

Kîme Ez? (Who am I?) Cegerxwîn

Background:

Cegerxwîn (b. Sheikmous Hasan) was born in 1908 in the region of Elîh or Batman in eastern Antolia to a Muslim father and Yezidi mother. His family fled to the city of Amude, in what became northeast French Mandate Syria, and after working on the construction of the post-war rail line traveled to Diyarbakir to study theology, later working as a mullah. During the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925 he became close to leading Kurdish nationalist figures such as Sheikh Ali Riza, grandson of Sheikh Said. In 1928, after returning to Amude, he began writing Kurdish poems which were published in the journal *Hawar*, the most influential Kurdish nationalist journal, and in 1937 he became a member of its supporting organization Xoybûn. In 1946 he participated in the Congress for Kurdish Freedom and Unity, and in 1948 joined the Syrian Communist party, becoming a parliamentary party candidate. In 1957 he left the party to help found the *Azadî* (Freedom) organization and the Syrian Democratic Kurdish Party. Two years later, in 1959, he traveled to Baghdad where he served as a Kurdish language instructor at Baghdad University, and in 1963, after his return to Syria, he was arrested in Damascus.

He was able to travel back to northern Iraq in 1969, where he supported Mustafa Barzani's uprising against the central government. After again returning to Syria, he was forced to flee to Lebanon in 1973, when he published the included poem, "Kime Ez?" (Who am I?). He left for Sweden in 1979, and died in Stockholm in 1984. This is one of, if not the, most popular and significant nationalist poems. It was slightly changed and put to music by Şivan Perwer with the title "Kine Em?" (Who are we?). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GL3JPxt1bc>

Cegerxwîn was witness to and participant in many of the central events and organizations of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 20th century, including the Sheikh Said Rebellion, the Xoybûn organization, the Syrian Democratic Kurdish Party and the Kurdish-Iraqi War. In reading this poem, think of how his experiences have shaped his words. Think to, for a poet who began his career as a religious cleric, how does this poem reflect religion as a basis for national identity? What sorts of histories does it draw upon?

Kime Ez? (Who am I?)

Who am I?
A Kurd of Kurdistan
The revolution and volcano together
I am dynamite
I am fire and flame
Red as the fires of Hell
The fire has reached the blasting cap
And when I explode
The world will shake
This flame and fire
Will kill the enemies
Who am I?

I am from the east
All its fortresses and castles
Its town and villages
Its cliffs and rocks
It the hands of the enemy
The bloodthirsty enemy
The strong but servile enemies
From the Rûm [Greeks] and Franks [Europeans]
In the challenging days
By fighting and dying
Saved, I saved
I saved this East
Who am I?

In the Near East
In the Middle East
These cities and villages
Its lands and waters
Gave its aid against the enemies
In battle and war
Through knowledge and art
I broke the enemy's back
I sought out leadership
I became the Padishah [ruler]
Powerful and honorable
[All the way] to the border of India
Who am I?
Who am I?

A victorious Kurd
Enemy to enemies
Friend to those of peace
I am a good person
Not a bear or beast
But what would I do without war?
The enemies won't leave
My father and grandfathers
Lived free
I do not want to live
Forever as a prisoner
Who am I?

So I must remove
The bloodthirsty enemy
The opium addict [corrupt] Sultan
The brutal Young Turks
I will live free
With my fellow contemporaries [lit. "my fellow moderns"]
I will gladly eat
In my own gardens and vineyards
I'll emerge carrying weapons
And leave a new mark on humanity
Who am I?

I am he who broke the soldiers of Richard the Lionheart
I have shed my own blood to defend these lands
I was once a thorn in the enemy's side [chest]
Under my shadow lived the Turks and Persians
Upon my head sat a crown
The head of my horse was held by many a Padishah
It was I, that hero
That Saladin
Ask about the Battle of Damietta
Ask about the Battle of Hattin¹

I was that Ardeshir²
I was that Anurshirvan³
The great castles

¹ References to two battles won by Saladin against the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem (1169 and 1187 respectively)

² Founder of the Sassanian Empire (180-242 CE)

³ Sassanian ruler Khosrow I Anurshivan (r. 531-579)

With my crown and palaces
A friend to those ancient ones
Who then became enemies
They bowed down their heads
Before my flame
My fighters and rulers
Took tribute from Greece to India
Who am I?

I am that hero, I am that brave one
Yes, I am a Kurd
Today I sit suppressed and broken
Those crowns and palaces
Have all gone and rotten
Those infamous enemies
Have stolen them from me
Those detestable [lit. pimp-like] germs have beaten my corpse
I have become destitute, nameless and with no identity
Who am I?

I am that iron, hard-headed Kurd
Today even those enemies fear me
The smell of gunpowder
Has entered my nose
I want to blow up
The whole milieu from below
And again like men
Climb into the mountains
I don't want to die
I want to take back
My Kurdistan
The land of the Medes
Who am I?

Kawa [Kaveh] the Blacksmith, my father and grandfathers
Crushed the head of Zehak the Tyrant
They broke the chains
On the neck of Kurds
We saved our many heads
From being cut off by swords
On the day the bloodsucker was killed
The faithful said as so:
Today is Newroz
The winter is going, those awful days

From the mouth of Zarqash
Thus said the wise Zarathustra
Ehreman is defeated, and Ahura Mazda arises
Who am I?

It is I who created that holiday Newroz
And so I must take
And not stay like this
Take up my cause, to take my revenge
I will be the ruler
Of Kurdistan
Let them be for me
These vineyards and orchards
These mountains and valleys
Those groves and pastures
I will take them in my own hand
Happily with joy
Well-read and knowledgeable
I will take this land
And bring to it enlightenment
Who am I?

I am the the Kardukoi, those ancient gains
I am the Mitanni, the Nairi and Sobar⁴
I am the Lullubi, Kardukoi and Kuti⁵
I am the Medes and the Gush
The Hurrians and Kuti
I am the Kurmanj, the Kelhor, the Lor and Gor⁶
I am, I am a Kurd, from above and below
How many thousands of years
Has my Kurdistan
Been torn apart, in the hands of the enemy
Who am I?

And today the Lor, Kelhor and Kurmanj
Have given up this crown and throne
They have become religious fanatics
For prayer beads and skewers⁷
And so the enemy broke us, our heads and backs

⁴ The Nairi were an ancient tribal confederation in the Armenian Highlands of Eastern Anatolia; the Sobar or Subartu was a Bronze Age kingdom in Northern Mesopotamia mentioned in the Amarna Letters (14th Century BCE)

⁵ The Lullubi and Kuti were also ancient Bronze Age kingdoms in the Zagros Mountains and Mesopotamia

⁶ Major Kurdish subgroups

⁷ A reference to the Qadiriyya Sufi practice of inflicting self bodily injury in an ecstatic state. The Qadiriyya, along with the Naqshibandiyya are the two dominant Sufi groups in Kurdistan.

We trampled our own state and existence
We became enemies to each other, and were carved up
Whither Kurdistan!
Whither Kurdistan!
Miserable and destitute
Until it has fallen into imprisonment
Who am I?

I am that people, I am that dragon
And captive in my sleep, I have now awakened
I want us to be like men
I want us to be like lions⁸
To raise our heads/rebel
How proud I am
And yet once again
I will teach the world.
The path of Marxism, the path of Lenin
The sons of Guhderz, Ferhad and Rustem
the sons of Salar and Shergoh and Deysem⁹
will say “I am proud”
will say “I am like a giant”
“I am powerful”
“I live free”
I want it soon, that we set out on our path
Who am I?

I am not bloodthirsty, I am the one who wants peace
Our commanders, heroic and undefeatable
We do not want war, we want to be as one
We will not take one step back
the enemy will flee
To mankind we are friends
Long live Kurdistan! Death to servitude!
Who am I?

⁸ A good opportunity to share the Kurdish idiom: “Şêr şêr e, çî jin e, çî mêr e” (A lion is a lion, whether it is male or female)

⁹ Common Kurdish names