



BAYT

BAYT, a genre of Kurdish folk art similar to Azarbaijani Turkish *dāstān* or *hekāya*, British and Scottish popular ballads, Danish *vise*, Spanish *romance*, Russian *bylina*, etc. *Bayt* is an orally transmitted story which is either entirely sung or is a combination of sung verse and spoken prose. It is distinguished from Kurdish lyrical folk songs (*ḥayrān*, *qaṭār*, and *lāwik*) by its essentially narrative character and, generally, its length. *Bayt* is also clearly distinguished from the Kurdish narrative genre *hekāyat* or *čirōk* (story) by its sung verse form. In contrast to its Azeri counterpart (see ‘*āšeq*), singing is unaccompanied by instruments.

The subject matter of the *bayt* is varied including such topics as tragic love (e.g., *Mam ū Zīn*, *Ḳaj o Sīāmand*, *Šōr Maḥmūd o Marzīngān*), conflict between the Kurdish principalities and the Iranian and Ottoman states (e.g., *Dimdim*, *Bāpīr Āḡay Mangur*), conflict between the principalities and or tribes (e.g., ‘*Abdullā Ḳānī Mukrī*), and religious themes (e.g., *Julindī*, *Sā’il* “The beggar,” *Qabr* “The grave”). Some *bayts* deal with the art of balladry and the lives of the bards (e.g., *Pīwāzān* “The onions,” *Halkatī w Ḳīrnāl*). Others have moralizing introductions and conclusions, while some are of a purely humorous nature (e.g., *Kur ū Kič* “Boy and girl”). Different (dialectal or regional) versions of a single *bayt* (cf., e.g., *Dimdim* in Dzhalilov, pp. 75-133, 206) may demonstrate variations in formal features such as stanza length, line length, rhyme, melody, and verse and prose combination.

There is a lively interaction between written (formal) literature and the ballads. A number of classical poets and modern writers have drawn on the



ballad repertory for their literary creations (for collections of literary and folk versions cf. Bitlisi, Fayzizāda, Musaelian, Rudenko, and Teïran). For example, Aḥmad Kānī's *Mam ū Zîn* (1105/1693-94), originally a *bayt*, has become the national epic of the Kurds. Although international folk motifs are present in the ballads and some derive from Persian and Arabic literature (e.g., *Šēkī Saṅ'ān*, *Mihr ū Wafā*, *Laylī w Majnūn*, *Yōsif ū Zilēkā*), the great majority of them are of local origin.

Most bards (*baytbēž*) male and female, have been semiprofessionals, living by both farming and singing. They performed for the village folk in their homes and at the village mosque, the feudal nobility in their lavish guest rooms, and the townspeople in the local teahouses which they frequented. These singers enjoyed considerable respect and were an indispensable element of the courts of the princes and the estates of the landed nobility. 'Alī Bardašānī, the greatest known *baytbēž*, served the court of the [Bābān](#) principality during the reign of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Pasha (1204-27/1789-1812). A number of well-known *bayts* are attributed to him. His mastery of the art has been explained by the village folk in terms of his relations with the supernatural beings, *jindōkān*, the jinns. He is said to have learned the *bayts* from the jinns and to have sung for their wedding parties (Mokriānī, pp. 155-56; Fattāḥī Qāzī, p. 315).

Bayts are found in all Kurmānjī (Northern) dialect areas (Iran, Soviet Armenia, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria) and in parts of the Sōrānī (Central) dialect regions, namely, the territories of the former principalities of Sōrān, Bābān, and Mokriān. Changes in rural life in the post-World War II period have resulted in the decline of the art. State-run broadcasting in Kurdish (since 1939 in Iraq and since the 1950s in Iran) has been inimical to balladry while the advent of cassette recording has encouraged its diffusion in Iran and Iraq. A serious setback to the survival and recording of the *bayts* has been the proscription of the Kurdish language and music in Turkey (since the mid-1920s), Iran (especially from the late 1920s to 1941), and Syria (since 1962).

For a music sample, see [Bayt Mahmud Kolāhpizah](#).



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