamentation, types of vibrato, texts, and the use of timbre. To a large extent, especially until very recently, singers have performed such music in Kurdish or Zazaki languages. They may not have Kurdish ancestry, as in the case of one of the most famous singers of Kurdish music, Karapetê Xaço, an Armenian from Batman Province, adopted by Kurds after his parents were killed in 1915 (Kevirbirî, 2005, p. 69).

The singer Ahmet Kaya, born of a Kurdish father and Turkish mother, became one of Turkey's most popular artists through his performances in Turkish (Gratien, in Kuruoğlu 2013: 47:03). On February 10, 1999, during the Association of Tabloid Press Journalists Award Ceremony, when he announced that he wanted to make a video clip of a song in Kurdish, however, he was "nearly lynched" (Kuruoğlu, 2013: 45:50). This event illustrates both the profound antagonism towards Kurdish identity, and the complexities involved when conceptualizing musics spanning multiple identities (see Hough, 2010; Koskoff, 2001). Some people, then, may think of Ahmet Kaya's music as Kurdish because of his ancestry and desire to sing in Kurdish, despite his use of Turkish language and the absence of Kurdish music traits.

Dengbêj, literally "voice telling," is the term for the traditional Kurmanji troubador, and indicates both the singer and the genre. It constitutes the outstanding repository both of the extraordinarily wide range of vocal techniques, and of the most important historical and aesthetic representations of Kurmanji culture (Çakır, 2010). The meaning of the term has changed in recent decades, depending both on the familiarity with Kurdish culture and on the evolution of performance practice. Traditionally performed unaccompanied, *dengbêj* now often perform with *bağlama*, electronic drone, or instrumental ensemble. In Istanbul, where Kurmanji is less common than in the southeast, some people use the term *dengbêj* loosely, to describe any music that they feel has a sonic characteristic of traditional singing.

The main genres of Kurdish music recordings in Turkey are popular, folk, and religious. The boundaries between these genres are fuzzy. Popular styles include amplified folk music, rock, and hip-hop; folk music includes the unaccompanied *dengbêj* singing, *govend* dance music, *kilam* or *stran* folk songs, *lawje* folk songs about divine love, *lorîk* lullabies, and forms specific to a particular locale; religious genres include Kurdish songs from Sunni, Alevi, Êzîdî (Yezidi), Zoroastrian, and Christian traditions.

Due to the complexities people employ when categorizing musics, it is apt to exclude from this paper music that reflects the general use of Kurdish influences by non-Kurdish people, as well as some music with specific Kurdish references, such as *Kürdi makam* (Bashir, 1998; for discussion of *makam*-s in the Neo-Byzantine Octoechos, see Chrysanthos of Madytos' *Mega Theoretikon* of 1832).

By "Turkey," I mean the geographic area of the Turkish Republic. The recordings discussed are of three types:

1. Recordings recorded in Turkey
2. Recordings manufactured and sold in Turkey
3. Recordings brought to Turkey legally or illegally.

The first two types are easier to document than the third. The difficulty of quantifying the use of illegal recordings is obvious, and legal recordings may enter Turkey in very small quantities, such as commercial recordings on foreign labels (Folkways, Melodiya, OCORA, Wergo, etc.).

2. PERIODS OF KURDISH MUSIC RECORDINGS IN TURKEY

The history of Kurdish music recordings in Turkey can be divided into seven periods, demarcated by political events that shaped access to existing audio technologies:

1. 1902-1923 Ottoman Empire. Cylinders; 78-rpm records recorded in Turkey.
2. 1923-1960 Early Republic. Language proscribed; 78s imported or smuggled into Turkey.
3. 1960-1971 Military Coup, May 27, 1960. A few 45-rpm records allowed.
4. 1971-1980 Military Coup, March 12, 1971. Cassettes become important, though illegal.
5. 1980-1991 Military Coup, September 12, 1980. Intensified language ban; cassettes continue.
6. 1991-2001 Law 2932 repealed. Birth of the Kurdish recording industry in Turkey.
7. 2001-present Easing of Restrictions. Full-time Kurdish television broadcasting allowed; Internet.

The approximate dates of when a new medium became dominant for Kurdish music in Turkey may be summarized as follows: 1902, cylinder; 1915, 78 rpm; 1961, 45 rpm; 1975, cassette; 2006, compact disc (WAV and MP3 formats); 2010, Internet. This chronology is limited to sound objects, and does not take into account radio and television broadcasts, as reliable audience statistics are unavailable.

3. PERIOD 1: 1902-1923. OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Scientific interest led to the first recordings of Kurdish musics, made on wax cylinders. Archaeologist and anthropologist Felix von Luschan travelled to an excavation in Zencirli ("Sendschirli") near Gaziantep, where on March 1, 1902 he recorded five Kurdish songs. The singers were Ali from Diyarbekir, Jussuf Effendi (a Kurd from Zencirli), Ali from "Delistekanly," and a Kurd from "Ham assly" (two songs). Luschan also recorded Jussuf Efendi singing a Turkish song. (Ziegler, 2006, p. 552) The Berlin Phonogramm Archiv, now part of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, holds these and other Kurdish recordings.

In her note accompanying the compact disc publication of the lament from "Delistekanly," ethnomusicologist Ursula Reinhard identifies seven music qualities evident in the song: "recitative sung on just one note, sustained notes of up to eight seconds in length provide contrast, the singer closes phrases with a sobbing sound, different kinds of trills, pulsation on one note, pendulum movements that occur within the interval of a second, the singer presses a quarter to a half-tone higher toward the end of his singing" (Reinhard, 2000, p. 29).

Along with the Berlin Phonogramm Archiv, the Vienna Phonogramm Archiv collected many important recordings. They hold a recording by a Syrian priest from Mardin, singing a Kurdish song. Gustav Klameth recorded it on May 31, 1912.

In addition to cylinder recordings made by researchers, the pre-republic period saw the first commercial records of Kurdish music in Turkey. The Blumenthal Record & Talking Machine Company issued Orfeon Records from 1911 to 1924, when the company was sold to Columbia Records. Orfeon manufactured their 78-rpm records in Feriköy, Şişli, Istanbul. On the last page of the second edition of their catalog, published before 1920, they listed eight Laz and seven Kurdish 78-rpm records. The Kurdish records were performed by Hasan Efendi and Mehmed Efendi (French spellings: Hassan and Mohammad Effendi) (Ünlü, 2004, p. 179, 185, 190-192). I could not locate any of these recordings. Jonathan Ward, a researcher on old recordings, estimates that only one or two copies of these recordings might still exist, and that they are not in any archive known to him (personal communication 2013-09-16). I list the basic information about these important records here, in the hope that researchers may find, identify, and share copies of them.

Catalogue No.	Title	Artist	Matrix No.
778	Düz Tek / Oyun Havasi	Mehmet Efendi	13419
778	Kadin Havasi / Oyun I-	Mehmet Efendi	13420
779	Davul Havasi	Mehmet Efendi	13421
779	Nare Havasi	Mehmet Efendi	13422
780	Yorda Hati Hurla Baki	Hasan Efendi	13423
780	Halil Sarkisi	Hasan Efendi	13424
781	Ramo	Hasan Efendi	13425
781	Amaturam	Hasan Efendi	13426
782	Lavik	Hasan Efendi	13427
782	Lelei	Hasan Efendi	13428
783	Kaval Sarkisi	Mehmet Efendi	13429
783	Mehmet Sarkisi	Mehmet Efendi	13430

784	Lavo	Mehmet Efendi	13431
784	Barfiç Bari	Mehmet Efendi	13432

Table 1.

Orfeon Kurdish Recordings (Ünlü, 2004: Taş Plak Kataloğu)

4. PERIOD 2: 1923-1960. EARLY REPUBLIC: A LEGACY LOST

The founding of the Turkish Republic brought with it the beginning of the profound suppression of Kurdish languages spanning three generations, from 1923 to 1991. The nature and degree of suppression varied depending on the political climate and the location within Turkey (Uçarlar, 2009; Yildiz, 2008, 78-89). The early years were especially silent musically, with very little access to published recordings and radio broadcasts. The Orfeon discs of the 1910s were the only Kurdish records published in Turkey until the 1960s, and even those would have been inaccessible except to a tiny handful of the wealthy.

Record companies in other countries, however, published a number of Kurdish 78s. Beginning around 1929, some eight record companies issued a few dozen 78-rpm records of Kurdish music in Iran and Iraq (they manufactured some of the discs in India, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom!) (Mansour n.d.). In the absence of affordable and practical recording devices during this period, imported 78s constituted the only access to transportable Kurdish sound recordings. A number of these recordings have been reissued on compact disc. KOM Müzik, a record company in Istanbul, has made a substantial effort to make some of these recordings available, including music recorded in Iraq by Kawîs Axa, Mihemed Arif Cizrawî, and Meyrem Xan.

Columbia Records marketed the first long-playing records (LPs) in the United States during 1948. This new format quickly became the primary medium for commercial sound recordings and continued to do so in the United States until around 1990, with other countries switching to compact discs slightly later. Although the Turkish record industry produced many LPs, it did not make any Kurdish albums, as far as I know. Thus, the primary medium for the dispersion of music was denied to Kurdish speakers in Turkey for another two generations. Of course, Kurdish speakers who sang in Turkish and did not use Kurdish symbols flourished and fully participated in the commercial recording industry of Turkey.

Iraqi and Iranian radio stations began broadcasting Kurdish programs during this period (Greve, 2006, p. 254), but it may have been Radio Yerevan's weekly programs of Kurdish music, starting around 1955, that had the greatest impact in Turkey (Akboğa, 2012; Greve 2006, p. 254-255; Hongur, 2013). Archival recordings from Radio Yerevan and Iraqi radio continue their importance through their issue on cassette and compact disc in Turkey by KOM Müzik, Silvana Müzik Üretim, etc. Among the Radio Yerevan issues is a remarkable performance wherein Mirazê Egît sings a clear two-note melody in overtones above a sustained pitch (Egît, 2001).

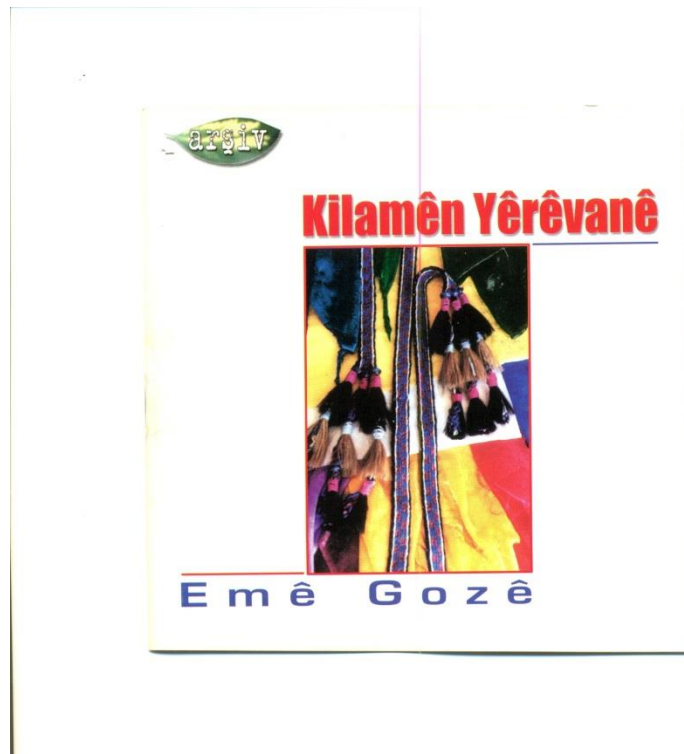


Figure 1.

Compact disc cover, *Kilamên Yêrêvanê: Emê Gozê*. This album includes Mirazê Egîr's overtone singing in "Were Yo Yo." Recorded 1963, Radio Yerevan. Istanbul: KOM Müzik Yapım. 2001.

5. PERIOD 3: 1960-1971. MILITARY COUP, MAY 27, 1960. 45-RPM RECORDS

The Radio Corporation of America was the first to sell 45-rpm records, in the United States in 1949. Kurdish 45s were made in Turkey starting in the 1960s. In 2011, the Foundation for Kurdish Library and Museum in Stockholm displayed 25 Kurdish 45s, in conjunction with their "Memorial Day for the Kurdish Mega Singer Mariam Khan" (Candan, n.d.). The director stated in his press release that the 45s date from 1961 to 1971 (Candan, n.d.). Those recordings are by Grabete Haço, Ayşe Şan, Mihemed Arif Cizrevi, Hüseyin Tural, Zülfikar Yumruk, Ali Cizreli, Fikri Kaya, Kadir Badikanlioğlu, and Mahmut Kızıl (I use the Turkish spellings, as they appeared on the records). Other artists who made 45s included Bozan Ahmet, Ahmet Akdoğan, Hasan Cizrevi, Kadir Gedikanlioğlu, Nusret Gülsoy, Gülizhar Han, Cemil Horo, Şükrü İzol, Mürüvet Kekili, Kemal Örkün, Musa Pervani, Nuri Polat, Mehmet Solmaz, Ferdane Şengül, Ramazan Şenses, and Hasan Temel. Although most of the record companies were in Istanbul, some 45s are from Izmir. The German company Türkofon also made some Kurdish 45s, by Ayşe Şan and Sivaslı Mahmut Gülçiçek. Some of the names of the companies survived into the 21st century, such as Coşkun and Silvana. The Ses Plak that issued 45s through the mid 70s, however, is a different company than the one with the same name founded in 1986 (see below).

Contrary to the date of 1961 given by Mr. Candan, Mahmut Kızıl (Mehmûd Qizil) said that he made the first Kurdish 45 in 1965, with the song "Lorî Lorî Cembelî" (AKnews, 2010). Acknowledging the importance of Mahmut's work, Kurdish academicians invited him to sing at the opening of the

Kurdology Conference at Hakkari University in May 2011 (Kurij, n.d.). Some of Mahmut Kızıl's 45s were reissued by Aşanlar Müzik Yapım in Diyarbakir, on a compact disc titled *Koçero / İbo Begê*.



Figure 2.
45-rpm record of Mahmut Kızıl, "Kocero."

6. PERIOD 4: 1971-1980. MILITARY COUP, MARCH 12, 1971. CASSETTE TAPES

Military coups shape political climates, thus two of them delimit this period. Technologically, the advances in the 1970s enabled the switch from impractical and expensive vinyl, to portable, recordable, and inexpensive tape, which was to remain the predominant sound medium until the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. The mass production of blank cassette tapes ("Compact Cassettes") began in Germany in 1964, and the introduction of prerecorded cassettes followed in 1965. In Turkey, however, Kurdish music cassettes did not become widely available until the mid-1970s (Kuruoğlu, 2013), the same time that inexpensive, semi-portable cassette recorders became available (the fully portable SONY Walkman was not introduced until 1979).

In contrast to the relatively benign and controllable 45-rpm records, which must be recorded in studios and manufactured in factories, cassettes constituted a brand new type of threat in the making. Anybody could now record any live performance, or make one's own copy of an existing tape, thus multiplying exponentially the transportability of the recorded sound object. Furthermore, the cost of sound recordings was drastically lowered. With access to an inexpensive tape recorder, one could

make one's own recording without the enormous cost of hiring a studio and manufacturing a minimum quantity of records; a blank cassette may cost about the same as a 45-rpm record. Likewise, the cost of cassette copies of commercial records may be substantially lower than the records themselves, as the typical length of a blank cassette is 60 or 90 minutes—enough to hold approximately ten 45-rpm singles.

This newly available technology made it possible for Şivan Perwer (born 1955) to make his music available as cassette-albums, beginning in 1975 with *Govenda Azadîxwazan* [Dance of the Freedom Lovers]. No Kurdish language Long Playing records were ever made in Turkey, and Şivan's albums mark a dramatic change in the nature of Kurdish music media: the move from the 45-rpm single containing two songs lasting around 10 minutes to albums containing sequenced collections of songs lasting up to 45 minutes.

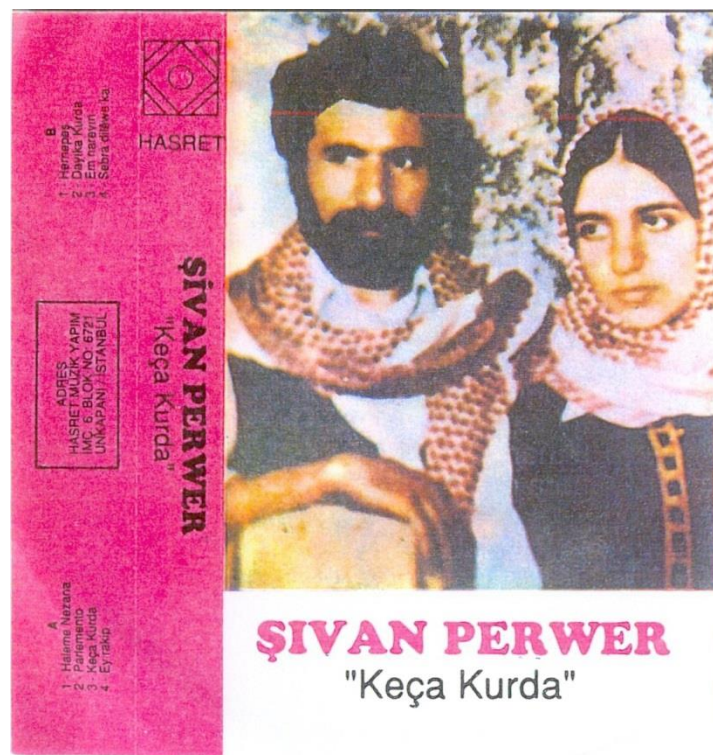


Figure 3.

Cassette cover, Şivan Perwer, *Keça Kurda*, a compilation album. The song "Keça Kurda" was first released on Şivan's fifth album, *Kî Ne Em* [Who Are We?] in 1979.

Language suppression continued during this period. Nizamettin Ariç, a Kurdish singer and film director from Ağrı, was arrested in 1979 for singing in Kurdish. Rather than serving a 5-15 year prison sentence, he moved to Berlin as a political refugee (Avcı, 2012).

During the 1970s, the Turkish radio and television corporation (Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon) wanted to compete with Kurdish broadcasts from other countries, so from their stations in Diyarbakir and Erzurum they broadcasted Kurdish folk songs, whose Kurdish lyrics had been replaced with new lyrics in Turkish, written by Kurdish musicians (Gündoğar, 2005, p. 34).

7. PERIOD 5: 1980-1991. MILITARY COUP, SEPTEMBER 12, 1980. SEVERE REPRESSION

One of the periods of severest repression was during the 1980s, after the coup. The founder of the Ses Recording Company, Ethem Güner, described the atmosphere in vivid terms:

Kurdish albums would be listened [to] secretly in the year of 1988 when many people were subject to torture for listening to these albums. In that process, firstly arms and secondly Kurdish albums would be seized in case of a police search. Most of the people would bury or destroy the albums they had. I think these albums were considered as arms at those times! Most of the artists escaped abroad in that process, while others did nothing. (Gönençay, 2012)

Listeners had to take a risk when listening to Kurdish musics. The legal system continued to provide a number of mechanisms to suppress spoken, written, and sung Kurdish language, and added new ones. In 1983, Law No. 2932 on "The Use of Languages Other than Turkish" was implemented (Efe, 2012, p. 21). It had a powerful effect in suppressing both language and music, until its repeal in February 1991.

A number of businessmen founded record companies during this period, aiming some or all of their productions towards Kurdish listeners, even though both Kurdish language and Kurdish iconography were strictly prohibited. Süleyman Nadir Ataman established Ataman Plak in Diyarbakir in 1983, changing its name to Umut Plak in 1994. As of 2009, he had released 250 albums (Mü-Yap 2009). Ethem Güner founded another important company, Ses Records, in 1986 (Gönençay, 2012) or 1987 (Ses Plak, n.d.). In 1988, in order to publish an album with one song sung in Kurdish, he gave only the Turkish translation of the song's lyrics to the Ministry of Culture, which must approve all publications. When Turkish officials realized that Beşir Kaya sang "Xezal Xezal" [Gazelle Gazelle] in Kurdish, they recalled the cassette within one week of its release. The government then sued Ethem at the High Criminal Court, for producing an album in "an unknown language" (Gönençay, 2012).



Figure 4.

Three albums by Beşir Kaya showing the change in freedom of using Kurdish language. *Gülüzarım* from 1989 has no Kurdish iconography, and the Turkish spelling of Kaya's home city is used rather than the Kurdish ("Diyarbakır" rather than "Diyarbakir"). A year later, *Derman Kalmadı* shows the artist wearing clothing associated with southeastern Turkey, but no Kurdish words. *Welatemin/Sare Sare* from 1993 shows Kaya in full Kurdish traditional dress and the use of Kurmanji for the album and song titles.

A year later, in 1989, Rahmi Saltuk was able to publish a cassette of Kurdish folk songs entitled *Hoy Nare*, and it too was immediately confiscated. Saltuk Plak reissued the album on compact disc in 2009 (Esen Shop, n.d.). It appears that the licensing board granted permission for Diyar Müzik Yapım to issue another Kurdish album, *Dersim Muhabbeti 1* in 1990, but prevented its publication until 1996. The author is in possession of two cassettes of this album that are identical except for their license numbers, one from 1990 and the other from 1996 (Çelik, 1996).

The military government persecuted many Kurdish musicians during this period. They also persecuted supporters of Kurdish rights. One of the first was Turkish composer, lyricist, and human rights activist Şanar Yurdatapan, who was exiled from 1980 to 1992 (Yurdatapan, n.d.). His wife, Melike Demirağ, sang an album of his songs that the American company Folkways Records published in 1982, called *Songs of Freedom from Turkey: Behind the Iron Bars*.

Exiled Kurdish musicians produced major works in their adopted countries, which continued to impact listeners in Turkey via illegal cassettes and broadcasts. Şivan Perwer made eight albums during this period, including *Ağır* from 1982. That album includes the remarkable song "Yar Merhaba," where he creates a beautiful aesthetic tension by starting verses on successively higher pitches, recalling the rising tone in the 1902 cylinder recording that Ursula Reinhard described.

Ciwan Haco was born in Syria in 1957. His family had moved from the Mardin region of Turkey to a town near Qamishlo, just across the border in Syria, due to repression following the Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925 (Haco, 2013). Along with Şivan, Ciwan Haco's recordings enjoyed enthusiastic reception in Turkey, where they were published by Ses Plak. Ciwan went further towards incorporating Eurogenetic and Amerigenetic elements in his music, including jazz (I use the suffix "-genetic" to indicate origins; I coined the term "Eurogenetic" in 2012 for a doctoral exam I administered in order to move away from the inaccurate appellation "Western"). During this period, Ciwan recorded six albums in Germany and Norway, which Ses Plak described as "Pop-Folk" or "Pop-Jazz."

8. PERIOD 6: 1991-2001. LAW 2932 REPEALED. BIRTH OF THE KURDISH RECORDING INDUSTRY IN TURKEY

The repeal of Law 2932 in February 1991 set the stage for radical changes in the production and dissemination of Kurdish musics in Turkey. Now that Kurdish languages were legal, according to the law at least, musicians could perform and record songs in Kurmanji and Zazaki. Although many restrictions remained (discussed in Efe, 2012), the continuous publication of Kurdish language cassettes and literature commenced in 1991.

At first several of the existing cassette companies issued a few Kurdish recordings, but faced with difficulties, the task soon fell to companies that focused on Kurdish productions (Kuruoğlu, 2013).

Companies established in the previous period now had the freedom to produce Kurdish language albums. Among the most important of these are Umut Plak (1983), Ses Plak (established circa 1986), and Diyar Müzik Yapım/Özdiyar Müzik (1987).

In 1991, Hasan Saltık founded Kalan Müzik Yapım. His company has become the standard-bearer for the widest variety of musics from Turkey ever published, with some 600 titles. In the face of lingering repression (Hobbs, 2010), Hasan released Kurdish recordings according to a schedule that charts dates that are more realistic than the laws concerning freedom of speech would suggest. During 1992-2000, he included individual tracks of Kurdish music, and starting in 2001, began releasing full albums of Kurdish songs. Chronologically, Kalan released the following Kurdish recordings:

1992. Grup Yorum's seventh cassette, *Cesaret*. The group performs their protest songs in Turkish, except for the last track, which consists of two Kurdish songs joined together, "Reşo," and "Keçe Kurdan" [Kurdish Girl]. (The latter was composed by Şivan Perwer, and recorded on his fifth album, *Kî Ne Em?* [Who Are We?] (1979).)

1996. Mazlum Çimen's original motion picture soundtrack to *Mem û Zîn*.

1997. Kardeş Türküler. *Kardeş Türküler*. Turkish, Kurmanji, Zazaki, Gorani, Armenian, Georgian, and Laz songs.

1999. Kardeş Türküler. *Doğu*. Turkish and Kurdish songs.

Since 1991, businessmen in Istanbul have established a number of new companies focusing on Kurdish music, including Aydın Müzik (300 albums as of 2009), KOM Müzik (199), Medya Müzik (98), and Silvana Müzik (100) (Mü-Yap. 2009). Record companies in Diyarbakir include Aşanlar Müzik and Seyme Müzik.

As noted earlier, the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) had been broadcasting Kurdish melodies with Turkish lyrics, provided "by TRT officials, musicians, and collectors" (Aksoy, 2008). In 2000, KOM Müzik (the record label of the Mesopotamian Cultural Center) published *Şahiya Stranan-1*, the first of three albums of Kurdish songs that are commonly known in their Turkish versions (see Figure 5). Most of the songs on that album appear in Hıdır Çelik's anthology of Kurdish songs, which he transcribed from albums produced by the Mesopotamian Cultural Center (Çelik, 2005).

The introduction of lossy compression formats such as MP3, along with increasing access to broadcasts via radio, television, and the Internet, characterize this period. In 1997, the number of personal computers in Turkey reached 1,300,000 (Trading Economics, n.d.), allowing for rapid adoption of the newly available MP3 format, using Winamp's free software. Portable MP3 players were introduced in 1998, and the iPod on October 23, 2001.



Figure 5.

Liner note to *Şahiya Stranan-1*. The Kurdish and Turkish titles are given, along with the regions from which the songs came, and the source of the performance on which this new recording is based.

9. PERIOD 7: 2001-PRESENT. EASING RESTRICTIONS. FROM SOUND OBJECT TO INTERNET AND BROADCAST

Amendments to the Turkish constitution eased language restrictions in 2001, and Law No. 4771 allowed Kurdish radio and television broadcasting, in 2002 (Hongur, 2013, p. 46). Record companies in Turkey have reissued some of the recordings from the Radio Yerevan archives on cassette compact disc. More than ten Kurdish satellite TV stations have been founded, including MED-TV, the first to broadcast, in 1995 (Sheyholislami, 2011, p. 5).

From 2001 onwards, Kalan Müzik included Kurdish music in its productions every year. While the first Kalan releases containing Kurdish music featured protest and brotherhood songs, the new millennium saw an expansion across a wide range of genres, including popular, folk, village, and minority religions (Êzîdî and Christian), as well as full albums in Zazaki language. The following Kalan albums introduced new genres, or broke new ground as productions by a company that issues both Turkish and Kurdish music:

2001. Burhan Berken. *Ba*. Kurdish pop music.
2002. Şêxo. *Dengê Axê*. Kurdish folk music.
2003. Mikhail Aslan. *Kilite Kou - Dağların Anahtarı – The Key of the Mountains*. Zazaki.

2004. *Eyhok: Traditional Music of Hakkari*. Ethnomusicological recording with 164-page booklet in Turkish, Kurmanji, and English. This album marked an important breakthrough, addressing members of the two largest languages spoken in Turkey together with the international community, and placing a high value on Kurdish rural music (Reigle, 2011).

2009. *(Y)ezidiler: Êzîdî Religious Music, Folk Music*. With 248-page booklet in Turkish, English, and Kurmanji.

2013. Şaban Ok. *Kilamên Kurdên Mesîhî-Kürt Hristiyan Ezgiler-Anthology of Kurdish Hymns*. Christian hymns in Kurmanji. With 28-page booklet in Kurmanji, Turkish, and English.



Figure 6.

Album cover of *Anthology of Kurdish Hymns*, a compact disc of Kurdish (Kurmanji) Christian hymns, released in 2013 by Kalan Müzik.

A European Union grant resulted in the publication of a book and compact disc of *dengbêj* from Diyarbekir, *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (Düzgün et al., 2007). In 2006, Remzi Maral produced a cassette-only release by Dengbêj Kerem on his Güneş Film Klip ve Müzik label, from Muş.

With the growing availability of compressed audio formats such as MP3 (facilitated by economic growth from the early years of the 21st century), and the advent of YouTube in 2005, the mediums of music listening in Turkey have been shifting away from music objects such as discs and cassettes. Sales of cassettes, formerly the primary music medium (compact disc sales did not surpass cassettes until 2006, far later than in Europe and the United States), plummeted from 28 million in 2004 to 2 million in 2008 (Mü-Yap, 2009). Video Compact Discs enjoyed a short life span in Turkey, reaching their peak in 2006, and fizzling out in 2009. The new media consist of sounds stored on the Internet and accessed through media libraries such as YouTube, Internet and mobile phone retailers, iTunes, Spotify, websites, and personal blogs; or broadcast through television, radio, or live-streaming Internet.

The Turkish music consortium Mü-Yap joined YouTube on February 13, 2007; as of December 4, 2013, it had 2,252,575 subscribers and 4,213,169,174 views (YouTube, 2013). Despite the government's blocking of YouTube during 2007-2011, as of 2010 the site remained the eighth most visited site in Turkey (Freedom House 2012: 8). Everyone with access to the Internet becomes a potential distributor of recordings stored on the Internet, by further disseminating them through social media such as Facebook, Wikipedia, Vimeo, SoundCloud, etc. Mü-Yap had launched their Digital Archive Distribution System in 2004, and by 2009 offered 100,000 tracks (Mü-Yap, 2009). TTNET, Turkey's largest Internet service provider, gives its subscribers access to several libraries, including those of Mü-Yap's members. Recently, the move away from desktop and laptop computers has intensified, with consumer preference shifting towards more portable electronic devices, such as tablet computers and Internet-capable phones (Arthur 2013). Despite the move to computer and broadcast media, record companies in Turkey continue to produce compact discs of Kurdish musics.

To date, perhaps some 4,000 Kurdish albums have been available in Turkey, including many from Iran, Iraq, and Syria. In 2011, an anonymous author contributed the first part of a Kurdish discography to Haber Diyarbakir, listing 1,606 Kurdish albums whose artists' names begin with the letters A to Ke (Haber Diyarbakir, 2011). Most listeners, of course, likely have access to only a fraction of those recordings at present, but evolving digital technology and delivery structures may permit near-complete access in the future.

Although Turkish citizens have had satellite access to Kurdish television channels since 1995, the government only legalized full-time television broadcasting in Kurdish languages as of January 1, 2009, when it launched TRT-6, Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu's [Turkish Radio and Television Corporation] channel six. Though the overwhelming majority of the programming is in Kurmanji, TRT-6 broadcasts a daily, 25-minute news program in Zazaki and a similar one in Sorani. TRT appears to aim the latter program towards viewers in Iran and Iraq, as there does not seem to be a substantial population of Sorani speakers in Turkey. Daily broadcasts by TRT-6 begin at 5:58 with the Turkish national anthem, "İstiklâl Marşı" [Independence Anthem]. The station plays music clips four to six times per day, in segments lasting 5 to 43 minutes, called Saeta Muzîkê [Music Time]. There is a folk music program called Çepik. On Wednesdays at 20:15 and 00:35 (Thursday), they broadcast "Dengbêj," an 80-minute program wherein a host presents four *dengbêj* singers. In the studio hang portraits of six well-loved Kurdish *dengbêj*: Şakiro, Meyram Xan, Karapete Xaco, Mihemed Arif Cizrawî, Eyşe Şan, and Şeroyê Biro. Their website describes the program as follows: "*Dengbêjî* (*Dengbêj* tradition) is the origin of Kurdish history and culture. *Dengbêjî* includes *destanbêjî* (epic telling), *çîrokbêjî* (story telling), *dîrokzanî* (narrative historiography), *helbestvanî* (poetry), *stranbêjî* (song singing), and *kilambêjî* (ballad singing)."

10.SUMMARY: A TIME-LINE OF KURDISH RECORDING MEDIA AND LANGUAGE USE

YEAR-APPROX.	MEDIA	LANGUAGE USE	COMMENT
1902	cylinder		archives
1919	78 rpm		Orfeon
1923		restricted	

1955	radio broadcasts		Armenian radio
1961	45 rpm		no LPs
1975	cassette		illegal
1980		heavily restricted	recordings hidden
1991		Law 2932 repealed	Kalan founded
1992	compact disc		cassettes still primary
1993	video compact disc		
1995	Satellite television		Kurdish illegal
1997	MP3		Internet and disc
1997	smartphone		Ericsson-Penelope
1998	Internet radio		(İTÜ Radyosu)
1998	MP3		portable players
1999	real-time push-email		BlackBerry
2002	radio broadcasts	greater freedom	Kurdish stations
2005	Internet video		YouTube
2006	Internet television		streaming; archives
2006	Social network		Facebook, Sept. 26
2006			CDs outsold cassettes
2009	television broadcasts	greater freedom	full-time television
2010	tablet computers		Apple iPad, April 3 rd
2013	Music streaming		Spotify, Sept. 24

Table 2.

A time-line of Kurdish recording media and language use

Technology shapes the evolution, performance, and distribution of Kurdish music, as it does all musics. Due to the extraordinary censorship of Kurdish languages, however, the recording history of Kurds in Turkey has a tremendous gap: except for the first and last decades of the 20th century, the normal recording media were not available for recordings of indigenous-language music. This forced listeners to find alternative media, a task that was not possible for many people during much of the century. Perhaps the most remarkable lacuna is the complete absence of Kurdish language long-playing records produced in Turkey. In order to gain deeper understanding of the history of Kurdish recordings in Turkey, the next phase of scholarship will require the production of a thorough discography. Delineating recorded repertoires should provide exactitude for an exploration of the impact that censorship had on the transmission of Kurdish music traditions. This project becomes more urgent as the few remaining products and producers of Kurdish musics in the 20th century slip away.

11. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my doctoral students, who gave many helpful suggestions, and especially Gönenç Hongur, for lengthy discussions as well as texts that I had overlooked. Thanks also to Cemal Atila for translating some Kurmanji texts. Any errors and omissions are my own.

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ROBERT REIGLE

[Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey](#)

Associate Professor Robert Reigle teaches ethnomusicology in the graduate program of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Music, where he created the first ethnomusicology doctoral program in Turkey. He received his ethnomusicology doctorate from the University of California, Los Angeles, with a dissertation about sacred music from Madang Province, Papua New Guinea. In 1993, he convened the second New Guinea Ethnomusicology Music Conference and edited its proceedings. He co-organized the Istanbul Spectral Music Conference, developing a new unified perspective on timbre, with ethnomusicologists, composers, musicologists, performers, and educators (proceedings published by Pan Yayincılık, 2008).