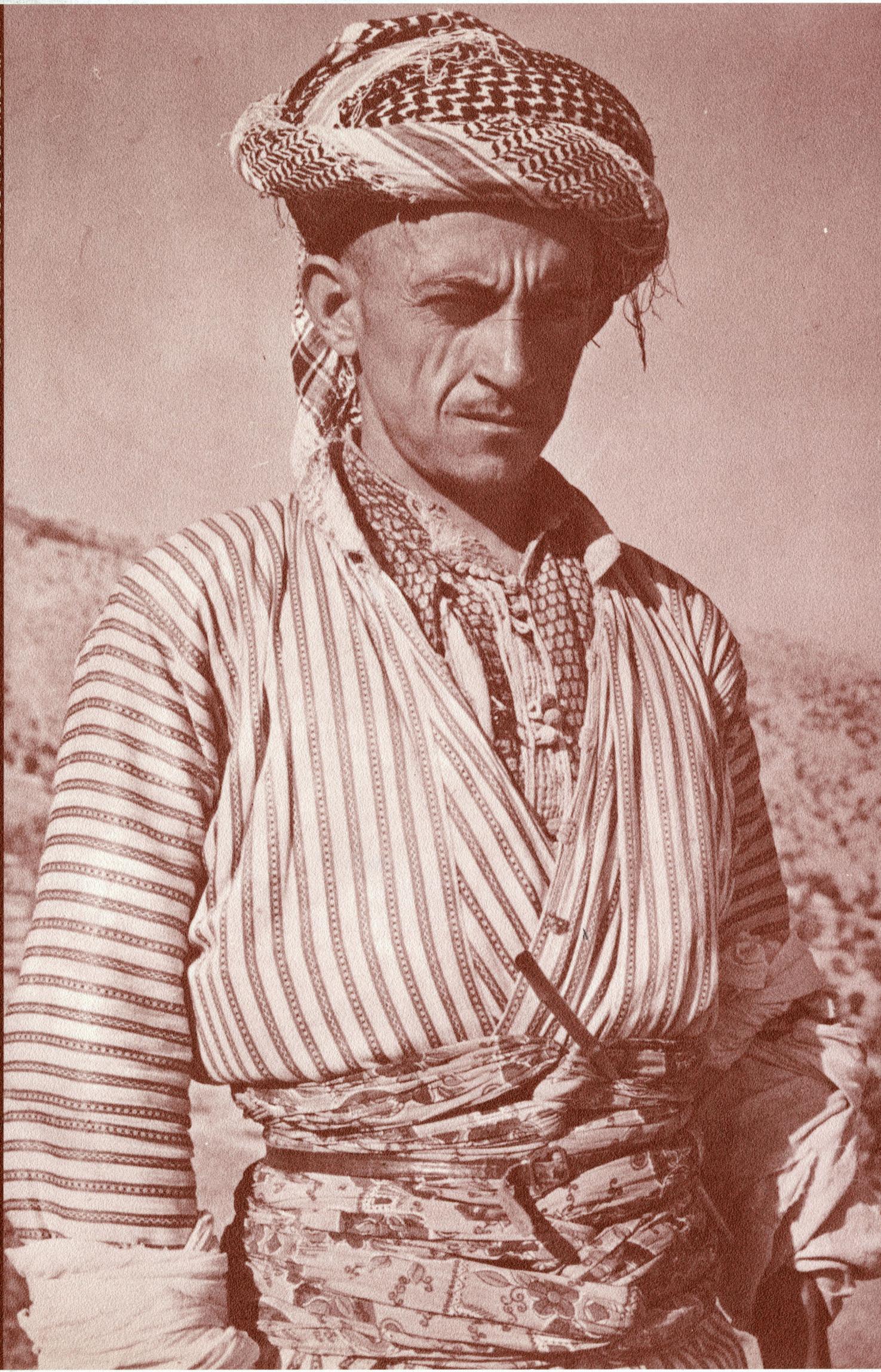


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KURDISH FOLK SONGS AND DANCES

RECORDED BY
RALPH S. SOLECKI



KURDISH FOLK SONGS AND DANCES

SIDE I

- Band 1. LOVE SONG
- Band 2. TRIBAL DANCE
Double flute
- Band 3. BARZAN FOLK SONG
- Band 4. SONG OF BEREAVEMENT
- Band 5. FLUTE MELODY
With handclapping
- Band 6. SONG OF VALOR
- Band 7. KURDISH FOLK DANCE SONG
- Band 8. HAIRAN
- Band 9. FLUTE MELODIES
- Band 10. FOLK DANCE
Flute and drum

SIDE II

- Band 1. BESTA
- Band 2. LAWK
- Band 3. LOVE SONG FROM SULAIMANIYA
- Band 4. LOVE SONG FROM SULAIMANIYA
- Band 5. FOLK DANCE
Flute and drum
- Band 6. TRIBAL SONG
- Band 7. LOVE SONGS
Duet

KURDISH FOLK SONGS AND DANCES

RECORDED BY
RALPH S. SOLECKI

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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KURDISH FOLK SONGS AND DANCES

KURDISH TRIBESMAN
PLAYING FLUTE



KURDISH FOLK SONGS AND DANCES

Recorded by Ralph S. Solecki

Introduction and Notes by Ralph S. Solecki

The name Kurdistan simply means the land occupied by the Kurds. It is not, nor has ever been, a nation in the modern sense. The Treaty of Sèvres after World War I provided for an independent Kurdistan, but the plan was shelved when a rebellion occurred among the Kurds. "Kurdistan" is also the name of a province in northwest Persia, within the ethnographic limits of greater Kurdistan.

The Kurds are a linguistic and cultural group numbering over 3 million people, almost all Moslem by religion. A large minority, they occupy an area in the Near East which straddles the boundaries of four countries -- Turkey, Iran (Persia), Iraq and Syria in that order of population. There is also a small, linguistically mixed group of Kurds in Soviet Armenia.

The homeland of the Kurds is a long narrow area about 600 miles long and varying in width up to 120-150 miles. It comprises some 74,000 square miles, or the size of New England plus New Jersey. It extends over the less desirable mountainous parts of the countries named, beginning from the Anti-Taurus mountains in Turkey and ending deep in the Zagros mountains of Persia to the southeast.

The Kurds are baked on the arid hillsides and steppes in the summer, and chilled to the marrow in the winter, a process which tempers them like steel. The Zagros mountains, which make up the greater part of Kurdistan, reach up into domes of 13,000 and 15,000 feet, none of which are difficult to scale. These mountains close over the northeastern border of the Fertile Crescent. For the most part the hillsides are barren, with here and there patches of dwarf oaks which have not yet succumbed to the ubiquitous goat or the burner of charcoal. A lesson in denudation, these hills were once clothed with forests. They have been the timber mine of Mesopotamia since the dawn of civilization.

Kurdistan has been likened to the hills of Scotland. And like the clannish Scots of old, the Kurds are fiercely tribal in their loyalty. Notorious from earliest times as "the wild tribes

from the mountains", the present day descendants, largely illiterate, are warily scouted by the several nations who are their hosts.

Kurdish is an Indo-Iranian language, and is distinctly related to English. There is no written Kurdish language, and schools are taught in the language of the country. There are dialectical differences from tribe to tribe.

The racial origin of the Kurds is not definitely known yet. It is said that they are the original Medes of biblical fame. The oldest Sumerian records, imprinted in clay about 4,000 years ago, speak of a people called Gūtu, or Kūti. They occupied a kingdom called Gūtium, roughly the heart of Kurdistan in the northern plains and mountains of present Iraq. The later day Assyrians called these people Kūrtie. Some of the tribes retain names which are recorded as early as the 6th century B. C. The Kurds boast claims to a racial purity and continuity that are stronger than any European nation, because they have been settled in their homeland since about 2400 B. C. Yet in physical appearance, there appears to be quite a diversity of types. They have closest affinities with the Iranian race, with mixtures of Armenoid and Mediterranean races. They are characterized by strongly marked facial features, with straight dark brown hair, dark brown eyes and quite often aquiline noses. At the same time there are many among them who have blue eyes and fair hair, apparently proof of the supposed Nordic strain. The Kurd is medium in stature and seldom given to obesity. Outside his rigorous environment, he may be found in such occupations as porters, mechanics, soldiers, airplane pilots, and political figures.

Formerly masters of important trade routes through their country, the Kurds have earned the reputation of being a people who were not to be trifled with. Their penchant to shoot on sight (and they are keen shots) has kept outside interference to a minimum. Flaying the skins of captive Kurds and stretching these tokens on the outer mud embattlements of earlier Assyrian capitals had no reformatory effect on these tribesmen. Unlike other ethnic groups, the Kurds never learned to live at peace with themselves, much less live in peace and harmony with their neighbors. The blood feud has been the principal waster of manpower, energy and resources among these hereditary tribes. Marriage within the group, a favored custom as a means of adding to tribal strength, has kept alive tribal differences.

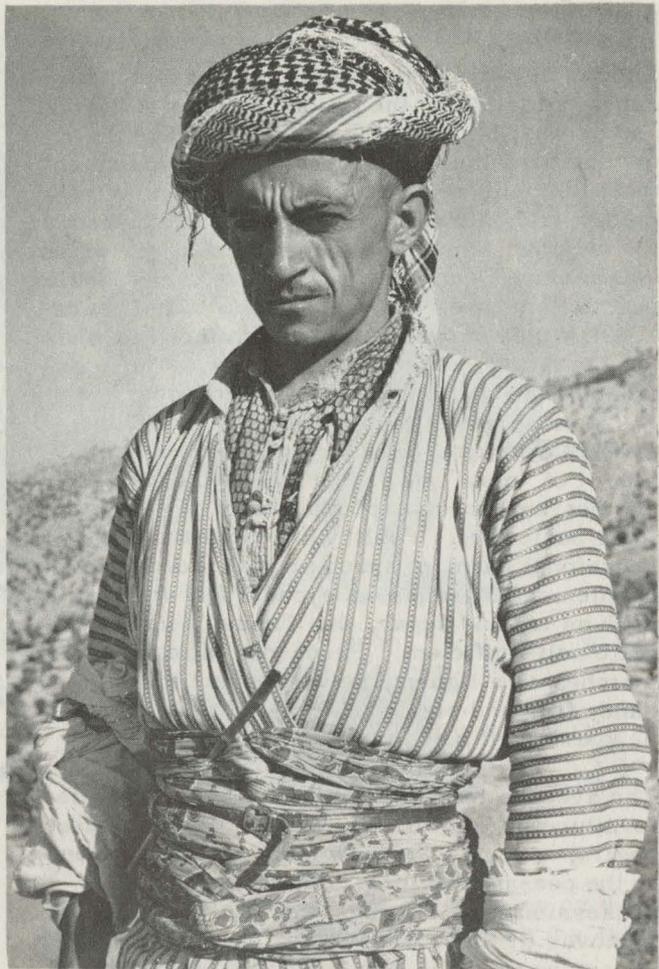
The history of the Kurds is confused. Trou-

blesome to the Sumerians and Assyrians, they fought Xenophon of the Greeks as well as the Persian Seleucids. Saladin the Great, a Kurd, united most of the tribes under his banner in the 12th century. One of Hulagu's (1252) express missions was to crush the Kurds of Shahrizor (Kurd-i-Kuh), a thorn in the Mongol's side. Shahrizor was one of the largest independent Kurdish Kingdoms, occupying an area stretching from Hamadan in Persia to the Tigris River in the 11th to 16th centuries.

The Ottoman Turks made several abortive attempts to subjugate the Kurds, but they remained free of taxations and military conscription for a long time. Kurdistan Iraq is still full of stories of Kiör Ahmad Pasha of Rowanduz, a powerful one eyed rebel who in 1836 held off the guns of the Turks with bows and arrows on his hilltop eyrie until he ran out of food and water. Always armed to the hilt (even to-day) against their "enemies", the Kurds frequently have waged factional wars and feuds. When relatively peaceful among themselves, they have made war on their neighbors, the Armenians and Assyrian Christians, both of whom they successfully alienated for any future common cause. Kurdish political activity has always been anti-governmental, rankling against any rule whatsoever, rather than for pro-Kurdish claims. Since 1923 there have been 10 serious revolts by the Kurds against various national governments. The latest of these was in 1947, when Mulla Mustafa of the Barzani tribe revolted against the governments of Iraq and Iran, finally fleeing to Russia with a large number of followers. According to Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, the Barzanis under Russian backed Mulla Mustafa were poised in Russian Azerbaijan in August 1950 ready to launch a new war in Kurdistan. But the successes of the United Nations in Korea forestalled this threatened front.

Since 1927, a Kurdish independence movement, the "Khoibun", has been in existence. However, its activities up to now have had little success, certainly in part due to jealousy, division and lack of cooperation among the Kurds themselves. An attempt was made to enlist the support of the Armenians and Assyrians, but this naturally received little support.

The sedentary Kurds live in low, flat roofed houses. These are made of mud where stone is lacking. The single roomed house of the poorer class of peasants is very poorly lit--practically windowless, since glass is expensive. Peasant homes of straw, brush and poles are also used. The villages are generally in



BARZAN TRIBE SINGER

compact clusters, situated near a source of water supply, and surrounded by fields. Single rooms are partitioned into quarters occupied by the whole family and the animals. Food and fuel are also kept in the single room, whose living quarters are always scrupulously clean. The better class peasant will possess more elaborate homes, while a chief or headman of the village in addition to having a fine building for his womenfolk will keep a separate establishment or guest house for the entertainment of his friends and travelers. For light in the simpler homes, a smoky kerosene wick lamp suffices--in the better class homes are to be found glass chimneyed kerosene lamps, while still better class homes have "Lux" lamps, or pressure oil lamps. Those homes of the more prosperous living in the larger villages will have electric lights. With the erection of multi-purpose power dams in Kurdistan Iraq, it will soon be possible for this segment of Kurdistan

to bring cheap power into more homes than before.

Food is relatively simple for the peasant. He subsists mainly on the products of his cattle and on what he is able to grow. Although in former days the Kurds were able to supplement their diet with products of the hunt regularly, to-day wild animals are very scarce. Indeed, the only numerous wild animals are pigs, which are immune from the hunt because of the Moslem restriction. Wolves, gazelles, ibex and bears are now only occasionally seen in the land where the Assyrians hunted lion for sport. The main food of the Kurd is thin unleavened wheat bread baked on a convex round piece of sheet iron over an open fire. Sheaves of this bread and a bowl of "mast" or yoghurt washed down with copious well-sweetened glasses of hot tea form their basic fare. Poultry products and an occasional chunk of sheep or goat meat are supplementary items. Beyond a few staples such as tea and sugar, the Kurdish peasant is quite self-sufficient. Perchance lacking matches or a lighter, he will revert to his handy flint and steel strike-a-light kit, which he knows well how to use.

The average Kurdish peasant's home has little furniture by Western standards. Beds, tables, chairs, etc., as we know them are not present in the peasant dwelling. The most prized possessions are the rugs, the cushions, the samovar (if there is one), tea glasses and copper ware. The Kurdish home is readily portable at a moments notice, and indeed, they may move bag and baggage often.

Many of the Kurds practice a mixed type of agriculture, or farming mixed with herding. Some few groups of Kurds have remained nomadic to the present day. Crosscutting national boundaries, they follow age-old routes from their winter pastures on the plains or steppes to their summer homes in the mountains seeking better feed for their goats, sheep and cattle. Their black goat hair tents can be made tight against all weather. The horse is primarily a prestige symbol, while the donkey or ass is used as the principal burden animal. Agricultural methods are simple. The chief natural products are wheat, barley, cotton, tobacco and all kinds of fruits and vegetables. Rice is also grown where possible on irrigated hill slopes.

The social organization of the Kurds may be said to be twofold. It is bound to a tribal system based on lineage descent, and it is bound to a feudal system based on class and land ownership. Both systems are gradually breaking down.

Of group activity, the traditional Kurdish dance, or "dobke", is a favorite. Dances are held on Moslem holidays, and on occasions of festivity. They are generally held outdoors in a cleared area. A line is formed single file behind a leader, and hands are clasped tightly. To the music of a flute and a drum or simply a singer chanting interminable "Guranis" or folksongs, the participants dance a kind of lock step in unison back and forth around the orchestra. The leader flourishes a kerchief with which he emphasizes a change in step, hissing as he does so. If the group is a small one, it will put on an intricate display of dancing prowess, jumping and stepping with great leaps and bounds. When women join the group, the dance is more restrained, almost minuet-like by comparison. Clothes may become disarrayed, shoes may be lost, but nothing will keep them from the dance, which will go on for hours on end. One or two singers are selected to sing at the dance, or at gatherings. The singing is done in a kind of falsetto, almost like yodeling with a reminder of Spanish folksongs. When singing, the right hand is often cupped alongside the cheek.

In the land of the Kurd, Moslem hospitality is always in force, although the old tribal customs are fast disappearing. Roads are fast changing the face of Kurdistan. The governments are relaxing their hostile front to the Kurds, and are becoming more benevolent. Hospitals and more schools are being introduced, and more official representation among their own people is being given--although one must remember that these benefits differ in amount in the various host nations of the Kurds. Whether Kurdistan will ever present a united front to the world as an independent nation is very dubious to-day. However, it can be said without equivocation that the outer world is reaching to the individual Kurd. Harbinger of the change, these songs were recorded in the valley of Shanidar, soon to be flooded behind one of the world's highest dams in northern Iraq.

NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS

This music was recorded as incidental to archaeological researches in Kurdistan directed by the author in 1953. Although the majority of the songs are tribal, sung by the Barzani workers employed in the excavation, others were contributed by the Kurdish police stationed at Shanidar village. Two songs heard on this recording were made by the paramount Sheikhs in Batas village to the south.

A debt is owed to the participants who were willing to put their voices and music on record;

KURDISH
TRIBESMEN
DANCING. THE
LONG WHITE
SCARVES ARE
REALLY SLEEVE
ENDS. BOTH MEN
AND WOMEN
PARTICIPATE.



and the author is also immensely obligated to Mrs. Fadhil al Jamali of Baghdad for so graciously lending her recording equipment. Without it of course, these recordings would not have been possible. The author is also indebted to Mr. Bakir Dileer of the United States Information Service in Baghdad for his translations of the songs.

Much like the ballads of our Appalachian mountaineers, who the Kurds resemble in temperament, the songs deal with universal things, such as love, troubles and war.

The musical instruments are of the simplest types. They consist of a two barreled reed flute called a juzale, and a skin head pottery drum called a tapil. The flute, about 10 inches long, consists of two hollowed reeds joined side by side, each barrel perforated along the upperside with fingerholes. More resonant and better quality flutes are made of large hollow bird bones. The mouthpiece consists of two small reeds shoved into the larger reeds. In each of the mouthpiece reeds is cut a narrow long flexible segment which is the vibratory mechanism. In playing this instrument, the whole mouthpiece is placed into the mouth. The cheeks of the player puff like a balloon, and the notes pulsating in an almost constant stream

are varied by the fingering of the holes on the pipe barrels. The sound is much like the skirl of a Scottish bagpipe.

The drum, about 12 inches long, is a familiar part of the culture.

When sitting, the player holds the drum under his elbow, resting it on his lap. When standing, as is usual for Kurdish dances, the drum is suspended by a cord around the neck. Played with a dextrous tasto of the fingers, knuckles and palms, the sounds emitted from the uncovered end of drum may vary from a staccato rush to a dull resonant boom. As an accompaniment to the flute, the drum keeps the beat of the dance. To anyone who has seen the tapil in action, the performer following every movement of the dancer with his practiced fingers on the drum, it seems an artistry.

The Kurdish folksong, like many others, is a song which sounds best in its natural setting in the still of a mountain valley. The Kurdish song preserves the folk culture and tradition. The songs played here are the classic Kurdish songs, call the "LAWK" or "HAIRAN". Recorded far from regular communication in northern Iraq, these songs are pure an unspoiled.

Sung in falsetto, with a quality of yodeling, some songs are plaintive and chant-like in execution. Others, particularly those associated with the folk dances, while repetitious, are very lively. A noteworthy quality of the singing is the use of "implosives", or the forced intake of air. Clearing the throat for effect is also common. On occasion of the dances, the audience can hardly restrain itself from adding an accompaniment of handclaps, joyous whoops, or the peculiar liquid "lu-lu-lu" sound, a sound of happiness. Another common sound accompaniment (not heard in these recordings) is that of finger snapping--a resounding thwack made by the finger of one hand forcibly striking the extended finger of the opposite hand, the hands being clasped.

THE RECORDINGS

SIDE I, BAND 1: A Barzan tribal love song. The literal translation is:

Wasp-waisted, tender-heartedness, slimness;
This nice figure is meant for me;
Oh! Allah! Let the Mulla and the other dis-
semblers die,
For they work in order to prevent me from be-
ing united
With the beloved girl who is meant for me.

(A mulla is a Moslem priest.)

SIDE I, BAND 2: This is a Barzan tribal dance, the music to which is played by a double-barreled flute.

SIDE I, BAND 3: A tribal Barzan folk song. "Rumi" was the name given to any outsider from the West, applied without distinction to Romans, Byzantines and Turks. The term is synonymous with hatred and contempt. The Kurds held the "Rumi" to be godless. This song is about a Kurdish prince called Miro, a name still to be found in Kurdistan.

Oh my prince, Miro, my prince,
Wake up, Miro;
Our prince is young, and a good cavalier,
But he is alone, and must stand alone against
those
Godless Rumis who come to destroy the
country....

SIDE I, BAND 4: This is a very moving, sad, tribal song about a youth named Wazir who was conscripted into the army by the Ottoman Turks during the first World War, and who died in battle, never to return to his homeland. His bereaved mother, lonely, still calls for him:

Wazir, Wazir, Wazir,
Wazir, the son of your mother,
Where are you this day, Wazir?
I call you every morning, Wazir!
Wake up, and drive the cattle to the end of the
village.

SIDE I, BAND 5: Flute music accompanied by a drum and the clapping of hands in an infectious rhythm.

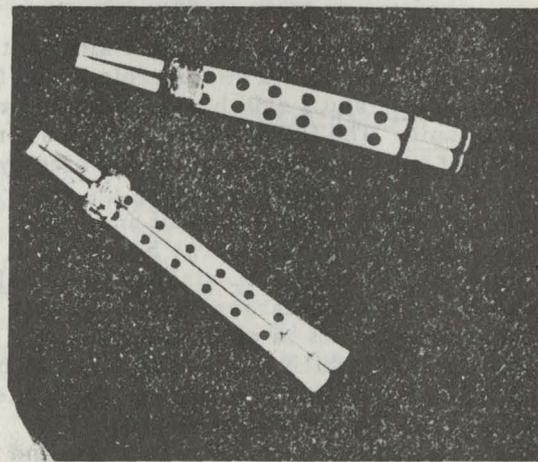
SIDE I, BAND 6: This song is about a strong young Kurd called Rusho. His name is widespread in all the summer and winter encampments in Kurdistan for his valor and exploits in battle.

SIDE I, BAND 7: A Kurdish folk dance song from Arbil accompanied by the clapping of hands and chorus with punctuations by the cry, "lu-lu-lu". "Hermē" mentioned in the text is a pear.

Yours is the pair of perfect pears;
Your bosom is a garden in Merivan
Those two pears on your bosom, I am afraid
of touching them;
I fervently wish I could be a button on your dress,
So that I could watch your bosom and breast.
(The singer evidently had wide amorous experiences, for he compares the beauty of the girls in far-flung Kurdish towns in northern Iraq, extolling the feminine wiles of the Sulaimaniya and Diana girls. Merivan is a town in Persia.)

SIDE I, BAND 8: A difficult type of tribal song called "Hairan":

The man loves a married woman.
He has told the Mulla to make incantations for
him,
In order to bring his heart up to her for him;



KURDISH DOUBLE FLUTES

But his efforts are gone with the wind, because
She is the wife of that rich old man.
Still he is successful, for the woman has
brought

To his mind that she will still keep her promise
Of meeting with him during the coming spring
in Desht-Dizai.

(Desht-Dizai is a place near Arbil in northern
Iraq.)

SIDE I, BAND 9: Two different flute melodies,
one after the other.

SIDE I, BAND 10: A folk dance with drum and
flute.

SIDE II, BAND 1: This is a folksong called
"Besta". It is accompanied by enthusiastic
handclapping and laughter from the audience,
including the cry, "lu-lu-lu".

Oh, my eye, my heart,
I want you to be for me alone;
It is more than two days since I last kissed you,
I will make you a present of a new dress for the
happy feast occasion,
My heart is always with you--
And I hope yours will be with mine always as
well.

("My eye" is a Moslem endearment for "loved
one", or in our slang, "apple of the eye".)

SIDE II, BAND 2: This is another kind of folk
song called "Lawk". The song is about a lovely
girl who captivates the Kurdish cavalier's heart.
It tells about his living with the girl at the tents
in the summer encampment.

SIDE II, BAND 3: This is a typical love song
from the Sulaimaniya area of Iraq. It tells
about the way a lovely girl is dressed; the way
she walks and talks; and the way she looks.

SIDE II, BAND 4: This is another love song,
typical of the Sulaimaniya area of Iraq. It is
another description of a beautiful girl, whom
the singer likens to the graceful creature of the
desert, the gazelle. The beautiful girl is like
the gazelle who is running away from the hunt-
ers.

SIDE II, BAND 5: This is dance music as play-
ed by flute and drum.

SIDE II, BAND 6: A Barzan tribal song.

SIDE II, BAND 7: Two songs sung in duet by
two young brothers, both paramount Sheikhs of
their tribes in Kurdistan Iraq. Both airs are in
the "ZAZA" or "BADINAN" dialect. The first
song is a call to a dance for his darling,

Mamiana, on a winter night. The second song
is also of love.

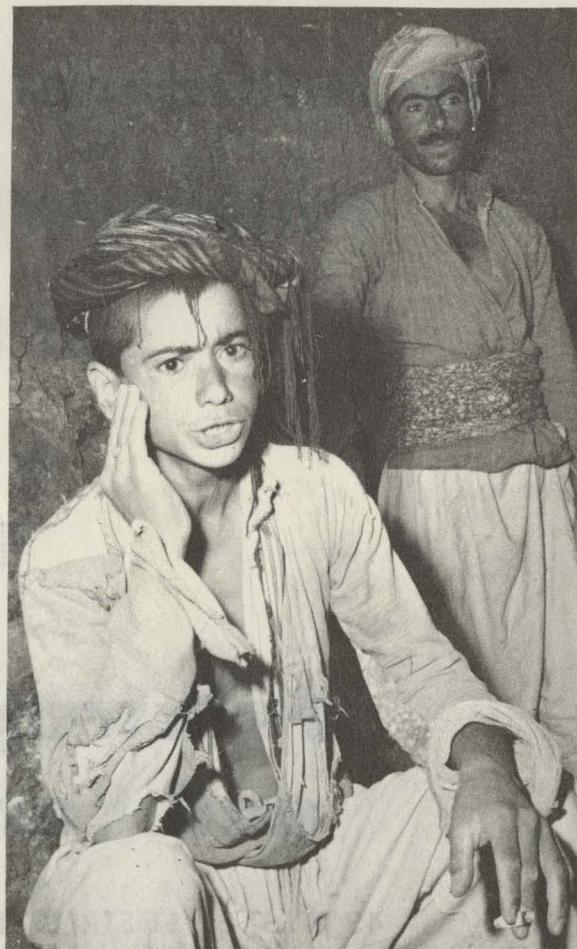
Literal translation of part 2:

Sing for me just a little more,
Open your heart for just a few days,
I cannot live without you,
Come let me have a kiss--
It is not winter but spring.
But alas! I cannot speak to her, not even
a hello!
Because of her mother who watches her
day and night.

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BARZAN TRIBE SINGER

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MOSES ASCH, PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

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