

Dewrêşê Evdî – Dewresh, Son of Evdi

A Kurmanji Epic as Performed by the
Berazi Singer Baqî Xido

Edited and translated by Barbara Sträuli

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Philip G. Kreyenbroek

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ji xelqê deîştê re

to the people of the plain

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Abbreviations

General

1st	first person
2nd	second person
3rd	third person
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
Arab.	Arabic
BCE	Before Common Era
ch.	chapter
cf.	confer
d.	died
dial.	dialect
et al.	and others
f.	feminine
fig.	figuratively
gloss.	glossary
ill.	illustration
imp.	imperative
ind.	indicative
inf.	infinitive
Kurm.	Kurmanji
lit.	literally
m.	masculine
metaph.	metaphorical
nom.	nominative

n.d.	no date
n.pag.	no pagination
Ottom.	Ottoman Turkish
par.	paragraph
part.	participle
Pers.	Persian
pers.pron.	personal pronoun
pf.	perfect
pl.	plural
poet.	poetical
sec. mean.	secondary meaning
sg.	singular
trans.	translated
transcr.	transcribed
Turk.	Turkish
vocat.	vocative
WK	written Kurmanji

Dictionaries

Ch	Chyet, Michael L. (2003). <i>Kurdish-English Dictionary</i> . Ferhenga Kurmancî-Inglîzî. New Haven: Yale University Press
Demîrhan	Demîrhan, Umîd (2007). <i>Ferhenga Destî, Kurdî bi kurdî</i> . Dogubeyazit
Farq	Farqînî, Zana (2000). <i>Türkçe-Kürtçe Sözlük</i> . İstanbul: İstanbul Kürt Enstitüsü Yayınları
–	(2004). <i>Ferhenga Kurdî-Tirkî</i> . İstanbul: İstanbul Kürt Enstitüsü Yayınları
FerOrg	Ferheng.org – Mala ferhengên kurdî. URL: http://www.ferheng.org/ Last updated 12 January 2011
Iz	Izoli, D. (1992 ²). <i>Ferheng. Kurdi-Tırki/ Türkçe-Kürtçe</i> . İstanbul

Kurmancî	(2009). Kurmancî. Rojnameya taybetî ya Enstituya kurdî ya Parîsê li ser pirsên zaravê. Hejmar 1–40. Avesta
Omar	Omar, Feryad Fazil (1992). Kurdisch-deutsches Wörterbuch. Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung
Red	Redhouse, Sir James W. (1890, new impr. 1996). A Turkish and English Lexicon. Beirut: Librairie du Liban
St	Steuerwald, Karl (1972). Türkisch-deutsches Wörterbuch. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz
W	Wehr, Hans (1985 ⁵). Arabisches Wörterbuch für die Schriftsprache der Gegenwart. Beirut und London

Logograms of Interviewees

(S. also list pp. 215-16)

AKh, HacM, MA, MeA, NA, PC, SA, ŞG, SŞ

Preface

This book exists to make a good story better known. The quality and the tragic impact of the Kurmanji epic *Dewrêşê Evdî* as sung by Baqî Xido transgress regional boundaries. As a patriarchal hero tale, *Dewrêşê Evdî* takes its place among the other great sagas of folk literatures. It is packed with passion, conflicting loyalties, great speeches and a heroic battle, all of which are the stuff of novels, films and plays.

Chance afforded me the opportunity to research the background to this epic in Turkey. I had visited the region of Suruç regularly for family reasons when a friend drew my attention to a typescript in his possession. It contained the epic *Dewrêşê Evdî*, performed by the singer Baqî Xido and transcribed by his countryman from Kobanî in Syria, Şahînê Bekirê Soreklî. Baqî Xido, a Berazi Kurd, had learnt it before World War II. He belonged to the same tribal confederation as my contacts on the Turkish side of the border and he spoke the same southwestern Kurmanji dialect. His home in Syria had been only nine miles distant from Suruç. My contacts knew the singer, they were familiar with the story of *Dewrêşê Evdî* and they were interested to discuss his performance text with me. In the end the whole process took twelve years, including a phase of intensive research between 2002 and 2006.

Baqî Xido's *Dewrêşê Evdî* is the longest version of this epic extant and a variant of high quality. The singers of Kobani were especially good at creating long and verbally artistic versions of older variants. The *ode* of the Şahin Begs Berazi, the chiefs of the Berazi confederation in Kobani, had an artistic impact on the surrounding regions between the two world wars, which reached as far as the Kurd Dağh and Afrin. Mişo Bekebûr (1889–1956) was their main singer at that time, while his pupil Baqî Xido (ca. 1918–1995) can be regarded as the last classical singer of this local tradition.

Like other Kurdish epics written down in the 20th century, *Dewrêşê Evdî* was transcribed by Şahîn Bekir Soreklî with little accompanying background information. Transcribing a long epic is an arduous task in itself, and Sorekli was writing for Kurdish readers and listeners. But the full meaning of Baqî Xido's performance is no longer accessible even to many Kurds. The action of his variant is set in the highly specialized nomadic society of the steppe, which vanished after World War II. Accordingly, my research was focussed on the first half of the 20th century when the singer had acquired and formed the epic, and on the years after the Second World War when nomadism was still practiced in the region. The result is a historical and bilingual edition, an in-depth semantic reading of the Baqî Xido's performance and a dense background description of the culture of the nomadic tribes as it is presented in the epic.

It is well known that the editing of an oral piece of folklore deprives it of important functions it has in performance. The strict rules of editing and the painstaking correctness required give the text of *Dewrêşê Evdî* a somewhat static aura it certainly did not have in a village performance. For Berazi audiences these performances were as transient as film screenings for town audiences before the invention of the Internet – at least my interviewees talked about them in a similar fashion. Although the singers were experts at arousing tragic emotions in the audience, their appearance in the village was an enjoyable event. They provided a welcome break in the rural monotony (I am speaking of the years up to about 1980). The reception of the singer in the *ode* and the time he spent in the assembly when he was not performing were filled with bartering news and witty verbal exchanges. Good singers were highly appreciated, but so were a whole range of other artists using language as their medium, such as professional tellers of jokes and anecdotes, tellers of fairy tales and the *duman*, wandering gypsies who performed little theatrical sketches in the village streets and sang derogatory songs on your neighbours if you paid them for it. If we take all these oral literary genres which existed side by side into account, we realize that the tragic genres represented by the big epics, melancholic long songs (*kilam*) and the *şîn* (laments for the dead) were only one half of the whole range of sung and spoken rituals or verbal entertainment available, the other half consisting in the comic genres mentioned and also a big treasure trove of collectively transmitted anecdotes and jokes told in the *ode*. Among my interviewees certain jokes villagers had practiced on each other 60 years ago were still told and retold.

In contrast to researchers like Christine Allison and Lokman Turgut who were forced by the difficult political situation to collect oral literature among Kurdish fugitives, I had the opportunity to talk to persons who were not displaced and whose tribes had settled several hundred years ago in the plain of Suruç. Although they were exposed to the usual assimilation practices by the Turkish state, they had an unbroken local and tribal history. A few weeks after I had finished the manuscript to this book, thousands of fugitives from the Syrian side of the border streamed into the Suruç plain. During my next visit in 2014 people told me that ‘nothing will be like before’, clearly aware of a radical and perhaps definite change in social dynamics. I had hoped that one day a complementary study of Berazi epics on the Syrian side of the border, in Kobanî, would be possible. Some of the sons of Baqî Xido and Mişo Bekebûr and other lovers of Kurdish folklore who knew the local traditions well had lived in that town. Now, after the destruction of Kobanî in winter 2014/15, their tapes and shellac records probably lie buried under heaps of concrete rubble. By a terrible twist of fate, this book has become a rare witness to the – literally buried – past of the Berazi singing tradition.

Acknowledgements

The person who needs to be mentioned first – it would be inappropriate to thank him – is Şahîn Bekir Soreklî, who in 1987 asked the singer Baqî Xido for tapes of his performance of *Dewrêşê Evdî* and transcribed them. Further generations will be grateful to him for the careful execution of his project at a time when, for political reasons, Kurdish folklore studies were non-existent in this region. Next to be mentioned is Ahmet Cantekin, Kurdish teacher and author in Sweden, who drew my attention to Sorekli's typescript.

My very warmest thanks go to my Kurdish interview partners from the Suruç plain and in Switzerland who patiently answered my questions. Sometimes they smiled at so much fervour directed towards things long past. Among these persons my special thanks go to Perwîz Cîhanî (Artuklu University, Mardin). Without him the close semantic analysis of Baqî Xido's performance text would not have been possible.

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My sincere thanks also go to Barbara Krauss, Director of Harrassowitz, and to Arif Biter for formatting this volume.

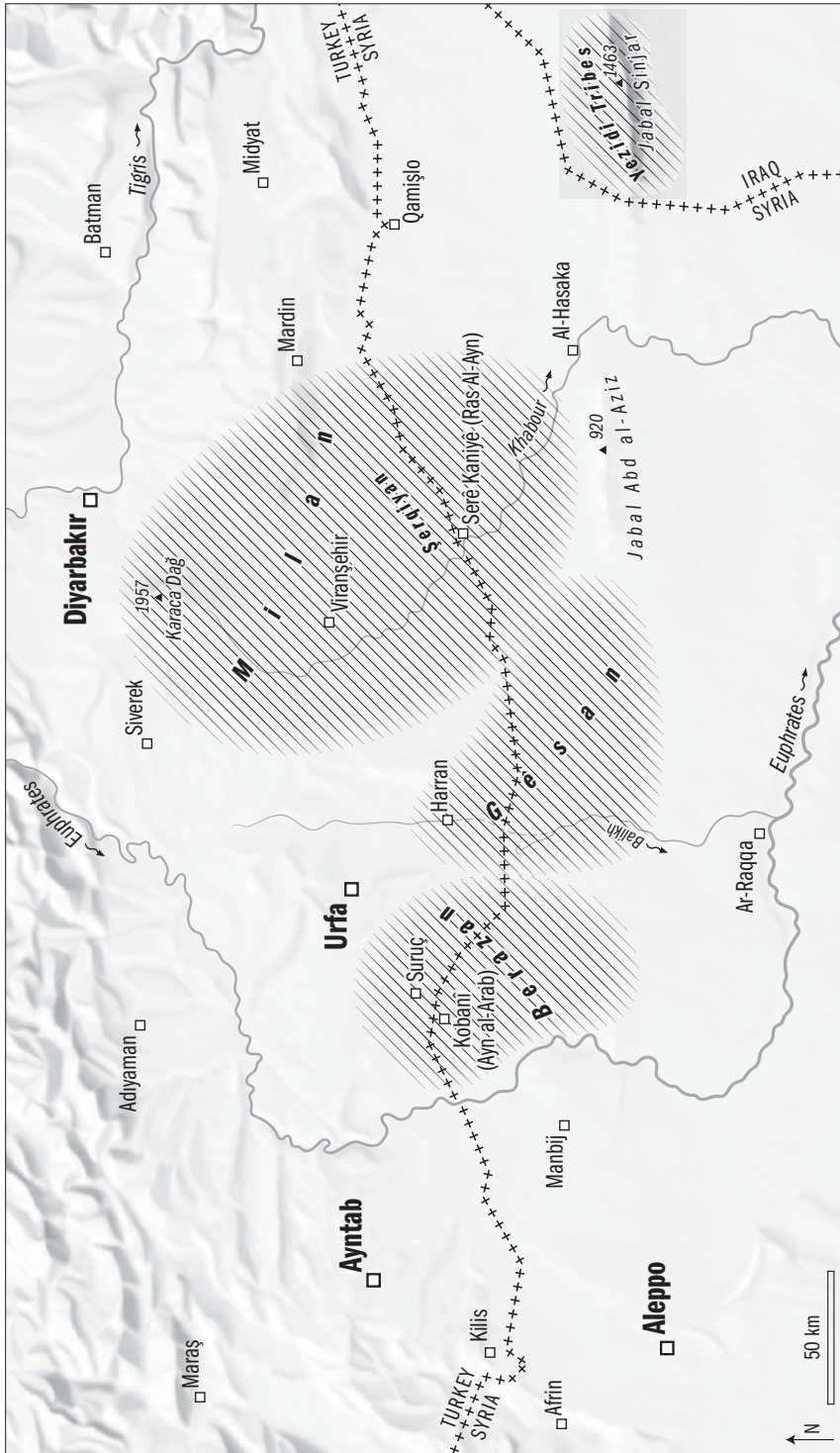
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Zürich, den 30. August 2016

Barbara Sträuli



Approximate roaming territories of the tribal confederations in 'Dewrêşê Evdî'

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Introduction

1. The Material

In the late spring of 1851, the archeologist and diplomat Austen Henry Layard visited the upper reaches of the river Khabur to escape the heat of the Iraqi plain. There he came upon a large camp of Kurds and Arabs:

‘The delta, formed by the two streams, was covered with tents. We wended our way through crowds of sheep, horses, cattle, and camels. The Chichi and Milli Kurds, who encamp during the spring at the foot of the mountains of Mardin, had now sought, under the protection of the Turkish soldiery, the rich pastures of the Khabour, and many families of the Sherabbeen, Buggara and Harb Arabs had joined the encampment. (...). The Tents of the Kurdish tribes, who wander in the low country at the foot of the mountains in winter and spring, and seek the hill pastures in the summer, and especially those of the principal men, are remarkable for their size and the richness of their carpets and furniture.’¹

For a long time, Layard’s romantic as well as ethnographic description remained a rare snapshot of the everyday life of the Kurdish tribes of Mesopotamia. More recently, these observations of an outsider can be compared with native accounts from inside such nomad camps. Thanks to European folklorists, who began to collect oral Kurdish literature in the 19th century, and to Kurdish researchers, who added greatly to the material in the 20th century, we now have access to Kurdish war epics reflecting the alliances and conflicts of the Kurdish tribes in the Syrian Jazira. These stories treat of wars between Kurds and the Ottoman army (*Hame Musikî*) or between Kurdish Yezidis and Muslims (*Teyar û Xezal, Mawwal heft bira*). But the most popular of these epics describes a battle between Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens. It is the tragic story of Dewrêş, son of Evdî, that involves the same confederation of Milan tribes which Layard had met on his visit to northern Mesopotamia. The epic is set in the same territory and in the same nomadic context, but the events that led to its emergence took place approximately 70 years before Layard’s visit.

By now, the story of Dewrêşê Evdî is preserved in over twenty published versions or fragments, many of them collected in Armenia. This monograph presents a version from southwestern Kurdistan, from the Euphrates region². It is the longest

1 Layard 1853: 310–11.

2 For this study, the ‘Euphrates region’ is defined somewhat generously as the region between

version extant today. Its singer Baqî Xido (1918?–2009) was a Berazi Kurd who lived in Kobanî (Turk. *Mürşitpınar*, Arab. *‘Ayn al-Arab*) on the Syrian side of the Turkish-Syrian border. Baqî Xido was a professional *sazbend* famous for his performance of *Dewrêşê Evdî*. He learned the epic in his youth, before the Second World War, and he sang it until 1995, when he gave up performing. His version has been preserved due to the efforts of a countryman from Kobanî, Şahînê Bekirê Soreklî who in 1987 asked Baqî Xido for recordings which he then transcribed. In this volume, based on Soreklî’s typescript, the epic is presented both in Kurmanji and English with annotations and a glossary of dialectal and obsolete expressions. This introduction deals with the text and with the hitherto almost unknown context of the Kurmanji oral tradition of the Euphrates region. The chapters on the editing process describe the methods used to establish a close semantic understanding of Baqî Xido’s performance (ch. 2), the properties of Soreklî’s transcription (ch. 3) and the literary features such as the local oral-formulaic tradition and the historical layerings observable in Baqî Xido’s version of *Dewrêşê Evdî* (ch. 4). The chapters on context deal with the region and its tribes – the Berazi confederation which furnished Baqî Xido’s audiences and the tribes important to the narration, i.e. the Milan confederation and its enemies (ch. 5), and with the singers (ch. 6). This final chapter also includes a discussion of the stance the singer takes towards his hero and the question of the changing interpretation of the main protagonist according to region and religion.

In unravelling the text of Baqî Xido’s performance, I was assisted by older women and men from the Suruç plain near Şanlıurfa (Turkey) whom I interviewed during several visits, and by Kurdish people in Switzerland (cf. the list of persons in the Appendix). These talks soon convinced me to focus on a close semantic interpretation of the text and on the presentation of the rich background information they gave me. My interviewees contributed stories and history, information concerning nomadic life and customs of the *erdî berrî*, the northern Mesopotamian plain, as well as geographic, historical and ethnological facts. They explained rare words and dialectal expressions and suggested emendations for garbled passages. They also talked about the performances of travelling singers and memories of recitals from their youth. Some of these memories of Berazi *sazbend* and their network reached back to before the Second World War, to the time when Baqî Xido learned his version of *Dewrêşê Evdî*. The annotations to the text of the epic in particular are based on information from my Kurdish interviewees. They are the most important contribution of this study.

In the conversations, two topics of sociological and political interest relevant to the background of the singer and his interpretation of the epic surfaced regularly. The first is the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of the population of the region. Since ancient times, Upper Mesopotamia has been a contact zone between

Urfa and Afrin, the reason being that many similarities can be found between the epics of these towns and that contacts between singers from Kobani, Aleppo and Afrin are testified.

cultures and languages.³ For several hundred years and up to the early 20th century, Kurdish, Arab and Turkmen tribes coexisted or fought each other here, sometimes threatened by the Ottoman army, at other times controlled by it. The controversial ethnic and religious positions contributing to the depth and tragedy in Baqî Xido's version of *Dewrêşê Evdî* have their roots in this regional history. The singer himself and his audience could identify easily with these positions, as their own identities were often mixed. Baqî Xido himself was a Berazi of Arab origin, while most of my interviewees, representatives of the Berazi singers' former audiences, were members of a former Yezidi tribe that had been converted to Islam.

The second topic was the impact of historical events on the development of the regional oral tradition.⁴ My interviewees especially mentioned the drawing of the Turkish-Syrian border in the 1920s and its consequences for the local tribal community. The border cut the territory of the Berazi confederation in two, a fate it shared with numerous other nomadic tribes of the Jazira who had their spring pastures in the steppe (now in Syria) and their summer quarters in the northern hills (now belonging to Turkey). The border also blocked the path of the travelling singers who wandered from village to village, and it created different, unequal conditions for the survival of Kurdish oral literature on either side. Surprisingly, contact never ceased between the two sides, as singers, shellacs and tape recordings travelled across the ancient tribal territory despite the new border, landmines, language persecution and military controls.

My approach to *Dewrêşê Evdî* is an editorial one as the aim was to produce a historical and critical edition of the singer's performance text. By doing so, I had to exclude several performance aspects vital to the full interpretation and appreciation of oral literature.⁵ Admittedly, the transcription of a piece of oral literature is like a musical score never to be performed again. But then again, not many of the existing transcriptions of Kurmanji epics have been scrutinized for the regional ethnological or historical information they contain.⁶ This edition thus may serve as a *text de base* for further research.

1.1 The Story of Dewrêşê Evdî and its Dissemination in the Middle East

Although variants and fragments of *Dewrêşê Evdî* exist in diverse and remote regions of Kurdistan, all versions contain the same two intersecting plot lines: an armed conflict between Arab and Kurdish tribes and Dewrêş's unhappy love story. The broad outlines of the plot are simple:

3 For a geographical description of the Jazira s. Epstein 1940.

4 As usual in Kurdish contexts, the political history of the region has been researched more extensively than its cultural tradition. In my interviews I focussed on the political background of the region only as far as it was relevant to this study.

5 Aspects of music and performance in Kurdish folklore are treated in Allison 2001, Asid 2007, Turgut 2010 and Amy de la Bretèque 2013.

6 Examples are Kevirbiri 2001, Allison 2001, Kreyenbroek 2005, Turgut 2010 and Gültekin 2013.

Dewrêş, son of Evdî, is a Yezidi and thus belongs to a non-Muslim religious minority. He loves Edule, the daughter of Zor Temir Pasha, the powerful leader of the Kurdish Milan confederation, whom Dewrêş serves as a tribal warrior (*egît*). Marriage is impossible because, according to some variants, as a Yezidi he is not permitted to marry a Muslim woman, and according to other variants, because Zor Temir rejects Dewrêş as a stranger and non-Muslim. But when the Pasha finds himself under severe pressure from a hostile alliance of Arabs and Turkmens, he promises Dewrêş the hand of his daughter, should he defeat this enemy. Various people, including his beloved, try in vain to dissuade Dewrêş from undertaking such a mad endeavour. In spite of all their warnings, Dewrêş rides into the steppe with a group of young men to fight a battle that is hopeless from the start. He is killed with all his companions except one. After Dewrêş's death, the fathers of the two lovers, Zor Temir Pasha and Evdî Milhim, combine their forces and scatter the enemy tribes.

The core of the story of Dewrêşê Evdî emerged towards the end of the 18th century in the region of the Milan confederation, which has its centre at Viranşehir (in present-day Turkey). The dual identity of the hero as a Milan warrior and a Yezidi hero ensured that over time different groups – the Milan tribes and the Yezidis – claimed the hero as their own. Accordingly, the storylines of the epic evolved slightly differently in different regions, so as to match the local religious or tribal perspective (see Chapter 6.1).

Christine Allison's investigation of the oral tradition of the Yezidis in Iraq showed *Dewrêşê Evdî* to be very prominent in the song repertory of the Yezidi Kurds.⁷ Yezidism is a minority religion in the Middle East that developed in the 11th and 12th century in Iraq out of the Muslim mystical community of Sheikh Adî (Sheikh 'Adî ibn Musâfir al-Umawî) and which integrated elements of the pre-Islamic western Iranian religion that is still locally prevalent.⁸ The faith community has its religious centre at Lalish (Iraq) and mostly speaks Kurmanji. The main areas of settlement of the Yezidis in Iraq are the *Sheikhan* territory north of Mosul and Mount Sinjar.

The story of Dewrêşê Evdî travelled with its singers northwards to the Iranian-Turkish border, to northeastern Turkey, and with the persecution of the Yezidis by the Ottoman state in the 19th and early 20th centuries also to today's Republic of Armenia. Most of the variants of *Dewrêşê Evdî* were collected and published by Yezidi Kurds in Soviet Armenia where the Kurdish language and culture were not only tolerated but promoted.

7 Allison 1996 and 2001. Allison did not publish any new variants of *Dewrêşê Evdî* in her Iraqi research, restricting herself to the six pieces from the collection of the Cêlîl brothers (Moscow 1978). For Yezidi variants from Iraq published later s. Hurmi 2000.

8 Philip Kreyenbroek, 'Ein altiranischer Mythos im heutigen Kurdistan?' Lecture at Göttingen University, 11.5.2010 (Public lecture series: *Arbeit am Mythos. Leistung und Grenze des Mythos in Antike und Gegenwart*. <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=0wn623TIM98>; last accessed 18 September 2014).

The epic migrated not only to the north, but also westward, from Mount Sinjar along the northern ridge of the Jazira to Urfa, Aleppo and the Kurd Dagh (Afrin).⁹ Yezidi singers may have been involved in its dissemination in the 19th century, as a string of Yezidi villages extended from Mount Sinjar to the Kurd Dagh,¹⁰ and Aleppo was one of the seven religious districts of the Yezidi.¹¹ The recordings of local singers, uploaded to the Internet by members of the Kurdish Internet community of the Euphrates region, testify to the lasting popularity of the epic both among the Berazi Kurds and in the Kurd Dagh (Afrin) north of Aleppo. The Urfa and Afrin versions appear to be related and are characterised by their great scope and wealth of episodes. Baqî Xido's *Dewrêşê Evdî* belongs to this tradition.

Unfortunately, I have not yet found a complete version of *Dewrêşê Evdî* by a Milan singer either in writing or as a recording. Evidence suggests that the epic was sung for the tribal leaders of the Milan confederation in the early 20th century, for Ibrahim Pasha Millî and later also for his sons.¹² According to Milan author Eyüp Kıran (aka Eyûbê Milî) who grew up in a Milan tribe, *Dewrêşê Evdî* was the most frequently performed epic of his youth.¹³ He researched the Milan tradition of the epic in detail. However, as he worked the results of his research into a novel in which he interwove various versions of *Dewrêşê Evdî* (including one by Baqî Xido), his text cannot be considered an authentic variant.

Around the year 2000, *Dewrêşê Evdî* gained unprecedented popularity among the transnational Kurdish community. It was sung on Kurdish television stations and different versions can be found on the Internet. Popular singers like Şivan Perwer und Delil Dilanar sang versions of Edule's lament (*Delalê Edûlê*) in music programmes, and historical recordings of Xerapetê (Garabetê) Xaco, Baqî Xido and other singers were uploaded on YouTube. Interest in the hero grew among Turkish Kurds because Abdullah Öcalan had before his capture listened to a version of *Dewrêşê Evdî* together with the singer Şivan Perwer in Rome and later stated that he identified with the protagonist¹⁴. Subsequently, in a series of articles, the struggle of Dewrêş was interpreted as the national Kurdish struggle and the epic as a contribution to the strengthening of Kurdish national identity.¹⁵

At the same time, the material became part of contemporary Kurdish fiction writing. Several novels and at least one play by Kurdish writers were published in

9 Cf. the recordings of *Dewrêşê Evdî* on YouTube by the singers Ahmad Nasir, Umer Cemlo and Bavê Selah from the Kurd Dagh (s. Bibliography).

10 Lescot 1975, Tolan 2013.

11 One of the seven *senjaqs* or standards of the Tawusi Melek which were brought from Lalish to the major Yezidi districts (*tawûsgêran*) was the *senjaq* of Aleppo. It was brought to the Kurd Dagh (Lescot 1975: 75).

12 O. and C. Cêlîl 1978, II: 475.

13 Eyüp Kıran 2011: 11.

14 Mahmut Baksî, 'Büyük Kürt Aşkı gerçekleşiyor'. In: *Özgür Politika*, 18.1.1999: 9.

15 E.g. Rûbar Andok, 'Evîna Edûlê'. In: *Yeni Özgür Politika*, 25.3.2010.

Turkey after the year 2000.¹⁶ The authors based their plot adaptations on recordings and the performances of singers they remembered from their youth. Like the Kurdish television stations, these novels, too, ensure the transmission of the material – crucial in the opinion of the Kurdish population – but not the preservation of the historical oral variants with their particular literary qualities.

1.2. Historical Background

Baqî Xido's performance does not contain any historical information that would permit dating or locating the tribal conflicts that form the basis of the material. The diverging course of narration in the extant versions shows that (according to the laws of oral transmission) the account of the historical events turned in the course of over more than 200 years of transmission into a legendary epic cycle around a single protagonist, Dewresh, son of Evdî.¹⁷

Kurdish writers have attempted to date the battle described in the epic,¹⁸ however without providing convincing proof from Ottoman source material that would permit to determine the time of the dispute between the Milan and an Arab tribal alliance. Sources may yet be discovered, for example in Armenian historiography. If the relevant historical event ever took place in a fashion similar to that presented in the epic, it would not be the skirmish of a vanguard connected with the name of Dewrêşê Evdî, but the subsequent battle of the Milan against a hostile Arab-Turkish alliance that would be mentioned in a written source. In Baqî Xido's version, for example, this fight is described in a mere two sentences at the end of the narration:

‘Ê herba Millan û Tirk û Gêsan û Yêzidan ji hevdi neqetiya hetanî ku Tirk û Gês ji hevdi parçe kirin. Çîl Îbramê Begdilî kuştin û koma Tirk û Gêsan ji hev di belav kirin, her hêlek bi hêlekê da çû.’ (par. 48)

‘The Milan, the Tirk, the Gêsan and the Yezidis engaged each other fiercely in battle until they (i.e. the Milan and the Şerqîyan) drove the Tirk and Gêsan apart. They killed Çîl Îbramê Begdilî and scattered the gangs of the Tirk and Gêsan, each in a different direction.’

The only historically documented character in the epic is Zor Temir Pasha Millî who led the Milan confederation at the end of the 18th century. His rule, at times semi-autonomous, at other times independent, extended from Viranşehir to Raqqa and

16 Bawêr Ferat, *Dermansiz sevda. Dewrêş ile Adûle* (2002); the theatrical company Şanoya Hêvî, *Dewrêşê Evdî* (2005); Îbrahîm Osman, *Evîna Mêrxasekî* (2008); Eyüp Kıran, *Dewrêşê Evdî. Kulîlka bilbizêk û rim* (2011).

17 Karl Reichl discusses this process of myth-formation in exemplary fashion for the Karakalpac epic *Edige* (2007: 116–124).

18 The author Çerkêzê Reş (Armenia), referring to a Mechitarist source apparently accessible to him, gives 1784 as the year of this battle (cited by Eyüb Milî in ‘Mêrxasî, Jan Dark û Dewrêşê Evdî’, www.netkurd.com 2005); İbrahim Bozkurt gives 1768 (2003: 145); Ömer Ulucay suggests a point in time between 1785 and 1790 (‘Dewrêşê Evdî û Milan’. In: *Kovara Bîr* 6, 27 July 2010, n.p.).

lasted from approximately from 1774 until after 1803.¹⁹ During this time, he was constantly monitored by the Ottoman state which tried to curb his autonomy. In 1790/91, Sultan Selim raised an army against him and its superior strength forced the Pasha to flee to Baghdad. The Milan were defeated and various tribal leaders were hanged, but Zor Temir himself was pardoned and appointed Wali of Raqqa and later of Sivas. In 1803, however, he lost the Sivas position because he continued to assert his power in Raqqa and Urfa. Zor Temir died soon after this attempt to build up a new tribal confederation in the Khabur region. In Baqî Xido's version of *Dewrêşê Evdî*, two historical aspects of this story are transmitted correctly. Temir Pasha bears the title of *Îskan Paşa*, i.e. a pasha tasked with the settlement of the tribes. According to Kıran he was given this title in 1779.²⁰ It was part of the plan of the Ottoman settlement programme that he should settle the Milan confederation in Raqqa, but in the epic, the confederation leads a nomadic existence in its old core territory as it had done for centuries – the Karaca Dagħ with Viranşehir as the centre and Ras al-Ain as its winter quarters. The perspective is purely Kurdish and tribal, the Ottoman state does not appear to exist in the epic, Zor Temir's power is absolute and the Milan are presented as an exclusively nomadic people on the move. In reality, villages and settled tribes were also part of the confederation. They had to provide the necessary wheat.

It is also quite probable that a small group of Şerqiyan joined the Milan confederation under Zor Temir, as is mentioned in the epic. Today, they continue to live in the village of Oğlakçı to the south of Viranşehir (Turkey).²¹ They trace their ancestors to Dewrêş's father Evdî Milhim who, according to their statements, had other sons in addition to Dewrêş und Sehdûn, both of whom in the epic die in battle.²² Dewrêş's grave is shown in the region and is frequently visited by Kurds from different parts of Kurdistan.

None of my interviewees in the Suruç plain doubted that Dewrêşê Evdî was a historical figure. Their beliefs were only partly extrapolated from their knowledge of the epic. Interestingly enough, they also knew a few traditions about the hero transmitted independently. They stated unanimously that Dewrêş's mother, Ayşa Welê, was a Dinna from the village of Mudeyib who had been married to Evdî Milhim.²³ And indeed, in Yezidi fragments of *Dewrêşê Evdî*, the Şerqî Evdî Milhim is referred to as the 'leader of the Şerqiyan und the Dinnan'.²⁴

19 The following information is based on Winter 2006: 467–69.

20 Kıran 2003: 141.

21 *Aşiretler Raporu* 1998: 336–37.

22 Eyüb Milî (aka Eyüp Kıran), 'Li Ser Navê Dewrêşê Evdî' (undated), www.lalish.de and Hurmî (2000). Of course, such traditional genealogies may be incomplete or have been adapted to the requirements of a particular context, but they undeniably have a historical core.

23 For the Dinna tribe, s. ch. 4.1. The marriage of Evdî Milhim and Ayşe Welê is a separate episode in the epic cycle around Dewrêşê Evdî. All my interviewees knew this episode.

24 See the version of singer Babê Qasimî from Sengal, in Hurmî 2000: n.pag.

NA, who lives in a village next to that of Mudeyib, told me an anecdote handed down in his own family which goes back far in time and which, at least, does not contradict any attempts at dating *Dewrêşê Evdî*: ‘The grandfather of my mother Ana Fato (the latter was born in 1915) whose name was Kalê Hesen met a ninety year old man who claimed to have seen Dewrêşê Evdî as a child.’ The origin of the epic was dated relatively accurately by NA and SŞ when I asked them about it. Independently of each other, and without ever having read anything about it, they both estimated that the events must have taken place roughly 200 years earlier. The singer Baqî Xido himself dates *Dewrêşê Evdî* to the beginning of the 19th century, either based on his own calculations or on information received from acquaintances familiar with Ottoman sources. He concludes his performance of 1987 with the sentence: ‘*Û halliyen, nuha, di vê wextê da, tarîxê Dewrêş sed û heystê sal e*’ – ‘And now, at this point in time, the story of Dewrêş is 180 years old’ (par. 48).

The leaders of the Milan tribes in the 20th century also regarded the events surrounding *Dewrêşê Evdî* as historical facts. Like Zor Temir Pasha himself, they were descendants of the ruling clan of the Milan, the *mala Keleş Evdî*. It can be assumed that they maintained an internal transmission of events relating to their clan, although it is of course never clear how much of their knowledge stemmed from the singers in the chief’s tent. It is said that Sileman Beg Millî, a son of Ibrahim Pasha Millî (d. 1908), interdicted the singing of *Dewrêşê Evdî* in his presence with the remark, ‘So many of us have perished in this battle, and Dewrêş was killed because of us.’²⁵

1.3 History of Research

The history of research done on *Dewrese Evdî* is surprisingly short. Despite the popularity of the hero among Kurdish tribes, no European researcher in the 19th century noted down his story. This omission may be due to the hero’s religious affiliation, as the Kurdish translators and the teachers of such scholars as Jaba, Lerch, Makas or v. Le Coq were Muslims who usually had been educated at a medrese and who either would not have been familiar with Yezidi traditions or who perhaps did not want to pass them on. Probably the earliest text bearing the title *Darwischi Avdi* was written down in 1903 by the Armenian composer Komitas. It consists of a few stanzas, which he included in a Kurdish-Armenian song collection.²⁶ In 1906 a Berazi Kurd, Sheikh Bozan, dictated a version of the epic to the Iranist Oskar Mann in the city of Urfa, in a Kurmanji-speaking area 500 km removed from Armenia.²⁷ In 1936, Heciye Cindi and Emin Evdal, both Yezidi

25 ‘*Sileman nedixast k’es vî şerê Dewrêş bêje. Digo, “Hewqas ji me hatiye kuştin u ji xwe ji Dewrêş di ber meda hatiye kuştin.” Dilê Silêman dişewitî, ko ev k’ilama digotin.*’ O. and C. Cêlil 1978, II: 475.

26 He wrote down the beginning of a variant of the lament of Edule (*Delalê Edûlê*) with text and musical notation. In: Kendal Nezan et.al., *Kürt Müziği*, 1996: 123–124.

27 Mann/Hadank-Bequest at the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, No. 170. An edition of the dictations of Sheikh Bozan by the author is in preparation.