

BY A. J. ARBERRY  
*The Koran Interpreted*  
*Scheherezade*  
*Sufism*  
*The Holy Koran*

# *The Seven Odes*

THE FIRST CHAPTER  
IN ARABIC LITERATURE

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LITT.D., F.B.A.

**Free Public Library, Newark, N. J.**

LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD  
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1957

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

*in 12 point Fournier type*

BY R. & R. CLARK, LTD., EDINBURGH

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## PROLOGUE

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### *The Golden Poems*

ON 4 September 1780 William Jones, barrister, poet and linguist, wrote to his friend Edmund Cartwright: 'The hurry of the general election to a professional man, has obliged me to suspend till another long vacation, two little works, which I hoped to finish in the remainder of this. The first is a treatise *On the Maritime Jurisprudence of the Athenians*, illustrated by five speeches of Demosthenes in *commercial* causes; and the second, a dissertation *On the Manners of the Arabians before the Time of Mahomet*, illustrated by the seven poems, which were written in letters of gold, and suspended in the temple at Mecca, about the beginning of the sixth century. When they are printed, I shall be proud in submitting them to your judgment, as their excellence is well known.'

This is the earliest extant reference to Jones's intention to publish for the first time in print the poems which constitute the theme of the present book. Since men's motives in the work they undertake are at least as interesting as what they eventually achieve, it will not be superfluous to consider briefly the background to what a young Welshman, the son of a distinguished mathematician and the grandson of an Anglesey farmer, was proposing to attempt in the summer of 1780 but found himself obliged to postpone, as he then thought, for another year. Cartwright was among those who had persuaded Jones to stand for parliament in the general election of 1780. Lord North's Tory administration seemed at last to be tottering to its fall; Whig hopes were high; the war in America was going from bad to

worse; and Jones, from the beginning an ardent and outspoken supporter of the 'colonists' in their bid for independence, visualised a brilliant career in British politics as opening before him. But the academic voters of Oxford preferred another, and he prudently withdrew his candidature; that chapter in his changeful life ended almost before it fairly began.

Yet the enthusiasm which had inspired 'Julius Melesigonus' (a fanciful anagram on Gulielmus Jonesius) to write his fiery *Ad Libertatem Carmen*, and to lose many votes for doing so, thought to recognise in the poetry of ancient Arabia that same spirit of sturdy independence and the love of freedom which animated Periclean Athens and Ciceronian Rome, not to mention the America of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. It was political partisanship, as much as aesthetic appreciation, which urged him to bring the Golden Poems to the notice of the British public. 'I should conceive,' he was to write in his analysis of one of the seven odes, 'that the king of HIRA, who, like other tyrants, wished to make all men just but himself, and to leave all nations free but his own, had attempted to enslave the powerful tribe of TAGLEB, and to appoint a prefect over them, but that the warlike possessors of the deserts and forests had openly disclaimed his authority, and employed their principal leader and poet to send him defiance, and magnify their own independent spirit.' Did Jones, who delighted in verbal masquerades, intend by these words an oblique reference to contemporary events? He reinforced the same point in connexion with another of the odes: 'This oration, or poem, or whatever it may be denominated, had its full effect on the mind of the royal umpire, who decided the cause in favour of the BECRITES, and lost his life for a decision apparently just. He must have remarked the fiery spirit of the poet AMRU from the style of his eloquence, as CAESAR first discovered the impetuous vehemence of BRUTUS's temper from his speech, delivered at Nice, in favour of the king *Deiotarus*; but neither the *Arabian* nor the *Roman* tyrant were sufficiently on their guard against men, whom they had irritated even to fury.'

Would the British tyrant take warning?

Yet Jones's interest in the Seven Poems was no new whim. As early as 1772, in the preface to his *Poems, consisting chiefly of translations from the Asiatick languages*, he had written (he was only twenty-six at the time, and would very shortly be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society): 'The seven *Arabick* elegies, that were hung up in the temple of *Mecca*, and of which there are several fine copies at *Oxford*, would, no doubt, be highly acceptable to the lovers of antiquity, and the admirers of native genius: but when I propose a translation of these *Oriental* pieces, as a work likely to meet with success, I only mean to invite my readers, who have leisure and industry, to the study of the languages, in which they are written, and am very far from insinuating that I have the remotest design of performing any part of the task myself.' Again in his *Poeseos Asiaticae Commentariorum Libri*, began in 1767 and published in 1774, he dilated eloquently in his fluent Latin on the merits of the minstrelsy of ancient Arabia. But his pleading with the leisured and the learned produced no visible effect, and so with tempestuous energy he applied his will to the herculean labour of editing and translating these famous poems, splendid indeed but of ferocious difficulty.

He did not after all wait for another long vacation to give him freedom from forensic preoccupations. The autumn of 1780 found him in Paris; while there, as he told his former pupil Lord Althorp, 'I obtained access also to a fine manuscript in the royal library, which has given me a more perfect acquaintance with the manners of the ancient Arabians; and how little soever I may value mere *philology*, considered apart from the knowledge to which it leads, yet I shall ever set a high price on these branches of learning, which make us acquainted with the human species in all its varieties.' On 12 November 1780 he was able to inform Cartwright: 'I give you my word that your letters and verses have greatly encouraged me in proceeding as expeditiously as I am able, to send abroad my *seven Arabian poets*; and I propose to

spend next month at Cambridge, in order to finish my little work, and to make use of a rare manuscript in the library of Trinity College; my own manuscript, which was copied for me in Aleppo, is very beautiful, but unfortunately not very correct. You may depend on receiving a copy as soon as it can be printed.'

Domestic tragedy intervened soon after this to delay Jones's programme; his mother died, a talented daughter of George Nix the cabinet-maker, who had exercised a great formative influence on her son's early education and to whom he was most devotedly attached. However, as his biographer Lord Teignmouth tells us, 'he devoted the leisure hours of the winter of 1780-1 to complete his translation of seven ancient poems of the highest repute in Arabia.' Meanwhile he composed *The Muse Recalled* as a nuptial ode on the marriage of Lord Althorp, and the more austere *Essay on the Law of Bailments* to enhance his legal reputation. On 1 May 1781 he wrote again to Cartwright: 'I take the liberty to send you (as my *Arabian* poets are not yet ready to wait upon you) a paraphrase of a Greek fragment, which came into my head this spring in my way to Wales.' The thoroughness with which Jones aimed to accomplish his task would have done credit to a German philologist, as proved by a letter sent in the following month to the Dutch scholar H. A. Schultens. The original was in Latin, which Jones always used in his correspondence with foreign colleagues; the version here quoted is Lord Teignmouth's. 'I have translated, without the omission of a single line, the seven *suspended* poems of our Arabs, and mean to publish the whole with notes, and a dissertation, on the ancient monuments of Arabia, in the next summer vacation. I possess the Commentary of Tabrizi; and I have been obligingly furnished from Trinity College, Cambridge, with the Paraphrase of Zouzini, and his short and excellent notes. At Oxford, we have the notes and Persic version of Sadi, the Scholia of Ansari, and the fine edition of Obeidolla; but I am anxious to inspect all editions and commentaries. Your illustrious grandfather, for whose memory, as in duty bound, I preserve the greatest respect, pronounces these

poems worthy of immortality, and says, if I do not mistake, that he transcribed the manuscript of Nahasi, at Leyden, for his own use. I also observed in the copious catalogue of the Schultensian library, (one copy of which I delivered to my friend Hunter) these words, "6990. The seven Moallakat Arabic, most beautifully written." Has this been purchased by any one? at what price will it be disposed of? I lament that I did not buy it, but being *tied up* at that time myself, by various important occupations, I could not bestow a thought on the *suspended* poems. Assist me, I beseech you, in the name of the Muses, with materials for perfecting my work; collect from your stores any notes, or various readings which you may possess, and communicate them to me. I have mentioned in my preliminary discourse, your Philarabic family, and have more to say about it both true and honourable. I wish particularly to know whether any of the seven poems, excepting those of Amr'olkais and Tarafa, will be published in Holland. You shall receive my book, which will be elegantly bound by Baumgarten.'

Jones had enjoyed the friendliest relations with H. A. Schultens for quite a few years, ever since the Dutch scholar had met the Welsh amateur during a visit to England. His grandfather, A. Schultens, a German who had moved to Leiden to teach Hebrew and Arabic, had published Ibn Shaddād's *Life of Saladin* in 1732, and the *Séances* of al-Hariri in 1740; the grandson had inaugurated his regrettably brief career as an Arabist with his *Anthologia Sententiarum Arabicarum* (Leiden, 1772). It is clear from the above letter, though no hint of the fact emerges elsewhere, that Jones knew and used the *primitiae* of Western studies of these poems, L. Warner's edition and Latin translation of the *Mu'allaga* of Imr al-Qais (Leiden, 1748), and J. J. Reiske's publication of Tarafa's ode (Leiden, 1742). He was now only waiting to complete his collation and annotations, and on 30 June 1781 he told Edward Gibbon: 'My *Seven Arabian Poets* will see the light before next winter, and be proud to wait upon you in their English dress. Their wild productions will, I flatter myself, be thought

interesting, and not venerable merely an account of their antiquity.' On 20 December 1781 Jones wrote to the evidently impatient Cartwright: 'My seven *Arabian* poets will wait upon you as soon as their European dresses are finished.'

But all through 1782 William Jones was very busy with politics—he was never long out of touch with Benjamin Franklin, and now received an invitation to go to America to help with the drafting of the new Constitution, an honour he regretfully declined; he was also active in canvassing support for his candidature for the Calcutta judgeship which would presently take him to India. So it was 'in the beginning of 1783,' to quote Lord Teignmouth, that 'Mr. Jones published his translation of the seven Arabian poems, which he had finished in 1781. It was his intention to have prefixed to his work, a discourse on the antiquity of the Arabian language and characters, on the manners of the Arabs in the age immediately preceding that of Mohammed, and other interesting information respecting the poems, and the lives of the authors, with a critical history of their works; but he could not command sufficient leisure for the execution of it.' So at last appeared

The Moallakát, | or | Seven Arabian Poems, | which were suspended on | the Temple at Mecca; | with | a translation and arguments.

The date printed on the title-page is 1782; in an 'advertisement' dated 1783, the author excused himself for publishing the book in a truncated form, and still looked forward to issuing a supplement. 'The Discourse will comprise observations on the antiquity of the *Arabian* language and letters; on the dialects and characters of *Himyar* and *Koraish*, with accounts of some *Himyarick* poets; on the manners of the *Arabs* in the age immediately preceding that of Mahomed; on the temple at *Mecca*, and the *Moállakát*, or pieces of poetry suspended on its walls or gate; lastly, on the lives of the *Seven Poets*, with a critical history of their works, and the various copies or editions of them preserved in *Europe*, *Asia*, and *Africa*. The Notes will contain authorities

and reasons for the translation of controverted passages; will elucidate all the obscure couplets, and exhibit or propose amendments of the text; will direct the reader's attention to particular beauties, or point out remarkable defects; and will throw light on the images, figures, and allusions of the *Arabian* poets, by citations either from writers of their own country, or from such of our *European* travellers as best illustrate the ideas and customs of eastern nations. But the *Discourse* and *Notes* are ornamental only, not essential to the work; and, by sending it abroad in its present form, the translator may reap no small advantage, if the learned here or on the Continent will favour him in the course of the summer with their strictures and annotations, and will transmit them for that purpose to the publisher. It is hoped, that the war will raise no obstacle to this intercourse with the scholars of *Leyden*, *Paris*, and *Madrid*; for men of letters, as such, ought, in all places and at all times, to carry *flags of truce*.'

Noble sentiments indeed; but if Jones ever received, whether direct or through his publishers, any 'strictures' or 'annotations' from his colleagues abroad, no trace of them now remains. On 12 April Sir William and Lady Jones sailed from Portsmouth on the frigate *Crocodile* for Calcutta. Once in India, the indomitable Welshman flung himself with characteristic abandon into the study of Sanskrit, and things Arabic were set aside for the time being; but it was to prove for ever. Asiatic Jones died in 1794, his further project on the ancient Arab poets unrealised. 'Some of the subjects intended for the dissertation,' writes Lord Teignmouth, 'appeared in a discourse on the Arabs, which he composed some years afterwards, and from the manner in which it was written, it is impossible not to regret the irrecoverable loss of the larger discussion which he originally proposed.' That sentiment may certainly be echoed today.

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'Arabic literature, like most literatures, sprang into existence with an outburst of poetry, but, unlike many others, its poetry

seems to have issued forth full grown.' The words are Professor P. K. Hitti's, but the statement sums up neatly the traditional and commonly held opinion. The Seven Poems are the most famous survivors of what appears to have been a vast mass of poetry, composed in and about the Arabian desert during the sixth century A.D. The evidence for the transmission of this poetry, which seemingly was not written down in the first instance, and the discussion of its authenticity, will be set forth briefly later. Here it suffices to remark that Arabia has not yielded so far any ancient inscriptions in verse, that no old codices or papyri from the pre-Islamic period have come down to us, and that the oldest book in Arabic literature, in the usual sense of the term, is the Koran. Yet by the end of the eighth century men were beginning to collect and edit, of course in manuscript, the 'works' of individual poets believed to have lived before Islam. A scholar who died in 845, al-Jumāhī, boldly stated that 'verse in the Days of the Ignorance was to the Arabs the register of all they knew, and the utmost compass of their wisdom; with it they began their affairs, and with it they ended them.'

The social pattern of Arabia in pre-Islamic times, as today, was primarily tribal; the tribes, then as now, were perennially engaged in feuds and vendettas which sometimes expanded into wide hostilities, broken from time to time by an uneasy truce. In this society the poet played a recognised and important part; as Ibn Rashīq of Kairouan (d. 1064) put it, 'Whenever a poet emerged in an Arab tribe, the other tribes would come and congratulate it. Feasts would be prepared, and the women would gather together playing on lutes, as people do at weddings; men and boys alike would exchange the good news. For the poet was a defence to their honour, a protection for their good reputation; he immortalised their deeds of glory, and published their eternal fame. On three things they congratulated one another—the birth of a boy, the emergence of a poet in their midst, or the foaling of a mare.' The odes studied in the following chapters furnish sufficient examples of the poet in a political role; to use modern jargon, the ancient

Arab bard was the public relations officer of his tribe. But it is safe to assert that no hand-out from Whitehall or the White House was ever couched in such vigorous and majestic language.

The most remarkable feature of the old *qaṣīda* (this is the word generally translated as 'ode') is its highly conventionalised scheme. The composition was expected to be of substantial length, upwards of sixty couplets all following an identical rhyme. The poet was free to choose between a considerable variety of metres fixed quantitatively, but having made his choice he had to keep to it. These, however, were by no means his only restrictions; a frequently quoted passage from the *Poetry and Poets* of Ibn Qutaiba (d. 889) enumerates the topics specified and the order in which they were to be treated. The version here quoted is R. A. Nicholson's.

'I have heard from a man of learning that the composer of Odes began by mentioning the deserted dwelling-places and the relics and traces of habitation. Then he wept and complained and addressed the desolate encampment, and begged his companion to make a halt, in order that he might have occasion to speak of those who had once lived there and afterwards departed; for the dwellers in tents were different from townsmen or villagers in respect of coming and going, because they moved from one water-spring to another, seeking pasture and searching out the places where rain had fallen. Then to this he linked the erotic prelude, and bewailed the violence of his love and the anguish of separation from his mistress and the extremity of his passion and desire, so as to win the hearts of his hearers and divert their eyes towards him and invite their ears to listen to him, since the song of love touches men's souls and takes hold of their hearts, God having put it in the constitution of His creatures to love dalliance and the society of women, in such wise that we find very few but are attached thereto by some tie or have some share therein, whether lawful or unpermitted. Now, when the poet had assured himself of an attentive hearing, he followed up his advantage and set forth his claim: thus he went on to complain of fatigue and

want of sleep and travelling by night and of the noonday heat, and how his camel had been reduced to leanness. And when, after representing all the discomfort and danger of his journey, he knew that he had fully justified his hope and expectation of receiving his due meed from the person to whom the poem was addressed, he entered upon the panegyric, and incited him to reward, and kindled his generosity by exalting him above his peers and pronouncing the greatest dignity, in comparison with his, to be little.'

This description fits almost exactly the great majority of ancient Arabian odes.

The poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia has been preserved in a variety of ways. Certain of the poets engaged the interest of later scholars to such an extent that great efforts were made to collect all their known works; such a collection was known as a *diwān*. These primitive editors were assisted in their task by the fact that certain men made it their profession, or their amusement, to act as 'reciters' of the compositions of particular poets. The verses of others have survived only through being included in general or special anthologies; if in the former medium, then we are apt to have mere fragments and not complete poems. Much of their output has been transmitted in books of anecdotes, or in historical, biographical or philological texts. The Seven Odes which are our immediate concern have come down to us in a special collection called the *Mu'allaqāt*. They are also to be found scattered over other books.

It is generally agreed, alike in antiquity and at the present day, that the man responsible in the first instance for selecting the seven poems and making them into a separate anthology was a certain Ḥammād, called al-Rāwiya ('the Transmitter'). Professor R. Blachère, whose *Histoire de la littérature arabe* (Paris, 1952) contains the most recent discussion of the problem, dates the first phase in the transmission of the ancient poetry at about the year 650. At that period, he remarks, 'a considerable mass of stories and works in verse were circulating among the nomads and settled

populations in the Arab domain. The diffusion of the greater part was limited to a single tribal group. Transmission, exclusively oral, was subject, as today, to chance, caprice, and the vicissitudes of life of the group carrying the poems about.' The quest for genealogies, and the partisan quarrels which punctuated the history of the Umayyad Caliphate, were among the factors that stimulated the search for old poetry securing the claims of the interested parties to hereditary greatness, and proving their opponents to be heirs of an ancient infamy. The second phase coincided with the beginning of the eighth century, when a movement started in Iraq to record in writing the materials which had hitherto been preserved only by word of mouth. Though references to the art of lettering are not infrequent in the poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia, the earliest definite proof of poetry being actually written down by the poet himself is furnished in the works of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a, who died about the year 719. In the reign of al-Walīd I (d. 715) 'a calligrapher appears to have been charged officially to copy poems and stories for the amusement of that prince.' The report that al-Walīd II (d. 744) caused to be made a collection of 'the *diwān* of the Arabs, their poems, their stories, their genealogies and their idiomatic sayings' is thought to be quite plausible.

It is to this second phase that Ḥammād's activities belong. Born in 694 in the military city of al-Kufa, he was the son of a Dailamite named Sābūr (or Maisara, or Hurmuz) who was taken prisoner during the Arab conquest of Persia. His father served his captor's daughter as a slave for many years, until on her death he was sold for a mere two hundred dirhams to one 'Āmir ibn Maṭar al-Shaibānī, who manumitted him. Such was the unpromising environment in which a boy grew up who would be recognised in after times as one of the great Humanists of Islam; to the end of his life his speech betrayed his foreign extraction. Of his early years virtually nothing is recorded. A very remarkable account is given of the circumstances under which he began the study of poetry. As a young man, it is said, he associated with



thieves and vagabonds; one night he broke into the house of a certain man, and found among the proceeds of his burglary a book containing verses composed by Companions of the Prophet. 'Ḥammād read this, thought it quite delightful, and learned it off by heart. Thenceforward he abandoned his former ways and devoted himself to the quest for literature, poetry, reports of the great battles of old Arabia, and Arabic lexicography.' If true, this was surely the most curious conversion to the scholar's life in the history of science.

Ḥammād's enquiries would have taken him far and wide in the desert, there to memorise from hearsay all that the Bedouins could tell him of their traditional lore. This treasury of antique knowledge was to prove very profitable to him; the fame of his erudition reached the ears of the Caliphs, and he became a familiar figure in their palace at Damascus. The first to favour him, by his own account, was Yazīd II, an amorous monarch who 'felt such attachment to two of his singing girls, Sallāmah and Ḥabābah, that when the latter was choked on a grape which he playfully threw into her mouth the passionate young caliph fretted himself to death' in 724. Yazīd was succeeded by his more serious brother Hishām, and Ḥammād went into hiding lest he should suffer the fate that too often overtook the favourites of the preceding ruler. But one day, about a year later, he was caught at his devotions in the mosque by two policemen who bore him trembling to the governor of Iraq. The rest of the story is given as he himself related it.

'I came to Yūsuf son of 'Umar and was ushered into his presence in the Red Court. I saluted him, and he returned my greeting; then he threw me a letter containing the following message. "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From the servant of God Hishām, Commander of the Faithful, to Yūsuf son of 'Umar the Thaqafite. When you read this letter, send for Ḥammād the Transmitter someone who will bring him to you without alarming him, and give him five hundred dinars and a fleet camel which will convey him to Damascus in twelve

nights." I took the dinars; then I looked around, and behold, there was the camel saddled for the journey. I mounted and set forth, and arrived at Damascus after twelve nights. I dismounted at Hishām's gate and begged leave to enter. Permission was granted me, and I came into the Caliph's presence. The apartment in which I found him was very spacious and was paved with marble, between each pair of marble slabs being a split of gold. Hishām was seated upon a crimson divan; he was wearing robes of red silk, and had perfumed himself with musk and ambergris. I saluted him, and he returned my greeting. I sought leave to approach; permission was granted me, and I drew near until I kissed his foot. Attending the Caliph were two slavegirls, the like of whom I had never seen; each wore in her ears a pair of earrings with gleaming pearls. "How are you, Ḥammād?" the Caliph asked. "Well, Commander of the Faithful," I replied. "Do you know why I sent for you?" he went on. "No," I answered. "I sent for you on account of a verse of poetry that came into my mind," the Caliph explained. "I don't know who its author was." "What is it?" I enquired. The Caliph then recited:

"With the morning-cup they said farewell, and there came  
a singing-girl with a flask in her right hand."

"It was 'Adī son of Zaid the 'Ibādite who said that," I said. "It's from one of his odes." "Quote me the whole poem," the Caliph commanded. I did so; and Hishām was delighted and exclaimed, "Well done, Ḥammād!"

One version of this anecdote represents the Caliph as adding, "Give him a drink, girl!"

"So she gave me a drink which took away a third of my wits," Ḥammād continues in the fuller recension. "Then Hishām commanded me, "Repeat the poem." I repeated the poem, and he was so transported with joy that he descended from his divan. Then he said to the other slavegirl, "Give him a drink!" So she gave me a drink which took away a second third of my wits. After that I said, "If she gives me a third drink I shall disgrace myself."

"Then ask for whatever you'd like, Ḥammād," said Hishām. "Anything at all?" I enquired. "Yes," he answered. "One of those slavegirls," said I. "They're both of them yours," the Caliph declared. "With all they're wearing and everything they possess."

Hishām made his lucky informant spend that night in his own apartments. Next day he moved him to a house which he had prepared for him, and there he found the two slavegirls, all their possessions, and everything that he could possibly require. He stayed with the Caliph for a while, and the Caliph made him a parting gift of 100,000 dirhams.

'The stories and anecdotes about Ḥammād are numerous,' remarks the biographer Ibn Khallikān, who, however, expresses his scepticism about the foregoing narrative on the ground that Hishām, unlike his brother, was not a drinker. The tales in circulation in the more frivolous books all emphasise the happy relations which Ḥammād enjoyed with the later Umayyad Caliphs. When the Abbasids supplanted them, and the capital was transferred from Damascus to Baghdad, the converted burglar thought it wiser to retire to his native al-Kufa, where he retailed his immense stock of poems and legends to less princely ears. Even so he received a summons to court from al-Manṣūr, and even from al-Mahdī; both were generous to him. The date of his death is given variously by the different authorities; it appears to have occurred between 771 and 774, or perhaps later.

The quantity of ancient poetry which Ḥammād claimed to know was enormous. He once offered to recite to al-Walīd II a hundred long odes for each letter of the alphabet, quite apart from briefer fragments and poetry composed after the coming of Islam. Though the young philologists of Iraq flocked to his recitations to gather from his fantastic memory materials for their sober monographs, they were not slow to accuse him of dishonesty and deliberate forgery. The Basran scholar al-Aṣma'ī (d. 831), who owed very much to Ḥammād, said of him, 'He was the most learned of men, when he was behaving himself.' This

cryptic remark was glossed by Yāqūt (d. 1229) as meaning when he was not adding or taking away anything in the poems and stories he purveyed, because he was suspected of composing poetry himself and giving it out as genuine Bedouin originals. The Kufan al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (d. 786), who was a contemporary of Ḥammād and a rival, though seemingly more scrupulous collector of desert lore, went so far (but academic jealousy may have affected his verdict) as to declare that poetry had suffered irreparable damage at Ḥammād's hands. Asked whether he meant by this observation that Ḥammād made mistakes or mispronunciations in his recitals, he replied, 'I wish it were only that. Scholars can easily put such faults right. No, he is a man learned in the language and poems of the ancient Arabs. He knows their individual styles and ideas; and he is all the time composing verses resembling the style of a particular man, then he inserts it into that man's poetry and quotes it all over the place as genuinely old. Consequently the poems of the ancients have become hopelessly mixed up; only a competent critic could distinguish the true from the false—and where is such a man to be found?'

This was the man who first put into circulation the *Mu'allaqāt*, the 'Suspended Poems.' The title was not his invention; though apparently current already in the ninth century, it was not in general use even as late as the end of the tenth. By the time it had gained universal acceptance its original meaning was long forgotten, and a fanciful explanation was invented which subsequent writers repeated and elaborated. Poets ambitious for recognition would, it was alleged, recite their choicest compositions at an annual fair held at 'Ukaz, near Mecca—a sort of poetical Academy' in Sir William Jones's words; no doubt today he would have called it an Eisteddfod—and the poems voted worthy of the award were transcribed in letters of gold on fine Egyptian linen and suspended in the Kaaba, Mecca's immemorial shrine. The reference to their being 'inscribed in letters of gold' appears to be an attempt to explain another obscure term sometimes applied to excellent poems—*Mudhahhabāt* or *Mudhhabāt*, 'Gilded.'

Though Jones, as we have seen, liked to quote this legend in and out of season, for he would have appreciated its romantic flavour, European scholars since Reiske have almost unanimously rejected it as pure fiction; some have sought with great ingenuity to discover a more plausible meaning for the word *Mu'allaqāt*. The German Alfred von Kremer pointed to the use of the verb '*allaqa* to signify 'transcribe' and proposed that the *Mu'allaqāt* were so called because after long oral transmission they had been put into writing. His compatriot W. Ahlwardt suggested that the meaning was that in these poems each verse or sequence of verses 'depended' on its predecessor. Both of these conjectures fail to account for the application to a particular and rather small collection of odes of a nomenclature whose meaning, on either interpretation, would equally well fit the whole body of pre-Islamic poetry. Sir Charles Lyall came forward with a third proposal: 'The name is most likely derived from the word *ilk*, meaning "a precious thing, or a thing held in high estimation," either because one "hangs on" tenaciously to it, or because it is "hung up" in a place of honour, or in a conspicuous place, in a treasury or storehouse.' T. Nöldeke advanced a conjecture somewhat similar to this; he pointed out that certain Arab authors in the Middle Ages used the fanciful title 'collar' (*simt*) for their books, and called attention to the fact that the *Mu'allaqāt* are sometimes referred to as the *Sumūt*; by analogy, *Mu'allaqāt* could be understood to mean 'necklaces.'

It is perhaps worth while remarking, though the arguments of Lyall and Nöldeke are reasonable enough to have been accepted by many eminent scholars, that the word *mu'allaqā* can have a quite different and distinct connotation. In the Koran (Sura IV: 128) the statement occurs:

You will not be able to be equitable  
between your wives, be you ever so eager;  
yet do not be altogether partial  
so that you leave her as it were suspended.

The context is a discussion whether or not to divorce in cases of incompatibility. The commentators explain the term *mu'allaqā* there as meaning 'one whose husband has been lost to her; or left in suspense, neither husbandless nor having a husband; or neither having a husband nor divorced.' Is it too fanciful to suppose that the *Mu'allaqāt* were so called because they had been abstracted from the *Dīwāns* of the seven poets, so to speak half-divorced from their authors' works and kept apart in a separate collection? This very tentative speculation gains some reinforcement from the fact that the alternative title *Mudhahhabāt* (or *Mudhhabāt*), which has always been interpreted 'Gilded,' could also according to another derivation mean 'sent away,' 'banished.'

The philologist al-Aṣma'ī knew of a collection of six odes, but it is not clear whether this bore any relation to the *Mu'allaqāt*. His contemporary Abū 'Ubaida seems to have been aware of a group of seven; while Ibn Qutaiba, who died some sixty years after him, speaks definitely of the ode of 'Amr son of Kulthūm as 'one of the seven.' The oldest book in which the *Mu'allaqāt* are reproduced as a separate collection is the *Jamharat ash'ār al-'Arab*, an annotated anthology of Arabic poetry compiled by one Abū Zaid al-Qurashī, who may or may not be identical with the Abū Zaid 'Umar ibn Shābba (Zaid) al-Baṣrī, author of many lost works on Arabic poetry who died in 878; he seems in any case to have been writing in the second half of the ninth century. His version presents the authors in a different form from that generally accepted and adopted in the modern literature (Imr al-Qais, Ṭarafa, Zuhair, Labīd, 'Antara, 'Amr, al-Hārith). What is even more curious, in the printed text (Cairo, 1891) his list contains eight and not seven items: Imr al-Qais, Zuhair, al-Nābigha, al-A'shā, Labīd, 'Amr, Ṭarafa, 'Antara; though in the introductory rubric Abū Zaid omits all mention of 'Antara and quotes Abū 'Ubaida and a certain al-Mufaḍḍal (not necessarily al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī) for the information that there were seven 'Long Odes' and that these were their authors.

The next evidence for the constitution of the *Mu'allaqāt* is

provided by the commentators. The earliest extant commentary is that written by Ibn al-Anbārī, a prominent Kufan philologist who died in 939; his order of the poems is: Imr al-Qais, Ṭarafa, Zuhair, 'Antara, 'Amr, al-Ḥārith, Labīd. Close in time to him Ibn Kaisān (d. 932) arranged them: Imr al-Qais, Ṭarafa, Labīd, al-Ḥārith, 'Amr, 'Antara, Zuhair. A little later Ibn al-Naḥḥās (d. 950) added two more to the seven and gave the order: Imr al-Qais, Ṭarafa, Zuhair, Labīd, 'Antara, al-Ḥārith, 'Amr, al-A'shā, al-Nābigha. The Persian al-Zauzanī (d. 1093), considerably junior to the first three but much appreciated in the Middle Ages and ever since, established the sequence: Imr al-Qais, Ṭarafa, Zuhair, Labīd, 'Amr, 'Antara, al-Ḥārith. His compatriot al-Tibrīzī (d. 1109), perhaps the greatest of all commentators on old Arabic poetry, supplemented the seven of the canon with three more: Imr al-Qais, Ṭarafa, Zuhair, Labīd, 'Antara, 'Amr, al-Ḥārith, al-A'shā, al-Nābigha, 'Abīd ibn al-Abraṣ. Succeeding centuries produced still more commentaries, but these five are regarded as the most authoritative; the passing of time would hardly produce any reliable new evidence.

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The first complete printed edition of the Seven Poems was that given by Sir William Jones in his highly idiosyncratic transliteration. All the individual odes had appeared in Arabic types separately by 1820. The *editio princeps* of the whole together came out in Paris, without title-page or date; editorship is assigned to A. P. Caussin de Perceval, and the British Museum dates it 1820 (?); the printing is extremely beautiful. In 1823 a text of the seven with a running commentary was published at Calcutta; this was prepared by the Indian scholar Maulawī 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn 'Abd al-Karīm Ṣafīpūrī at the instance of the British orientalist Matthew Lumsden.

These editions were entirely superseded when the German scholar D. F. A. Arnold, encouraged by the learned Professor D. H. O. Fleischer (to whom he dedicated 'hocce opusculum'),

published at Leipzig in 1850 *Septem Mo'allakāt: carmina antiquissima Arabum*. Into the preparation of this book, which is accompanied by a commentary based on al-Zauzanī, went a careful collation not only of the previous editions but also of eight manuscripts. The last important landmark in the history of the text was C. J. Lyall's edition (Calcutta, 1894) of al-Tibrīzī's *Commentary on Ten Ancient Arabic Poems*, undertaken 'at the instance of the late Dr. William Wright, Professor of Arabic in the University of Cambridge, who desired a text-book which he could place in the hands of students commencing the study of Arabic poetry.' Meanwhile W. Ahlwardt had included in *The Divans of the Six Ancient Arabic Poets* (London, 1870) the *Mu'allaqāt* of Imr al-Qais, Ṭarafa, 'Antara and Zuhair; while L. Abel produced at Berlin in 1891 *Die sieben Mu'allakāt*, a student's edition of the poems with an Arabic-German vocabulary. Further bibliographical details relating to the separate odes are given in the following chapters.

Sir William Jones's translation was soon recognised as a most important contribution to literary studies; though now obsolete and in many places inaccurate, it hardly deserves the unsympathetic treatment which it received in a volume of essays published in 1946 to mark the bicentenary of the great orientalist's birth. Gibbon, having received his promised copy, remarked in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that 'we may read in our own language the seven original poems which were inscribed in letters of gold, and suspended in the temple of Mecca'; though to be sure he adds in a footnote, 'the seven poems of the Caaba have been published in English by Sir William Jones; but his honourable mission to India has deprived us of his own notes, far more interesting than the obscure and obsolete text.' Goethe, who greatly appreciated Jones's many-sided genius—'Die Verdienste dieses Mannes sind so weltbekannt und an mehr als einem Orte umständlich gerühmt'—quotes his estimate of the seven poets as given in the *Poeseos Asiaticae Commentariorum Libri* in the annotations on his own *West-östlicher Divan*. A. T. Hartmann's

*Die hellstrahlenden Pleiaden am arabischen poetischen Himmel* (Munster, 1802), a humdrum version in German prose, owed everything to Jones. When Friedrich Rückert, the talented paraphraser of oriental poetry, in his *Amrilkais, der Dichter und König* (Stuttgart, 1843) and elsewhere published tuneful verse-translations of selections from the odes, the popularity of the *Mu'allaqāt* in Germany and Austria was assured. It was thus with all the more confidence that Philip Wolff, who had already put *Kalila wa-Dimna* (Stuttgart, 1837) and Sa'di's *Gulistān* (Stuttgart, 1841) into German, in 1857 printed at Rotweil his metrical *Muallakat: die Sieben Preisgedichte der Araber*.

The time was thus overdue for a new English version; and in 1877 C. J. Lyall, who had taken up service in India nearly a century after Jones, wrote in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*: 'It is proposed to publish a translation of the seven *Mo'allaqāt*, or "Suspended poems" of the Arabs, together with a rendering into English of the notices of their authors contained in the famous *Kitāb-el-Aghānī*, or "Book of Songs of the Arabs," by Abu-l-Faraj el-Isfahānī. . . . The book will consist of four parts: I. An Introduction, giving a sketch of the history of Arabia during the century before the Hijrah to which the poems belong, a brief account of early Arabian poetry generally, some information regarding the mode in which the poems have been handed down and the early *rāwīs* or traditionists to whom their preservation and illustration are due, together with an examination of the historical data afforded by the *Kitāb-el-Aghānī* regarding the lives of their authors. II. Translations from the *Kāmil-et-tawārīkh* of Ibn-el-Athīr and the *Kitāb-el-Aghānī*, giving the history of the Wars of Basūs and Dāhis. III. Notices of each of the seven poets (except Ṭarafēh, who is not mentioned in the work) translated from the *Kitāb-el-Aghānī*. The account of Ṭarafēh will be filled in from extracts from Ibn Quteybeh and others supplied by Reiske's edition of his *Mo'allaqah*. IV. Following each notice, a translation of the poet's *Mo'allaqah* in English prose, line for line with the original. Parts II, III, and IV will be illustrated

where necessary by notes appended. . . . It is hoped that an accurate translation of the most ancient and authentic poems of the Arab race—poems which have for ages been regarded with the highest admiration as models of style and composition, and which undoubtedly present a fresh and faithful portraiture of the people among whom they appeared—illustrated by the oldest and most trustworthy traditions regarding the circumstances under which they were composed and the valiant stock to which their authors belonged, will not be found unacceptable.'

Unfortunately Lyall never realised his plan; though a large part of the introductory matter, and some fragments of the proposed translation, appeared in his *Translations of Ancient Arabian Poetry*, dedicated 'to Whitley Stokes . . . in memory of the days when this book was begun, Simla 1877.' A version such as Lyall envisaged, executed by him, would have proved an invaluable contribution to the understanding of these odes. In his stead, Captain F. E. Johnson of the Royal Artillery, finding himself at Kirkee and in contact with 'Shaik Faizullahbhai, Esq., B.A., of Bombay, a really first-class Arabic scholar,' made a translation of the Seven Poems 'intended to be nothing more than an aid to the student, and for this reason it has been made as literal as possible.' *The Seven Poems suspended in the Temple at Mecca*, which came out in 1894, keeps strictly to its author's programme; it adheres firmly to the tradition of the schoolboy's Latin crib and is understandably, and deliberately, without the least literary value.

But the reading public had not so long to wait after all for a new and worthier version. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, poet and ardent champion of the Arabs, and his wife Lady Anne Blunt resolved to try their hands at making something better. 'We find the Seven Poems translated first into Latin,' they reported, 'and then from Latin into the chief languages of the West during the course of the eighteenth century.' (It would be interesting to know where they discovered this information; not in the Library of the British Museum, as they allege.) 'The present translators, therefore, are unable to claim the honour of putting an unknown

work before English scholarship. At the same time, the field they have chosen will, they believe, be found practically virgin by the poetry-reading public. Sir William Jones' translation is a prose one, and its English is of the eighteenth century, polite, latinized, and little suggestive of the wild vigour of the original Arabic. Even so, his version is all but forgotten, though Mr. Clouston included it in 1881 in his *Arabian Anthology*; nor has any rival translation made its appearance since. Sir Charles Lyall, it is true, made a commencement which promised well in verse, and a single Ode of the Seven was published by him in 1885 in his excellent collection of pieces gathered from the ancient Arabian poets. But the design was not completed, and the *Modllakát*, as a whole, remains a stranger to us still in any form of English verse. The only other translation known to have been made is a word for word rendering in unadorned prose at Bombay by Captain Johnson, which was printed a few years ago for the use of Indian students, an excellent work of its kind, but nothing more. The present translators, therefore, indulge a hope that the work they have been engaged on will be accepted as an attempt, rather tardy than premature, and altogether needed, to fill a gap in English translated literature. Their aim has been to produce a volume, not for scholars only, but also for all lovers of strange and beautiful verse, such a volume, if possible, as was produced forty years ago by FitzGerald, when he gifted English poetry with the glorious "Quatrains of Omar Khayyám."

The Blunts did not underestimate the difficulty of their undertaking. 'The text of the *Modllakát*, in itself obscure, has for centuries been still further obscured by mediaeval commentators, learned in everything except personal knowledge of the customs and ways of Bedouin thought. Townsmen by birth, this was not to be wondered at, and their mistakes have been handed down from age to age almost as a religion. In dealing with these, the present translators have had the advantage of their long experience of the desert and desert practices, and it may be added, desert politics (for these are essentially the same now in their modern

developments as they were in the *Days of the Ignorance*); and they believe that they have been thus able to throw new light on not a few time-honoured obscurities.' It is presumably only the stupidity supposed by travellers to characterise the chair-borne philologist that has prevented scholars from hailing the revelations vouchsafed to the Blunts in their wilderness.

What Arabic scholarship there was in the enterprise was provided, curiously enough, by the feminine hand. 'While the sole responsibility of the verbal rendering has been undertaken by Lady Anne Blunt, that of the verse belongs exclusively to her co-partner in the translation.' Despite their mistrust of townsmen, the authors were glad to acknowledge the help of Cairene advisers. 'The text they have followed has been that recently published at Cairo, a text which has been carefully revised by the learned Sheykh el Shangíti, and which has received the imprimatur of the still more learned Grand Mufti, Sheykh Mohammed Abdu. To these great scholars the translators owe a debt of gratitude they here acknowledge in connection with their work, as also to Sheykh Abderrahmán el Aléysh of the Azhar University, and to Abdallah Effendi el Ansári of Cairo.' As for the method of translation adopted, this is clearly stated. 'A far more serious difficulty has been so to simplify and arrange the verses as to make them run easily and intelligibly to English ears. An absolutely verbal rendering of verse in another language is nearly always a betrayal—"traduttore traditore" says justly the Italian proverb—and this is especially true when Arabic and English are in question. To translate baldly, where tongues are so different, is to outrage the original, and often to render it ridiculous. FitzGerald's free-handed method is really the only fair one, and FitzGerald's has been the model taken by the present translators. They have been careful, however, nowhere to violate the text. Each couplet stands self-contained as in the original, and the sense has been always strictly adhered to. Only here and there words have been transposed, and more rarely words added without which no clear meaning could have been conveyed. Those portions

especially of the Odes which deal with local events and tribal politics have needed a courageous handling, and the translators hope that the result may have justified them, and that, without referring to the explanatory notes of the Appendix, each poem will now be readable even by those who run. Above all, they hope that their justification will be found in the judgement that what they give is true poetry, a new flower of a strange and interesting kind added to the body of our English classics.'

Sustained by this high expectation, the Blunts published in 1903 *The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia*. The first edition was printed finely, at the Chiswick Press, in crown 4to. The price asked for a copy was the modest sum of five shillings. But FitzGerald's shade had been invoked in vain; the indifferent public hailed no new Omar, and the Blunts' translation has never been reprinted. Nor has any other version of the *Mu'allaqāt* been published since those expansive Edwardian days, in English or any other language.

## ONE

*The Wandering King*

JUSTINIAN, secure and splendid upon the throne of Byzantium, about the year A.D. 530 (according to Arab legend) summoned to his court a Bedouin of princely blood called Imr al-Qais, intending to employ him in the struggle against his hereditary enemies the Sassanid emperors of Persia. The conflict between New Rome and the successors of Darius had already been in progress for several centuries, being indeed a renewal of that more ancient rivalry which had led to Marathon and Salamis; it would continue a hundred years yet, before a new religion should be born in the wastes of Arabia that was to put an end to the long quarrel of Constantinople and Ctesiphon and destroy the millennial glory of Iran. But at the time of that imperial summons it was found convenient by the warring empires to maintain tributary principedoms on the northern fringes of the Arabian desert; the Persians encouraged the local ambitions of the Lakhmid house who ruled the fertile lands about the lower reaches of the Euphrates, while Byzantium's vassal was now al-Ḥārith the Lame, the fifth of his name (in Greek Aretas) to bear the sceptre in Ghassan, a stretch of territory taking in what is now Jordan with parts of Syria and having as its principal cities fabulous Petra and Palmyra, whose columned palaces and temples already lay in ruins. It was this al-Ḥārith who had recommended to Justinian that he might find Imr al-Qais useful.

We are reaching back into a shadowy age before the secure annals of Arab history begin, and should be warned that the story of Imr al-Qais and how he came to Byzantium is rejected

by modern scholarship as a pure fiction; some researchers indeed have denied that such a person as Imr al-Qais ever existed. But fiction has its value, and may even possess a grain of truth; the story is in any case undeniably interesting and merits fresh recital, for all that we live in so critical an age. First it must be explained that Imr al-Qais was a nickname; it had been borne by a Lakhmid king of al-Hira two centuries earlier, whose epitaph comprises one of the oldest surviving Arabic inscriptions. The true name of the man of whom we are speaking was Hunduj, son of Hujr, son of al-Hārith, a descendant of that royal Kinda who gave his name to a famous South Arabian tribe. His grandfather had ruled al-Hira for a time following the death of the Sassanian Qubādh, whose client al-Mundhir III he expelled from the Lakhmid kingdom; he was, however, driven out in his turn on the accession of Anūshīrwān the Just, and massacred by the avenging al-Mundhir together with some fifty members of his family. That evil day spelt the end of the short-lived greatness of Kinda's royal house, which had established a supremacy in Central Arabia under the shadow of the Tubba's of Yemen, and engendered an enduring hatred between them and the rulers of Lakhm. On al-Hārith's death his kingdom broke up, his quarrelsome sons dividing between themselves control of the various tribes of which the confederacy had been composed. One of them, Hujr, took over the affairs of the Banū Asad, but presently they rebelled against him and slew him as he slumbered in his tent. Hujr had several sons, the youngest being Imr al-Qais; yet upon him fell the duty of avenging his father's death.

It was ironical that this should be so; for Imr al-Qais had never stood in well with Hujr. From his early days he had conceived a passion for poetry, in which it is said he was encouraged by his uncle al-Muhalhil. When report came to his father that he had actually composed verses, with all the traditional king's contempt for those who courted the Muses he deputed a retainer called Rabi'a to put Imr al-Qais to death. Rabi'a, however, spared the young prince, slaying a fawn in his stead; and it was well that he

had done so, for Hujr meanwhile repented of his anger, and was greatly relieved when his son returned unscathed to court. Even so, Imr al-Qais refused to give up poetry, and Hujr felt no option but to banish him. Thus began his wandering life among the outlying tribes, and that consorting with ne'er-do-wells which greatly developed his poetic talent at the expense of his diminishing good repute. Scandal followed scandal, until no honest woman felt safe from his attentions. In his verses, passed quickly from mouth to mouth, he made boast of his wild exploits, as especially in those lines of his *Mu'allāqa* in which he commemorated a particularly notable day.

Oh yes, many a fine day I've dallied with the white ladies,  
and especially I call to mind a day at Dāra Juljul,  
and the day I slaughtered for the virgins my riding-beast  
(and oh, how marvellous was the dividing of its loaded  
saddle),  
and the virgins went on tossing its hacked flesh about  
and the frilly fat like fringes of twisted silk.

The story behind the verses is as follows. Imr al-Qais fell in love with a cousin named 'Unaiza; he sought her company for a long time, but was not successful in his approaches. Then one day the tribe loaded up their beasts and departed from their encampment, the men riding ahead while the women with the servants and the baggage lagged behind. Observing this, Imr al-Qais hung back also and hid in a hollow to wait for the women, among them 'Unaiza, to pass him. When they reached a pool called Dāra Juljul the women said, 'Why shouldn't we get down here and bathe in this pool? That would freshen us up.' So they alighted there, dismissed the servants, undressed themselves completely and plunged into the water. Thereupon Imr al-Qais stole up on them unawares, seized their clothes, made a heap of them and sat down on it. Then he shouted, 'By Allah, I won't give a single one of you girls her clothes, not though she stays in the



pool all day, until she comes out of the water naked and takes her clothes herself.' That they refused to do, till the day was well advanced and they feared they would never reach the station for which they were making. Then at last they came out of the pool, all except 'Unaiza; she adjured him by Allah to throw her her clothes, but he would not. So finally she too came out, while he looked at her this way and that. The women advanced on him crying, 'You've certainly punished us, keeping us here your prisoners and starving us!' 'Well,' he said, 'what if I were to slaughter my camel for you, would you eat of it?' 'Yes,' they shouted. So he drew his sword and hamstrung the beast, then he slaughtered it and stripped off its flesh. The servants collected a great pile of brushwood and kindled up a mighty fire, and Imr al-Qais set to hacking off the choicest pieces for them and throwing them on the glowing embers. The women ate, and he ate with them, and drank the remainder of the wine he had with him, singing to them between-whiles and flinging to the slaves some of the roast meat. When they were ready to ride on one of the women cried out, 'I'll carry his saddle-carpet.' 'I'll have his saddle and girth-thongs,' shouted another. In that way they divided his harnessing and provisions between them, while 'Unaiza alone was loaded with nothing at all. 'Well, my noble young lady,' Imr al-Qais said to her, 'there's nothing else for it, you'll have to carry me with you. I can't walk all the way.'

Yes, and the day I entered the litter where Unaiza was and she cried, 'Out on you! Will you make me walk on my feet?'

She was saying, while the canopy swayed with the pair of us, 'There now, you've hocked my camel, Imr al-Kais. Down with you!'

But I said, 'Ride on, and slacken the beast's reins, and oh, don't drive me away from your refreshing fruit. Many's the pregnant woman like you, aye, and the nursing mother

I've night-visited, and made her forget her amuleted one-year-old;

whenever he whimpered behind her, she turned to him with half her body, her other half unshifted under me.'

The last four lines were afterwards described as 'the most indecent verses ever spoken by any Arab poet.'

As though this were not enough, Imr al-Qais also gloated of his attempt to seduce the lady Fāṭima of the Banū 'Udhra, that very tribe famed throughout Arabia for the pure and chaste passion of its menfolk; many were the stories of young lovers who would waste away to death rather than betray their chivalrous ideal. That did not prevent our poet-prince from outraging the most hallowed taboo of the desert, and publishing the indelicate words he spoke to the unfortunate victim of his casual fancy.

Ha, and a day on the back of the sand-hill she denied me swearing a solemn oath that should never, never be broken.

'Gently now, Fāṭima! A little less disdainful:

even if you intend to break with me, do it kindly. . . .

Many's the fair veiled lady, whose tent few would think of seeking,

I've enjoyed sporting with, and not in a hurry either, slipping past packs of watchmen to reach her, with a whole tribe

hankering after my blood, eager every man-jack to slay me. . . .

Out I brought her, and as she stepped she trailed behind us to cover our footprints the skirt of an embroidered gown.

But when we had crossed the tribe's enclosure, and dark about us

hung a convenient shallow intricately undulant,

I twisted her side-tresses to me, and she leaned over me; slender-waisted she was, and tenderly plump her ankles,

shapely and taut her belly, white-fleshed, not the least flabby,  
polished the lie of her breast-bones, smooth as a burnished mirror. . . .'

Such was the youngest outcast son who was nevertheless deemed fittest to seek out and punish his father's murderers. When news of the assassination of Ḥujr was brought to Imr al-Qais in exile at Dammūn, he remembered how in days gone by his family had dwelt in the Yemen, before they migrated to Nejd, and he exclaimed:

Long time has the night stretched over us, Dammūn!  
Dammūn, verily we are a concourse from far Yemen,  
and of a surety we truly love our people.

The messenger who bore the heavy tidings found Imr al-Qais drinking wine and playing at backgammon with a boon companion. 'Ḥujr has been killed,' he announced laconically. Imr al-Qais paid not the slightest attention; he seized his friend's arm and cried, 'Throw!' His companion threw as he was bidden. When he had finished Imr al-Qais said to him, 'I didn't want to spoil your turn.' Then he asked the messenger for details of his father's murder. Having heard the whole miserable story, he exclaimed bitterly, 'He left me to rot when I was a boy, and now I am a man he's loaded me with his blood.' Then with a shrug he added, 'We'll not be sober this day, neither drunken tomorrow. Wine today, tomorrow business!' For seven nights he continued his revel; then, when he had sobered up, he swore a solemn oath that he would not eat flesh nor drink wine again, nor anoint himself, neither touch any woman, until he had avenged his father; he would kill one hundred of the Banū Asad, and shear the forelocks of another hundred.

Forthwith he made preparations, and amassed weapons to make war on the traitorous tribe. Marching with his irregulars collected

from various clans, he found himself in the neighbourhood of Tabāla, a station in northern Yemen about seven days' journey from Mecca. In those days a white stone was worshipped in Tabāla as a powerful idol, Dhu 'l-Khalāṣa,—later the prophet Muḥammad ordered it to be destroyed—and Imr al-Qais thought to consult the oracle before proceeding further. The divination consisted in shuffling three arrows, inscribed 'Do,' 'Don't' and 'Wait' respectively, and drawing one of them. Imr al-Qais shuffled and drew, and the arrow 'Don't' was in his hand. Twice he repeated the prescribed procedure, and twice again he received the same answer. Thereupon he seized all the arrows, broke them and threw them into the idol's face, saying, 'Confound you, if it had been your father that was murdered you wouldn't have wanted to stop me then.' Sir Charles Lyall took this anecdote as conclusive proof that Imr al-Qais was not a Christian, as he has been made out to be by various authorities—the learned Father Cheikho included him in his anthology of Christian Arab poets. But those who have resided in the Arab world know that even today Christians will sometimes visit certain Muslim and Jewish shrines, and vice versa, if virtue is felt to reside in such pilgrimages, and it would be entirely in character (again allowing that all this may be pure fiction) for the poet-prince even though nominally a Christian to try his luck at a pagan altar. In any case, as the story informs us, he set no great store by the verdict that Dhu 'l-Khalāṣa delivered.

Revenge on an impressive scale Imr al-Qais eventually extracted from the Banū Asad, yet not sufficient to satisfy his tempestuous spirit. So presently he found himself deserted by his motley allies, and to add to his troubles the remnants of his father's recalcitrant subjects now obtained reinforcements from al-Mundhir of Lakhm, who was delighted to vent on the grandson the rage he had once slaked with his grandfather al-Ḥārith's blood. Imr al-Qais was again a fugitive, seeking protection of one tribe after another and finding at best only temporary security; his wanderings through Arabia make a long but on the whole a

tedious story, and need not be repeated here. At last he came to a man who was to prove a true and trusty friend—Samau'āl (Samuel) son of 'Ādiyā, a Jewish Arab living at Taima in a castle called The Piebald. He took the refugee in and promised to defend him against his enemies. When Imr al-Qais begged of him an introduction to al-Ḥārith the Lame of Ghassan, Byzantium's phylarch in Syria and the mighty adversary of Persia's vassal al-Mundhir, Samau'āl readily agreed to write him a letter of commendation, and further undertook to guard for him during his further travels the five coats of mail which were his most prized family heirloom. The Syrian king in turn forwarded Imr al-Qais to Constantinople, naming him to the Greek emperor as a man of infinite courage and resource, avid to destroy Justinian's adversaries.

The accounts of what befell the royal poet next are somewhat confused and contradictory. One report makes Justinian appoint him, after a protracted sojourn in the capital, governor of Palestine; another version is that Imr al-Qais petitioned the Emperor to help him to regain his ancestral kingdom, and that the great Byzantine placed an army at his disposal for this purpose. What is agreed on all sides is that he came to an untimely end when he reached Ankara on his southward journey. Justinian is said to have had second thoughts about trusting an Arab vagabond who would use his borrowed forces to strike at his benefactor; or, as another authority plausibly assures us, he discovered that Imr al-Qais had profited of his hospitality to seduce the Emperor's daughter and then, following the scurrilous habit of his youth, had published abroad his conquest in typically boastful verses. The fate that overtook the Arab poet is strangely reminiscent of the legend of Nessus. Justinian sent after him a gold-embroidered mantle with a letter: 'I have sent you this robe, which I used to wear myself, as a token of my esteem. When it reaches you, pray wear it for luck, and let me have news of you as you journey from place to place.' But the mantle was steeped in a cunning poison, and when Imr al-Qais put it on he at once broke out in running

sores (from which he was afterwards known as 'the Man with the Ulcers'), and died in great agony.

Imr al-Qais appears to have perished about the year 540. His tragic story had a grim epilogue. When the king of al-Hira learned that his hated enemy had left his precious coats of mail with Samau'āl, he despatched al-Ḥārith son of Zālim to demand their surrender. To this the faithful Jew refused to agree, saying that he had received them on trust and that he would never break his plighted word; he shut himself up in his fortress, and made ready to withstand a long siege. One day his son sallied out to hunt, and on his return was captured by al-Ḥārith. 'Do you know who this is?' the gleeful besieger shouted, flaunting his prisoner to Samau'āl. 'Yes, he is my son,' the latter replied. 'Then will you now hand over to me what you are holding, or shall I kill him?' 'Do as you will with him,' the father answered. 'I will never betray my covenant. I will not give up my guest's property.' Immediately al-Ḥārith smote Samau'āl's son and clove him in twain. Then he departed. On this account Samau'āl was honoured by the Arabs for all time as a model of unwavering fidelity. 'As faithful as Samau'āl,' the proverb ran. He too was counted among the poets, and the verses which he uttered on the occasion of his son's death are still remembered.

I kept trust with the mail-coats of the Kindite;  
though many men be reproached, I still keep trust.  
My father Ādiyā one day thus charged me:  
'Ruin not, Samau'āl, what I have builded.'  
Ādiyā built for me an impregnable fortress  
and a well I may draw water of whenever I will.

\* \* \*

The fame of Imr al-Qais was widespread during his lifetime; after his death he gained even greater renown. Men treasured jealously the verses that he had spoken, and transmitted them

from mouth to mouth—for the art of compiling manuscripts had not yet been invented in the desert lands—until all Arabia echoed with his songs. The austere Messenger of Allah, who had no great love for poetry and poets—

And the poets—the perverse follow them;  
hast thou not seen how they wander in every valley  
and how they say that which they do not?

Such were the very words of God revealed to Muḥammad by Gabriel—he, the Prophet of Islam, described Imr al-Qais as ‘the most poetical of the poets, and their leader into Hell-fire.’ The second caliph ‘Umar, however, reached a more favourable verdict; for him the poet-prince was ‘their forerunner—he excavated for them the well of poesy, opening a most true vision where formerly there had only been purblind notions.’ ‘Alī the fourth caliph also admired him for the excellence of his invention and his outstanding intuition, and because ‘he never uttered out of fear or for favour.’ R. A. Nicholson has pointed out that the report, often repeated by the ancients, that Imr al-Qais was the originator of the conventional opening of the formal ode—‘mentioning the deserted dwelling-places and the relics and traces of habitation’—is not correct; this ‘appears from the fact that he mentions in one of his verses a certain Ibn Humām or Ibn Khidhām who introduced, or at least made fashionable, the prelude with which almost every ode begins: a lament over the deserted camping-ground.’ Ibn Rashīq (d. 1064), the eminent critic of Kairouan, quotes a more considered opinion: ‘Imr al-Qais was not the pioneer of the poets in the sense that he said things which had never been said before; it is rather the case that he was the first to express certain ideas, and then other poets admired them and followed his lead.’ Among his inventions are enumerated the comparison of women with gazelles, wild cows and eggs, and the likening of horses to eagles and staffs—he excelled in the use of metaphor and simile; he was also the first

to separate the erotic prelude from the rest of the ode. The great Umayyad satirist al-Farazdaq (d. 728) agreed with the Prophet’s opinion that the ‘Man of the Ulcers’ was the most poetical of the poets, a verdict that he naturally did not modify in the way that Muḥammad had done; this was already the view also of Labīd (d. 661), the author of the fourth *Mu‘allaqa*. Ṭarafa, who was a younger contemporary of Imr al-Qais and composed the second *Mu‘allaqa*, paid his predecessor the sincerest compliment of imitation. Imr al-Qais had said:

There my companions halted their beasts awhile over me  
saying, ‘Don’t perish of sorrow; restrain yourself decently.’

Labīd in a similar context chanted:

There my companions halted their beasts awhile over me  
saying, ‘Don’t perish of sorrow; bear it with fortitude!’

Numerous other instances are cited by Arab writers to illustrate the overwhelming impact made by the poetry of Imr al-Qais on the minds and imaginations of later composers. Many of his phrases acquired the universal currency of proverbs. It is no exaggeration to say that his *Mu‘allaqa* is at once the most famous, the most admired and the most influential poem in the whole of Arabic literature.

So far as is known, the earliest scholar to ‘edit’ the assembled poetry of Imr al-Qais was the eminent philologist al-Aṣma‘ī (d. 831). ‘All the verses of Imr al-Qais that we possess,’ he is reported to have said, ‘have come to us by oral transmission from Ḥammād, save for a very small portion that we owe to Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā.’ Before examining al-Aṣma‘ī’s credentials, it is therefore necessary to consider briefly the two authorities upon whose information he relied. Ḥammād the Transmitter has been discussed in the introductory chapter to this work; he is the man who first chose the Seven Odes, and it is well to be reminded of his

reputation. 'The stories which are told of Ḥammād al-Rāwīya,' writes Professor Nicholson, 'clearly show how unscrupulous he was in his methods. . . . His contemporary, Muḥammad al-Dabbī, is reported to have said that the corruption which poetry suffered through Ḥammād could never be repaired, "for," he added, "Ḥammād is a man skilled in the language and poesy of the Arabs and in the styles and ideas of the poets, and he is always making verses in imitation of some one and introducing them into genuine compositions by the same author, so that the copy passes everywhere for part of the original, and cannot be distinguished from it except by critical scholars—and where are such to be found?"' In regard to the Transmitters in general Nicholson remarks, 'The temptation to father their own verses, or centos which they pieced together from sources known only to themselves, upon some poet of antiquity was all the stronger because they ran little risk of detection. In knowledge of poetry and in poetical talent they were generally more than a match for the philologists, who seldom possessed any critical ability, but readily took whatever came to hand.' Now al-Aṣma'ī was a philologist; so we have to determine whether he had any critical ability. Nicholson's strictures on Ḥammād, which were admittedly derived from the pioneering study of the Transmitters published in 1872 by the erudite W. Ahlwardt, itself based largely on Arab report and opinion, have been echoed by many scholars. 'Great value was placed on his judgment on poets and poetry,' remarks the Dutch orientalist C. van Arendonk. 'He was almost always able to detect plagiarism and borrowings. He himself was less conscientious however in transmitting and used his gifts to smuggle verses of his own into ancient poems.' It has, moreover, been stressed by Professor R. Blachère that Ḥammād, who is credited with being the first to collect and publish the ancient poems, did his work of collecting and publishing exclusively by memory and not in writing. As for Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā', who died about 770, in his case also the greatest reserve needs to be exercised. Having spent a great part of his life giving currency in Basra to

the anecdotes and verses of old Arabia which he gathered together, he underwent a religious crisis in his later years and is said to have burned all that he had so sedulously transcribed. 'Whether this material was destroyed because of its apocryphal character or out of a spirit of devoutness, scarcely matters,' Professor Blachère comments. 'One fact must be borne in mind; even if this destruction did take place, that would not have wiped out the generation of scholars trained by Abū 'Amr who, after his death, employed themselves at Basra reassembling with the greatest zeal the vestiges of old Arabia.' In using Abū 'Amr then al-Aṣma'ī was not drawing on a source of unimpeachable veracity.

Whereas Ḥammād and Abū 'Amr must in the nature of things remain somewhat shadowy figures, in that they left behind them nothing in writing for modern scholarship to evaluate, with al-Aṣma'ī we emerge into the clearer light of preserved and comparatively abundant documents. Born of a poor Arab family at Basra in 739, in the reign of Hishām 'rightly considered,' remarks Professor P. Hitti, 'by Arab authorities the third and last statesman of the house of Umayyah,' he grew up in the exciting days when Basra and its jealous rival Kufa were developing 'into centres of the most animated intellectual activity in the Moslem world.' It was during his lifetime that the foundations of Arabic grammar and prosody were soundly laid; he himself studied under the renowned Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 791), the father of metrics and lexicography, who formed among others Sībawaihi (d. 793), the greatest grammarian; he was a contemporary and rival of Abū 'Ubaida (d. 825), the author of some two hundred works on philology. Meanwhile the Umayyad caliphs were overthrown; the Abbasids supplanted them, and presently the capital of the empire was moved from Damascus to the newly built Baghdad. Fame of al-Aṣma'ī's learning now reached that great city, soon to supplant Basra and Kufa as the intellectual centre of Islam. A pleasant story is told of how al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī', vizier of the caliph al-Amin, tested the soundness of al-Aṣma'ī's erudition and that of Abū 'Ubaida. He asked the two savants how much they had

written on the subject of the horse; Abū 'Ubaida claimed to have compiled no fewer than fifty weighty volumes, against which al-Aṣma'ī could only boast of one. The vizier then called for a horse, and invited first Abū 'Ubaida to name and identify each part of it; but he tartly replied that he was a philologist, not a farrier. When al-Aṣma'ī was challenged to do better, he went up to the animal and, beginning with its forelock, ran through the entire nomenclature of limbs and bones—and the Arabs have a word for everything—quoting ancient verses to prove each point. Delighted by his performance, al-Faḍl presented him with the noble beast; and 'whenever I wished to annoy Abū 'Ubaida,' al-Aṣma'ī would recount in later years, 'I rode it to his house.'

But not only viziers paid tribute to his learning; Hārūn al-Rashīd held him in the highest regard, and on one occasion summoned him to court with a curious commission—to conduct a viva voce examination on two slavegirls of the royal household who were reputed to be unusually erudite. One of the pair was pronounced talented but not perfect; of the other, after she had been put through a gruelling test in Koranic science, grammar, syntax and poetry, al-Aṣma'ī reported to the caliph that 'he had never seen any woman like her—she might have been a man.' Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā the Barmecide also wished to demonstrate his admiration for the eminent scholar, and asked him one day whether he had a wife. 'No,' al-Aṣma'ī replied; doubtless he was too poor to indulge in such a luxury. 'Then have you got a slavegirl?' the powerful minister enquired. 'Yes, one—strictly for housework,' answered the savant. 'Would you like me to give you a really smart girl?' 'I could certainly do with one.' Ja'far clapped his hands, and a most charming and beautiful young lady entered the salon. 'There you are, Aṣma'ī, I give her to you; take her.' The famous philologist accepted the handsome present with lively thanks, but to his consternation the girl burst into tears. 'Master,' she cried, 'are you really fobbing me off on this ugly, hideous old man?' The Barmecide took pity on her, and asked al-Aṣma'ī if he would accept a thousand dīnars in

lieu of the maiden. 'I don't mind that at all,' al-Aṣma'ī replied. The slavegirl withdrew in great relief, and Ja'far then confessed. 'The truth is, Aṣma'ī, that girl did something I didn't like, and I wanted to punish her; then I had compassion on her—giving her to you would have been too much.' 'Why didn't you tell me that before?' the scholar protested with a chuckle. 'Before coming today I combed my beard and dressed my turban. If I'd known the whole story I'd have appeared as I usually am, and if she'd seen me like that she'd never have done anything else to displease you as long as I lived.' In later years al-Ma'mūn, the great patron of learning and founder of the House of Wisdom at Baghdad, desired al-Aṣma'ī to visit him from Basra, but he excused himself on the grounds of age and infirmity; the liberal caliph would accordingly collect difficult problems and send them to the scholar from time to time for him to solve. It was in 813 that al-Ma'mūn succeeded his brother al-Amīn, and al-Aṣma'ī was by then 74 years of age; he died in 831 or thereabouts, nearly if not quite a nonagenarian. It is said that on learning of his death the poet Abu 'l-'Atāhiya, esteemed for the high moral tone of his writings, uttered the following verses:

Woe is me for the loss of al-Aṣma'ī! He is gone,  
highly praised; his was a share in every virtue.  
Gaiety has deserted men's gatherings, now he is dead;  
when he bade us farewell, learning and gentility said  
goodbye.

While he lived, the star of learning shone among us;  
now his days have come to an end, and the star is set.

It would be pleasant to believe Abu 'l-'Atāhiya's son, to whom we owe this report; unhappily there is a difficulty—the poet himself died, if we are to accept the general opinion, at least three years before the philologist.

Sir Charles Lyall in his *Ancient Arabian Poetry* writes of al-Aṣma'ī that 'his work as a commentator and expounder of the

beauties of the old poetry forms the basis of nearly all that has since been written on the subject.' He edited the poems of the six pre-Islamic giants, al-Nābigha, 'Antara, Ṭarafa, Zuhair, 'Alqama and Imr al-Qais; it was this collection, in the recension of the Andalusian commentator al-Shantamarī (d. 1083), that W. Ahlwardt published at London in 1870 as *The Divans of the Six Ancient Arabic Poets*, a milestone in the progress of modern scholarship. He could boast of knowing by heart 16,000 *rajaʿ* verses alone; we are told that he added a further 90 poems to the 30 odes which al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (d. 786) collected together. One branch of learning he is supposed studiously to have avoided—the elucidation of the Koran and the Traditions of the Prophet; whether out of natural aversion, religious scruple, or because he preferred not to stand comparison with Abū 'Ubaida who did not refrain from dabbling in this subject. Yet he did not hesitate to criticise his favourite rival for what he had written on *Metaphor in the Koran*, alleging that he expounded the Book of God according to his personal opinion—a serious charge in an age that prized highly the views of the first believers and strove strenuously to recover and preserve them. Despite this reported self-abstinence, we are informed by Ibn al-Nadīm, who wrote towards the end of the tenth century, that he had seen a book by al-Aṣma'ī on rare words occurring in the Traditions, a manuscript of some 200 sheets in the autograph of his young pupil al-Sukkarī (d. 888). It is Ibn al-Nadīm who gives us the longest list of al-Aṣma'ī's writings, a total of 47 titles exclusive of 'a large quantity of the poetry of the Arabs that is not well viewed by scholars because of its paucity of rare pieces and the brevity of its information on transmission.' He also quotes the famous al-Mubarrad (d. 898) for the verdict that Abū 'Ubaida was superior to al-Aṣma'ī in the science of genealogy—accounted an important weapon in the armoury of those working on ancient poetry—but that al-Aṣma'ī was the better grammarian.

Imr al-Qais's editor was not content to take his information at second hand, even though his informants were men so reputedly

stuffed with desert lore as Ḥammād and Abū 'Amr. Numerous anecdotes tell of his expeditions among the Bedouins, doubtless to check up so far as he could on those minutiae of language, geography, flora and fauna, tribal matters and customs and local legend which would guarantee a sound understanding of what the old poets said, and form a judgment on what might be accepted as authentic. His initiative was admirable, and it was not his fault if the memories of the desert were as unreliable as those of the professional reciters in the cities; the situation was desperate, and he did all that was possible in his days to remedy it. The story of his contest with Abū 'Ubaida before the vizier al-Faḍl shows him as a scholar not content to write in his library; if the horse was the subject of his immediate concern, he would trouble himself to visit the stables, if not the hunting-field, in order to familiarise himself with the vocabulary of horsemanship. His usual method of recording the material he gathered was somewhat curious, though characteristic of his times. Among those works of his that have survived are monographs on the horse, the camel, wild beasts, plants and trees, the palm and the vine, rain, and games of chance; his lost books included treatises on the bee, clothes, weapons, the saddle and the bridle, and rivers and springs. These topics were chosen not primarily for the beauty of the poetry to be quoted, nor for the purpose of scientific discussion, but as pegs on which to hang strings of assorted verses containing key-words of philological interest. The value of the information assembled is therefore linguistic rather than literary; it found its way in due course into the great dictionaries of Arabic compiled in later times, notably the *Lisān al-'Arab* ('The Tongue of the Arabs') of Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1311) and the *Tāj al-'arūs* ('The Bride's Crown') of al-Zabīdī (d. 1791), upon which our modern lexicons are unfortunately still based—unfortunately, because errors made in the ninth century continue to plague us in the twentieth. Yet it would be unjust and ungrateful not to acknowledge the debt we owe to such men as al-Aṣma'ī; they lived in an age when the old lore of the desert,

though dying, was not yet quite extinct, and they preserved for us, admittedly in a confusion with much that was already no longer understood and much that was spurious, a large quantity of acceptable documentation without which the meanings of the old Arabic poetry would be beyond unravelling. 'On two points in particular,' sums up the learned Professor Blachère, 'on the attribution of the poems and their authenticity, the labour of these savants has not permitted us to reach any clear answer. At most, one may think that their patient efforts led the way on the one hand to disentangling and then rejecting what is apocryphal in flagrant instances, and on the other to saving from shipwreck a part of the ancient works spared till their time. That is not much, but it is certainly meritorious.'

After al-Aṣma'ī his pupil al-Sukkarī made a fresh recension of the poetry of Imr al-Qais; his contemporary 'Alī al-Ṭūsī wrote a commentary on it, to be followed by many others, among them the Andalusian al-Baṭalyausī (d. 1100), the Persian al-Tibrīzī (d. 1109) and the Syrian Ibn al-Naḥḥās (d. 1298). Anecdotes of the poet's life and extracts from his work found their place in the histories of Arabic poetry, such as the *Book of Poetry and Poets* by Ibn Qutaiba (d. 889) and the *Adorned Robe* by al-Marzubānī (d. 993); the richest of all collections is that occurring in the immensely valuable *Book of Songs* of Abu 'l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī (d. 967), a treasure-house of information on all matters relating to ways and customs of the desert. The first modern scholar to take interest in Imr al-Qais's poetry as a whole—apart from the *Mu'allāqa*—was the Franco-Irish Baron MacGuckin de Slane, better known for his translations of Ibn Khallikān and Ibn Khaldūn; his *Le Diwan d'Amro'lkais* appeared at Paris in 1837. Friedrich Rückert the German poet-scholar, whose versions from Firdausī enjoyed much esteem in their day, introduced the poet-prince to a wider public in his *Amrilkais, der Dichter und König* (Stuttgart, 1843). Mention has already been made of the edition, with the works of the five other great pre-Islamic poets, put out by W. Ahlwardt (London, 1870). The commentary of al-

Baṭalyausī was printed at Cairo in 1865, 1890 and 1906. A new recension of the poems was published by the Egyptian scholar Ḥasan al-Sandūbī in 1930. Numerous monographs on various aspects of the poet's life and works have been written in a variety of languages, and of recent years several attractive biographical and literary sketches of the 'Wandering King' have been composed in Arabic. Nevertheless a fresh edition of his poems on modern scientific lines, to include not only a re-collation of the existing manuscripts but also a systematic collection of all the lines and phrases quoted by later writers, would be a task eminently worthy of some able and aspiring scholar. It is not satisfactory that the most eminent poet of ancient Arabia should continue to be denied that loving care which has been lavished on many writers of lesser interest and inferior merit.

\* \* \*

The history of the translation of the Seven Odes has been summarised in the preliminary chapter, and it is now proposed to prefix to each of the new versions here offered some extracts from the older renderings.

The pattern of the original poem is not easy to make out at first reading; however, the 'argument' of each *Mu'allāqa* is so excellently set forth in Sir William Jones's pioneer essay, and that essay, first published in 1783 and seldom reprinted, is now so rare and generally inaccessible, that it seems appropriate to allow the reader to savour the outline of the ode in the elegant prose of our eighteenth century.

### *The Poem of Amriolkais*

The poet, after the manner of his countrymen, supposes himself attended on a journey by a company of friends; and, as they pass near a place, where his mistress had lately dwelled, but from which her tribe was then removed, *he desires them to stop awhile*, that he might indulge the painful pleasure of weeping over the



deserted remains of her tent. They comply with his request, but exhort him to show more strength of mind, and urge two topics of consolation; namely, *that he had before been equally unhappy*, and *that he had enjoyed his full share of pleasures*: thus by the recollection of his passed delight his imagination is kindled, and his grief suspended.

He then gives his friends a lively account of his juvenile frolics, to one of which they had alluded. It seems, he had been in love with a girl named *Onaiza*, and had in vain sought an occasion to declare his passion: one day, when the tribe had struck their tents, and were changing their station, the women, as usual, came behind the rest, with the servants and baggage, in carriages fixed on the backs of camels. *Amriolkais* advanced slowly at a distance, and, when the men were out of sight, had the pleasure of seeing *Onaiza* retire with a party of damsels to a rivulet or pool, called *Daratuljul*, where they undressed themselves, and were bathing, when the lover appeared, dismounted from his camel, and sat upon their clothes, proclaiming aloud, that *whoever would redeem her dress, must present herself naked before him*.

They adjured, entreated, expostulated; but, when it grew late, they found themselves obliged to submit, and all of them recovered their clothes except *Onaiza*, who renewed her adjurations, and continued a long time in the water: at length she also performed the condition, and dressed herself. Some hours had passed, when the girls complained of cold and hunger: *Amriolkais* therefore instantly *killed the young camel on which he had ridden*, and, having called the female attendants together, made a fire and roasted him. The afternoon was spent in gay conversation, not without a cheerful cup, for he was provided with wine in a leathern bottle; but, when it was time to follow the tribe, the prince (for such was his rank) had neither camel nor horse; and *Onaiza*, after much importunity, consented to take him *on her camel before the carriage*, while the other damsels divided among themselves the less agreeable burden of his arms, and the furniture of his beast.

He next relates his courtship of *Fathima*, and his more dangerous amour with a girl of a tribe at war with his own, *whose beauties he very minutely and luxuriantly delineates*. From these love-tales he proceeds to the commendation of his own fortitude, when he was passing a desert in the darkest night; and the mention of the morning, which succeeded, leads him to a *long description of his hunter, and of a chase in the forest*, followed by a feast on the game, which had been pierced by his javelins.

Here his narrative seems to be interrupted by a *storm of lightning and violent rain*: he nobly describes the shower and the torrent, which it produced down all the adjacent mountains, and, his companions retiring to avoid the storm, the drama (for the poem has the form of a dramattick pastoral) ends abruptly.

The metre is of the *first* species, called *long verse*, and consists of the *bacchius*, or *amphibrachys*, followed by the first *epitrite*; or, in the *fourth* and *eighth* places, of the distich, by the double *iambus*, the last syllable being considered as a long one: the regular form, taken from the second chapter of *Commentaries on Asiatick Poetry*, is this:

‘Amator | puellarum | miser saepe fallitur  
ocellis | nigris, labris | odoris, | nigris comis.’

Jones included with his translation a transliteration of the original Arabic; and though the system employed—and indeed invented—by him has long since been abandoned, it will not be useless to reproduce a handful of the opening verses of Imr al-Qais’s ode so that the rhythmic pattern may be the better appreciated.

1

kifá nebcí min dhicraí hhabébin’ wamenzili  
bisikth’i állíwat baína áldahhúli fahhaúmeli

2

fatúdh’ihha fálmikráh’i lam yáfo resmohá  
limá nasijat-há min jenúbin’ washemáli

## 3

wokúfán' bihá s'ahhbeí álayyi mathíyyahom  
yekúlúna lá tahlic ásyán' watehhammali

The *Mu'allaga* of Imr al-Qais abounds in splendid descriptions and brilliant images, so that it is difficult to choose a passage that will show author and translator equally to best advantage. There is, however, general agreement that the storm scene with which the ode concludes shows the Arab poet at his most vigorous and most imaginative. This is how the passage appears in Sir William Jones's version.

- 64 O friend, seest thou the lightning, whose flashes resemble the quick glance of two hands amid clouds raised above clouds?
- 65 The fire of it gleams like the lamps of a hermit, when the oil, poured on them, shakes the cord by which they are suspended.
- 66 I sit gazing at it, while my companions stand between DAA-RIDGE and ODHAIB; but far distant is the cloud on which my eyes are fixed.
- 67 Its right side seems to pour its rain on *the hills of* KATAN, and its left on *the mountains of* SITAAR and YADBUL.
- 68 It continues to discharge its waters over COTAIFA till the rushing torrent lays prostrate the groves of *Canahbel-trees*.
- 69 It passes over *mount* KENAAN, which it deluges in its course, and forces the wild goats to descend from every cliff.
- 70 On *mount* TAIMA it leaves not one trunk of a palm-tree, nor a single edifice, which is not built with well-cemented stone.
- 71 *Mount* TEBEIR stands in the heights of the flood like a venerable chief wrapped in a striped mantle.
- 72 The summit of MOGAIMIR, covered with the rubbish which the torrent has rolled down, looks in the morning like the top of a spindle encircled with wool.

- 73 The cloud unloads its freight on the desert of GHABEIT, like a merchant of YEMEN alighting with his bales of rich apparel.
- 74 The small birds of the valley warble at day-break, as if they had taken their early draught of generous wine mixed with spice.
- 75 The beasts of the wood, drowned in the floods of night, float, like the roots of wild onions, at the distant edge of the lake.

Jones was of course not attempting to reproduce in any way the rhythmic pattern of the original. Yet his rendering, though not free of faults—and the miracle is that it is so good—flows smoothly and pleasantly enough, not being impeded by that pedantic over-scrupulosity which makes so many scholars' translations virtually unreadable. In his study of this poem Jones could rely exceptionally on the Latin rendering of the eminent Dutch orientalist Levinus Warner, edited posthumously in a volume of mixed contents by G. J. Lette (Leiden, 1748); a specimen of this is appended.

- O Socie mi, videsne fulgorem, quem tibi ostendo 71  
strictim coruscantem  
Instar manuum, quae vibrantur in nube elata,  
aliis circumdata nubibus;  
Cujus emicat splendor: aut instar lucernae mona- 72  
chi,  
Qui profudit largissime oleum in contorto el-  
lychnio.  
Consedi ad ipsum, dum socii mei alii essent in 73  
loco Darich  
Alii in Uzeib, sed quam procul erat quod in-  
tentus expectabam!  
Erat in superiore parte *montis* Katna dextra largi 74  
ejus imbris,  
Sinistraque supra *montes* Sitar & Jedsubul.

The fame of Sir William Jones's universal scholarship swiftly spread to the Continent. His versions of *Hāfiz* attracted the lively interest of Goethe himself; while his work on the Seven Odes stimulated the friendly rivalry of the German Arabists, among them Anton Theodor Hartmann whose *Die hellstrahlenden Pleiaden*, published at Münster in 1802, clothed the *Mu'allaqāt* in the sober dress of methodical German prose. This in its turn led the way to Rückert's rhymed paraphrase, in which Imr al-Qais's poem is broken up into sections; the storm-scene is the fifth.

*Die Regenschau*

Hast du den Blitz gesehen? o sahst du, Freund, den Glanz,  
Gleich einem Händewinken im dunklen Wolkenkranz?  
Wars dort der Leuchtung Zucken? wars in des Klausners Zell  
Die Lampe, deren Docht er getränkt mit frischem Quell?  
Zwischen Odheib und Daredsch, ins Ferne hinzuspähn,  
Sass ich mit den Genossen, den Regen anzusehn,  
Von dem der Strich zur Rechten auf Katan seine Flut,  
Zur linken über Jadhbul und Elsitar entlud.  
Da wälzte bei Kutheifa das Wasser Schaum und Schlamm,  
Und warf auf's Antlitz nieder der hohen Eiche Stamm.  
Es fuhr von ihm ein Schauer hin über Elkannan,  
Und trieb des Berges Gemen hernieder auf den Plan.  
In Teima aber liess er nicht einen Palmenschaft,  
Und kein Gebäude, das nicht von Steinen dauerhaft.  
Da sah ich, wie im Gusse Thebir, der Berg, da stand,  
Ein greiser Fürst, gewickelt ins streifige Gewand.  
Mudscheimar's Felsenzacken, umworren vom Gesträuch  
Des Giessbachs, sahn dem Rocken an einer Kunkel gleich.  
Im Felde von Gabit war geschüttet aus der Sack,  
Als läg' ein Trupp Jemaner dort mit dem Waarenpack.

Da jubelten die Finken des Morgens in dem Hain,  
Als hätten sie den Frühtrunk gethan in Würzwein.

Doch dort lag hingeschwemmet ertrunkenes Gewild,  
Wie ausgerissne Knollen des Lauches im Gefild.

Philipp Wolff was not content to leave matters there; in 1856 he decided to publish at Rottweil, as a birthday offering to King Wilhelm of Württemberg, a new poetical version of the first three *Mu'allaqāt*. Like Rückert before him, he was remarkably successful in imitating the rhythm of the original, though his literary talent appears of an inferior order.

Freund, siehest du das Blitzen? sieh hin! den rothen Glanz,  
Wie schnelle Handbewegung, aus dicker Wolken Kranz  
Oder gleichwie die Lampe des Mönches, deren Docht  
Getränket war in Fülle mit Öle hell gekocht.

And so forth.

From Germany the story next passes to India, where from 1877 another British administrator, Sir Charles Lyall, had been occupying his leisure with the poetry of old Arabia. Lyall's version of Imr al-Qais's ode is confined to the concluding passage which he contrives to put into an unrhymed adaptation of the 'long metre'; he interestingly points out that 'in Mr Browning's *Abt Vogler* we constantly find lines which completely fulfil the requirements of an English *Tawil*'—an observation which reminds us of the extent to which the Victorian poets, Tennyson among them, sought to extend English prosody to take in the exciting rhythms newly discovered in the East. Here is Lyall's sensitive and scholarly rendering.

O Friend—see the lightning there! it flickered, and now is  
gone,  
as though flashed a pair of hands in the pillar of crownèd  
cloud.

Nay, was it its blaze, or the lamps of a hermit that dwells  
alone,  
and pours o'er the twisted wicks the oil from his slender  
cruise?

We sat there, my fellows and I, twixt Dârij and al-'Udhaib,  
and gazed as the distance gloomed, and waited its  
oncoming.

The right of its mighty rain advanced over Kaṭan's ridge:  
the left of its trailing skirt swept Yadhbul and as-Sitâr;  
Then over Kutaifah's steep the flood of its onset drave,  
and headlong before its storm the tall trees were borne to  
ground;

And the drift of its waters passed o'er the crags of al-Kanân,  
and drave forth the white-legged deer from the refuge  
they sought therein.

And Taimà—it left not there the stem of a palm aloft,  
nor ever a tower, save one firm built on the living rock.  
And when first its misty shroud bore down upon Mount  
Thabîr,  
he stood like an ancient man in a gray-streaked mantle  
wrapt.

The clouds cast their burden down on the broad plain of  
al-Ghabîṭ,  
as a trader from al-Yaman unfolds from the bales his  
store;

And the topmost crest on the morrow of al-Mujaimir's cairn  
was heaped with the flood-borne wrack like wool on a  
distaff wound.

At earliest dawn on the morrow the birds were chirping  
blithe,  
as though they had drunken draughts of riot in fiery wine;  
And at even the drowned beasts lay where the torrent had  
borne them, dead,  
high up on the valley sides, like earth-stained roots of  
squills.

The same metrical purpose actuated Wilfrid and Lady Blunt,  
though they felt that a Biblical style of English would represent  
more closely the archaic Arabic. This is how Imr al-Qais appeared  
at London in 1903:

Friend, thou seest the lightning. Mark where it wavereth,  
gleameth like fingers twisted, clasped in the cloud-rivers.

Like a lamp new-lighted, so is the flash of it,  
trimmed by a hermit nightly pouring oil-sésame.

Stood I long a watcher, twin-friends how dear with me,  
till in Othéyb it faded, ended in Dâriji.

By its path we judged it: rain over Kâttan is;  
far in Sitâr it falleth, streameth in Yáthboli.

Gathereth gross the flood-head dammed in Kutéyfati.

Woe to the trees, the branched ones! Woe the kanáhboli!  
El Kanâan hath known it, quailed from the lash of it.

Down from their lairs it driveth hot-foot the ibexes.  
Known it too hath Téyma; standeth no palm of her  
there, nor no house low-founded,—none but her rock-  
buildings.

Stricken stood Thabíra whelmed by the rush of it,  
like an old chief robe-folded, bowed in his striped mantle.

Náy, but he Mujéymir, tall-peaked at dawn of day,  
showed like a spinster's distaff tossed on the flood-water.

Cloud-wrecked lay the valley piled with the load of it,  
high as in sacks the Yemámi heapeth his corn-measures.

Seemed it then the song-birds, wine-drunk at sun-rising,  
loud through the valley shouted, maddened with spiceries,

While the wild beast corpses, grouped like great bulbs up-  
torn

cumbered the hollow places, drowned in the night-trouble.

R. A. Nicholson, who remarked of Imr al-Qais that 'his  
daring images and exquisitely worded pictures of life in the  
desert set the translator a hard task, which the state of the text only

makes harder,' chose an earlier scene for his attempt in which rhyme is retained but rhythm abandoned.

How many a noble tent hath oped its treasure  
 To me, and I have ta'en my fill of pleasure,  
 Passing the warders who with eager speed  
 Had slain me, if they might but hush the deed,  
 What time in heaven thē Pleides unfold  
 A belt of orient gems distinct with gold!  
 I entered. By the curtain there stood she,  
 Clad lightly as for sleep, and looked on me.  
 'By God,' she cried, 'what reck's thee of the cost?  
 I see thine ancient madness is not lost.'  
 I led her forth, she trailing as we go  
 Her broidered skirt lest any footprint show,  
 Until beyond the tents the valley sank  
 With curving dunes and many a pilèd bank.  
 Toward me I drew her then by her side-locks both,  
 Nor she—full-ankled, fine of waist—was loth.  
 Fair in her colour, splendid in her grace,  
 Her bosom smooth as mirror's polished face:  
 A white pale virgin pearl such lustre keeps,  
 Fed with clear water in untrodden deeps.  
 Half-turned away, a slant soft cheek, and eye  
 Of timid antelope with fawn close by,  
 She lets appear; and lo, the shapely neck,  
 Not bare of ornament, else without a fleck,  
 Whilst from her shoulders in profusion fair,  
 Like clusters on the palm, down falls her coal-dark hair.

The fascination of Imr al-Qais has exercised less influence on French and Italian scholarship, and the field of interpretation still lies wide open in the Romance languages. To conclude this survey of translations, here is appended Professor Francesco Gabrieli's impression of the storm-scene.

Vedi, amico, un lampo laggiù che io ti mostro brillare, come  
 un balenar delle mani, entro una densa nuvola tonda?  
 È il suo bagliore a dar luce, o son le lampade d'un romito,  
 che versi l'olio sul lucignolo attorto?  
 Ristetti con i compagni a osservarlo, fra Darig e Udhaib,  
 lontano oggetto di osservazione.  
 Scrutandolo, il suo rovescio d'acqua cadeva sulla dritta sul  
 monte Qatan, sulla sinistra sopra il Sità e Yadhbul.  
 E prese a rovesciar l'acqua su Kutaifa, abbattendo prostrati  
 gli alti fusti degli alberi.  
 Le sue raffiche passarono sul monte al-Qanàn, traendone giù  
 gli stambecchi.  
 In Taimà non lasciò in piedi tronco di palma, né fortilizio  
 che non fosse murato in pietra.  
 Il monte Thabir, tra i rovesci del suo acquazzone, pareva un  
 gran capo, ravvolto in un mantello rigato.  
 I culmini del Mugiainir al mattino, per il flusso dell'acqua e i  
 detriti, sembravano la sommità rotonda di un fuso.  
 Il temporale scaricò il suo carico d'acqua sul Ghabit, come il  
 mercante yemenita che mette giù i carichi trasportati  
 delle sue merci.  
 Gli uccelletti delle valli al mattino sembravano inebbriati del  
 succo di vino puro, infuso di pepe.  
 E la selvaggina annegata, nelle estreme contrade dell'alluvione,  
 pareva nella sera viluppi di radici selvatiche.

\* \* \*

It seems unlikely now that further linguistic discoveries will be made of a character so fundamental as materially to affect the traditional interpretation of ancient Arabic poetry. Apart from the divergences of opinion admitted by the old commentators, who were themselves often groping in impenetrable shadows, and between which the modern investigator is obliged to choose, often enough arbitrarily—apart from that, the problem which confronts

the translator is the usual one, how best to convey in his own idiom the impression made upon his mind by words uttered fourteen hundred years ago, in a remote desert land, at the first dawn of an exotic literature. Most of those who have faced this enigma appear to have felt that 'antique' Arabic demands for its adequate presentation some kind of 'antique' English. For my own part I cannot share this view; Imr al-Qais and his kind speak into my ear a natural, even at times a colloquial language; such, I feel sure, was the effect they produced on their first audience. In the versions which I have made I have sought to resolve the difficulty of idiomatic equivalence on these lines; and I think that the result is a gain in vigour and clarity. I have also tried to follow the original rhythms, without rhyming, but not so slavishly as to be compelled by the rigour of the verse to contract or to interpolate.

## MU'ALLAQA OF IMR AL-QAIS

Halt, friends both! Let us weep, recalling a love and a lodging  
by the rim of the twisted sands between Ed-Dakhool and

Haumal,

Toodih and El-Mikrát, whose trace is not yet effaced  
for all the spinning of the south winds and the northern blasts;  
there, all about its yards, and away in the dry hollows  
you may see the dung of antelopes spattered like peppercorns.  
Upon the morn of separation, the day they loaded to part,  
by the tribe's acacias it was like I was splitting a colocynth;  
there my companions halted their beasts awhile over me  
saying, 'Don't perish of sorrow; restrain yourself decently!'  
Yet the true and only cure of my grief is tears outpoured:  
what is there left to lean on where the trace is obliterated?

Even so, my soul, is your wont; so it was with Umm al-  
Huwairith

before her, and Umm ar-Rabát her neighbour, at Ma'sal;  
when they arose, the subtle musk wafted from them  
sweet as the zephyr's breath that bears the fragrance of cloves.  
Then my eyes overflowed with tears of passionate yearning  
upon my throat, till my tears drenched even my sword's  
harness.

Oh yes, many a fine day I've dallied with the white ladies,  
and especially I call to mind a day at Dára Juljul,  
and the day I slaughtered for the virgins my riding-beast  
(and oh, how marvellous was the dividing of its loaded saddle),  
and the virgins went on tossing its hacked flesh about  
and the frilly fat like fringes of twisted silk.  
Yes, and the day I entered the litter where Unaiza was  
and she cried, 'Out on you! Will you make me walk on my  
feet?'

She was saying, while the canopy swayed with the pair of us,  
'There now, you've hocked my camel, Imr al-Kais. Down  
with you!'

But I said, 'Ride on, and slacken the beast's reins,  
and oh, don't drive me away from your refreshing fruit.  
Many's the pregnant woman like you, aye, and the nursing  
mother

I've night-visited, and made her forget her amuleted one-  
year-old;

whenever he whimpered behind her, she turned to him  
with half her body, her other half unshifted under me.'

Ha, and a day on the back of the sand-hill she denied me  
swearing a solemn oath that should never, never be broken.

'Gently now, Fátima! A little less disdainful:

even if you intend to break with me, do it kindly.

If it's some habit of mine that's so much vexed you

just draw off my garments from yours, and they'll slip away.

Puffed-up it is it's made you, that my love for you's killing me

and that whatever you order my heart to do, it obeys.

Your eyes only shed those tears so as to strike and pierce

with those two shafts of theirs the fragments of a ruined heart.

Many's the fair veiled lady, whose tent few would think of  
seeking,

I've enjoyed sporting with, and not in a hurry either,  
slipping past packs of watchmen to reach her, with a whole tribe

hankering after my blood, eager every man-jack to slay me,

what time the Pleiades showed themselves broadly in heaven

glittering like the folds of a woman's bejewelled scarf.

I came, and already she'd stripped off her garments for sleep

beside the tent-flap, all but a single flimsy slip;

and she cried, "God's oath, man, you won't get away with this!

The folly's not left you yet; I see you're as feckless as ever."

Out I brought her, and as she stepped she trailed behind us

to cover our footprints the skirt of an embroidered gown.

But when we had crossed the tribe's enclosure, and dark about  
us

hung a convenient shallow intricately undulant,  
I twisted her side-tresses to me, and she leaned over me;  
slender-waisted she was, and tenderly plump her ankles,  
shapely and taut her belly, white-fleshed, not the least flabby,  
polished the lie of her breast-bones, smooth as a burnished  
mirror.

She turns away, to show a soft cheek, and wards me off  
with the glance of a wild deer of Wajra, a shy gazelle with its  
fawn;

she shows me a throat like the throat of an antelope, not  
ungainly

when she lifts it upwards, neither naked of ornament;

she shows me her thick black tresses, a dark embellishment

clustering down her back like bunches of a laden date-tree—

twisted upwards meanwhile are the locks that ring her brow,

the knots cunningly lost in the plaited and loosened strands;

she shows me a waist slender and slight as a camel's nose-rein,

and a smooth shank like the reed of a watered, bent papyrus.

In the morning the grains of musk hang over her couch,  
sleeping the forenoon through, not girded and aproned to  
labour.

She gives with fingers delicate, not coarse; you might say  
they are sand-worms of Zaby, or tooth-sticks of ishil-wood.

At eventide she lightens the black shadows, as if she were  
the lamp kindled in the night of a monk at his devotions.

Upon the like of her the prudent man will gaze with ardour  
eyeing her slim, upstanding, frocked midway between matron  
and maiden;

like the first egg of the ostrich—its whiteness mingled with  
yellow—

nurtured on water pure, unsullied by many paddlers.

Let the follies of other men forswear fond passion,

my heart forswears not, nor will forget the love I bear you.

Many's the stubborn foe on your account I've turned and  
thwarted  
sincere though he was in his reproaches, not negligent.'

Oft night like a sea swarming has dropped its curtains  
over me, thick with multifarious cares, to try me,  
and I said to the night, when it stretched its lazy loins  
followed by its fat buttocks, and heaved off its heavy breast,  
'Well now, you tedious night, won't you clear yourself off,  
and let

dawn shine? Yet dawn, when it comes, is no way better than you.  
Oh, what a night of a night you are! It's as though the stars  
were tied to the Mount of Yadhbul with infinite hempen ropes;  
as though the Pleiades in their stable were firmly hung  
by stout flax cables to craggy slabs of granite.'

Many's the water-skin of all sorts of folk I have slung  
by its strap over my shoulder, as humble as can be, and  
humped it;

many's the valley, bare as an ass's belly, I've crossed,  
a valley loud with the wolf howling like a many-bairned  
wastrel

to which, howling, I've cried, 'Well, wolf, that's a pair of us,  
pretty unprosperous both, if you're out of funds like me.  
It's the same with us both—whenever we get aught into our  
hands

we let it slip through our fingers; tillers of our tilth go pretty  
thin.'

Oftentimes I've been off with the morn, the birds yet asleep in their  
nests,

my horse short-haired, outstripping the wild game, huge-  
bodied,

charging, fleet-fleeing, head-foremost, headlong, all together  
the match of a rugged boulder hurled from on high by the  
torrent,

a gay bay, sliding the saddle-felt from his back's thwart  
just as a smooth pebble slides off the rain cascading.  
Fiery he is, for all his leanness, and when his ardour  
boils in him, how he roars—a bubbling cauldron isn't in it!  
Sweetly he flows, when the mares floundering wearily  
kick up the dust where their hooves drag in the trampled  
track;

the lightweight lad slips landward from his smooth back,  
he flings off the burnous of the hard, heavy rider;  
very swift he is, like the toy spinner a boy will whirl  
plying it with his nimble hands by the knotted thread.  
His flanks are the flanks of a fawn, his legs like an ostrich's;  
the springy trot of the wolf he has, the fox's gallop;  
sturdy his body—look from behind, and he bars his legs' gap  
with a full tail, not askew, reaching almost to the ground;  
his back, as he stands beside the tent, seems the pounding-slab  
of a bride's perfumes, or the smooth stone a colocynth's  
broken on;

the blood of the herd's leaders spatters his thrusting neck  
like expressed tincture of henna reddening combed white locks.  
A flock presented itself to us, the cows among them  
like Duwár virgins mantled in their long-trailing draperies;  
turning to flee, they were beads of Yemen spaced with cowries  
hung on a boy's neck, he nobly unclad in the clan.

My charger thrust me among the leaders, and way behind him  
huddled the stragglers herded together, not scattering;  
at one bound he had taken a bull and a cow together  
pouncing suddenly, and not a drop of sweat on his body.  
Busy then were the cooks, some roasting upon a fire  
the grilled slices, some stirring the hasty stew.

Then with the eve we returned, the appraising eye bedazzled  
to take in his beauty, looking him eagerly up and down;  
all through the night he stood with saddle and bridle upon  
him,  
stood where my eyes could see him, not loose to his will.



Friend, do you see yonder lightning? Look, there goes its  
glitter  
flashing like two hands now in the heaped-up, crowned  
stormcloud.

Brilliantly it shines—so flames the lamp of an anchorite  
as he slops the oil over the twisted wick.  
So with my companions I sat watching it between Dárij  
and El-Odheib, far-ranging my anxious gaze;  
over Katan, so we guessed, hovered the right of its deluge,  
its left dropping upon Es-Sitár and further Yadhbul.  
Then the cloud started loosing its torrent about Kutaifa  
turning upon their beards the boles of the tall kanahbals;  
over the hills of El-Kanáń swept its flying spray  
sending the white wild goats hurtling down on all sides.  
At Taimá it left not one trunk of a date-tree standing,  
not a solitary fort, save those buttressed with hard rocks;  
and Thabeer—why, when the first onrush of its deluge came  
Thabeer was a great chieftain wrapped in a striped jubba.  
In the morning the topmost peak of El-Mujáimir  
was a spindle's whorl cluttered with all the scum of the torrent;  
it had flung over the desert of El-Ghabeet its cargo  
like a Yemeni merchant unpacking his laden bags.  
In the morning the songbirds all along the broad valley  
quaffed the choicest of sweet wines rich with spices;  
the wild beasts at evening drowned in the furthest reaches  
of the wide watercourse lay like drawn bulbs of wild onion.

## TWO

*Whom the Gods Loved?*

THE successor of Imr al-Qais's enemy al-Mundhir III on  
the throne of al-Hira was 'Amr son of Hind. So he was  
styled, extraordinarily among the ancient Arabs; for Hind  
was the name of his mother. She was a Christian princess of  
Ghassan, or perhaps of Kinda, and in an inscription still extant as  
late as the twelfth century she described herself as 'the maid of  
Christ and the mother of His servant and the daughter of His  
servants.' 'Amr, despite the gentle religion professed by her who  
bore him, was a cruel and tyrannical ruler, earning the nicknames  
'the Burner' and 'the Stone-cracker'; for all that he loved poetry,  
and al-Hira during his reign, which lasted from 554 to 569,  
became a prototype of those Muslim capitals where men of letters  
and science later thronged the courts of munificent but often  
fickle princes.

One day—the year is quite uncertain, perhaps about 564, and  
in any case there are those who treat the story which follows as  
apocryphal—'Amr sent for Tarafa son of al-'Abd, a mere youth  
of a poet, and his uncle the poet al-Mutalammis, both of whom  
were enjoying his patronage, and gave them gracious leave, if  
they were minded, to visit their family domiciled in south-  
eastern Arabia; he handed to each, to speed them on their way, a  
letter of recommendation to the Governor of al-Bahrain. 'Take  
these missives,' he told them, 'to Abū Karib. I direct him to give  
you a good welcome and to reward you for your services.' The  
pair departed, doubtless in lively anticipation of a handsome  
present; but they had not proceeded far when the older man

began to have second thoughts. 'You are young and inexperienced,' he told his nephew. 'I know the king's treachery. We've both composed satires against him in our time, and I'm afraid he may have written something that will prove disastrous for us. Let's open our letters and see; if their contents are favourable we'll take them to their destination, but if on the other hand there's something dangerous for us in them we'll throw them in the river.' Ṭarafa, however, refused to break the royal seal. As they were passing by the stream that flowed about al-Hira they chanced to encounter an intelligent-looking lad. 'Boy,' al-Mutalammis called out, 'can you read?' 'Yes,' the boy replied. 'Then read this.' The lad took the uncle's letter and recited its contents: 'When this letter of mine is handed to you by al-Mutalammis, cut off his hands and feet and then bury him alive.' That was quite enough for al-Mutalammis; he threw the paper into the river. 'Ṭarafa, yours will be just the same,' he warned his nephew. But Ṭarafa had a stubborn and touching faith in his royal patron; he continued on his course, while his uncle prudently fled to Syria. So the young poet came to al-Bahrain and was there cruelly put to death, it is said at the age of 20 or at most 26. 'The letter of al-Mutalammis' became a proverbial phrase for a man who carried in his hands his own death-warrant.

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Ṭarafa's real name was 'Amr son of al-'Abd, son of Sufyān, son of Sa'd, son of Mālik. After that the careful genealogists divide, some making Mālik the son of Ḍubai'a, son of Qais, son of Tha'laba, son of 'Ukāba, son of Ṣa'b, son of 'Alī, son of Bakr, son of Wā'il, sprung of Ma'add son of 'Adnān the ancestor of all the desert Arabs; others say Mālik son of 'Ubād, son of Ṣa'ṣa'a, son of Qais, son of Tha'laba, and so back to 'Adnān. His mother's name was Warda, and she was of the same clan as his father, a noble tribe camping about al-Bahrain and al-Yamama, among whom the art of poetry was widely cultivated. Ṭarafa, according to popular report, displayed the family talent at a very early age.

The story goes that he heard his uncle al-Mutalammis (or some declare that it was al-Musaiyab son of 'Alas) reciting verses about a male camel, in the course of which a rare word occurred that could only be applied to a female. 'There now,' the child exclaimed, 'the he-camel has become a she!' The poet shouted to the precocious infant to show him his tongue; Ṭarafa obliged—for children have always been accustomed to such eccentric demands from their elders—and the talkative member showed of a blackish hue. 'Misfortune befall this child on account of this tongue!' the mortified rhymester exclaimed. It was one of those curses that come to roost too soon.

Ṭarafa is said to have composed his first verses at the age of seven. He was taken by his uncle on a hunting expedition, the quarry being skylarks which the Arabs have always regarded as a delicacy; only the other year I saw them fluttering on strings in the narrow alleys of Fez. The party alighted by a pool, and the child set his snare in a grassy meadow and waited all day for the birds to land. But he caught nothing; the company loaded up and rode off, and then at last Ṭarafa to his vexation saw the birds swoop down and peck at the grain he had scattered to entice them. As to the manner born, he improvised these verses.

Skylark winging about a grassy meadow,  
the air is all yours: lay your egg, and sing!  
Peck about whatever it pleases you to peck—  
the fowler has gone from you, so be of good cheer;  
the snare is lifted, nothing is left to fear.  
One day you must surely be caught; be patient now!

His father died when he was still only a child, and his father's brothers would have robbed his mother of her inheritance. Ṭarafa was too young to defend her with arms, but he found poetry an equally potent weapon when he threatened his uncles with the dire consequences that would overtake them if they persisted in their evil intentions.

You pay no regard to the rights Warda has over you;  
her children are little, and Warda's clan are afar.  
Yet a little matter may stir up serious trouble  
so that blood goes on being shed on account of it.

So young Ṭarafa discovered that genius for invective which attracted to him the anger and hatred of those who felt the lash of his sharp tongue, and was in due course to be his undoing. He grew up with equally fatal shortcomings, a taste for strong drink and an incurable extravagance. So long as his possessions lasted he had friends in plenty to enjoy his exaggerated generosity; as soon as he had squandered his patrimony he was deserted by his boon-companions, and even driven out of the tribe. Very heavy was his sorrow when obliged to endure separation from Khaula of the tribe of Tamīm, the fair lady on whom he lavished all the affection of his youthful heart; it was of her that he thought first when, during his wanderings through the wild desert, he set himself to compose a great ode in emulation of the immortal Imr al-Qais.

There are traces yet of Khaula in the stony tract of Thahmad apparent like the tattoo-marks seen on the back of a hand; there my companions halted their beasts awhile over me saying, 'Don't perish of sorrow; bear it with fortitude!'

But he tired of the vagabond life at last and returned to his kinsfolk, promising to mend his ways and to live soberly and sensibly in future. He enlisted among the tribe's warriors, and acquitted himself with distinction in the war called al-Basūs between Bakr and Taghlib. Victory brought him his share of the abundant booty, and with it the temptation which he could not withstand to return to his old fecklessness. Once more he was reduced to penury, and once more he became a wanderer on the face of the earth. He sought the protection of his elder brother Ma'bad, who grudgingly accepted to shelter him on condition

that he worked for his keep, pasturing his flocks. Even this simple labour proved too exacting for his artistic temperament; the tribesmen of Muḍar raided the grazing-land and drove off the camels under his very nose. Threatened by his brother, he begged King 'Amr of al-Hira to intervene and compel the thieves to disgorge their plunder; repulsed in this entreaty, he petitioned his cousin Mālik to come to his aid, but the latter merely scolded him and drove him from his door. It was then that he completed the *Mu'allāqa* which all later ages have hailed as one of the masterpieces of Arabic literature; in it he mentioned the names of two wealthy and powerful relatives, as the sort of hero he would have wished to be.

Had my Lord willed, I'd have been another Kais bin  
Khālid,  
and had my Lord willed, I'd have been another Amr bin  
Marthad;  
then I'd have been a man of much substance, visited  
by all the sprigs of the nobility, chiefs and sons of chiefs.

When 'Amr son of Marthad heard these verses recited, he summoned Ṭarafa at once to join his household, and at his departure he was able to drive away a hundred camels of his own, which he disposed of in part to clear his account with his brother Ma'bad. The rest soon enough disappeared, for the poet could not learn from his double experience of poverty procured by too open a hand, but must needs beggar himself a third time for the entertainment of his fair-weather friends. In this extremity he determined to try his luck once again at the Lakhmid court. His cousin 'Abd 'Amr son of Bishr was already firmly established in the favour of 'Amr son of Hind, while his uncle al-Mutalammis had been appointed to the service of the king's brother and heir-presumptive Qābūs. Ṭarafa, now a famous poet, was warmly welcomed by the monarch who loved to be surrounded and fawned upon by poets; he deputed him to assist his uncle in

waiting upon Qābūs, a man given over entirely to the pleasures of drinking and the chase. But the proud poet quickly wearied of the menial life of a courtier; it irked him to be at the beck and call of a gay prince whose only title to order him about was the awkward fact that he was his employer. To restore his self-respect he had recourse to his favourite consolation, the gift of inspired invective; he amused himself by composing a satire in which he expressed his true feelings about the arrogant king and his playboy brother.

Would that we had, in place of the king Amr,  
a fine ewe bleating around our tent,  
one of those spare of wool, with good long udders,  
her breasts nicely rounded and crammed with milk,  
and a pair of lambs to share her with us—  
such a ewe as rams straddle, she standing her ground.  
Upon your life, Qabus the son of Hind  
has plenty of folly mixed up with his rulership.

The poet had the imprudence, moreover, to recite these verses in the hearing of his cousin 'Abd 'Amr, and shortly afterwards to lampoon him also.

A marvel is Abd Amr, he and his tyranny!  
Abd Amr sought to wrong me, quite outrageously.  
There's no good in him, bar that he's very rich  
and his flanks, when he stands up, are very slim.  
All the women of the tribe go waltzing round him  
crying, 'A palm-tree, straight from the vale of Malham!'  
He boozes twice daily, and four times every night  
so that his belly's become quite mottled and swollen.  
He boozes till the milk of it drowns his heart;  
He boozes till the milk of it drowns his heart;  
if I were given it, I'd let my heart have a rest.  
The armour droops on him like on a willow-branch—  
see how puffed he is, ugly crimson his paunch's creases!

One day King 'Amr entered the royal baths with his minister 'Abd 'Amr, and seeing him naked he remarked pleasantly, 'Your cousin Ṭarafa couldn't ever have seen you like this, to say that the only good things about you were your wealth and your slim flanks!' 'Ha, that's nothing to what he's said about yourself,' 'Abd 'Amr replied with some heat. 'Why, what has he said about me?' the king demanded. 'Abd 'Amr thereupon repeated the verses about the bleating ewe. 'Amr son of Hind was enraged, and would have put Ṭarafa to death at once had he not reflected, as is said, that all the tribe of Bakr, a mighty confederation, would rise to avenge their eminent poet. However, Ṭarafa was shortly to give the Lakhmid tyrant even more instant cause for seeking his blood. Seated one day at table with the king's sister, the incorrigible romantic could not resist giving impudent voice to his admiration for her beauty.

Ah yes, the gazelle with the glittering  
ear-rings gave me her company,  
and but for the king sitting with us  
she'd have pressed her mouth against mine.

That final sally settled Ṭarafa's fate. King 'Amr gave him gracious leave, with his uncle al-Mutalammis, to visit their family domiciled in south-eastern Arabia, and handed to each, to speed them on their way, a letter of recommendation to the Governor of al-Bahrain.

\* \* \*

If we are to believe the statement of Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 939), the Kufan grammarian who was one of those writing a commentary on the Seven Odes, we have to thank Ṭarafa's uncle al-Mutalammis in the first instance for the preservation of his *Mu'allāqa*. His transmission would certainly have been oral, if historical reliance can be put on the story of King 'Amr's letter and the boy who deciphered its contents for him; oral the tradition may well

have remained down to the time of Ḥammād al-Rāwīya who passed it on, doubtless with the other poems ascribed to the same author, to his circle at Basra. The great Umayyad poets Labīd (d. 661), al-Akḥṭal (d. 710) and Jarīr (d. 728) all knew of Ṭarafa's poetry and esteemed it highly; Jarīr indeed reckoned him the finest of the poets, while Labīd and al-Akḥṭal both assigned him second place in the pantheon of ancient Arabia. It was again al-Aṣma'ī who made the first written recension of Ṭarafa's works; his rival Abū 'Ubaida, as quoted by Abū Zaid al-Qurashī in his *Collection of Arab Poetry*, also admitted the significance of his output but put him in the second class. It fell to the honour of Ibn al-Sikkīt to establish a new and reliable edition of the poems which was later taken by al-Shinqīṭī as the basis of his commentary.

'The Son of the Silent Man,' Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb son of Iṣḥāq, was born at Baghdad of a Persian family that had migrated to the capital from Dauraq in Khuzistan, a province abounding in game and ruined fire-temples. His father attained a certain distinction as a philologist, and Ibn al-Sikkīt first studied under him, later attending the circles of such famous scholars as al-Farrā', al-Aṣma'ī and Abū 'Ubaida; he also visited the Bedouins to hear pure Arabic spoken. In his early years he found employment with his father as a pedagogue for working-class children, but 'the Silent Man' had higher ambitions for him. So far he was deficient in the finer points of grammar; but while his father was running between al-Safā and al-Marwa on the Muslim pilgrimage he prayed to God that his son should master that difficult science. His petition was granted; Ibn al-Sikkīt soon blossomed out as a talented grammarian and lexicographer, and was in a position to become a visiting tutor to the wealthier households of his native quarter. His fame grew, and in the end he found himself appointed by the Caliph al-Mutawakkil to take charge of his sons al-Mu'tazz and al-Mu'aiyad. That was a fatal promotion; Ṭarafa's editor had the misfortune to be as imprudent in his speech as the poet he so much admired, and al-Mutawakkil yielded nothing to 'Amr son of Hind in tolerance and cruelty.

Ibn al-Sikkīt preached what he did not practise. The first day he sat with al-Mu'tazz he began gently enough, 'What would His Highness like us to begin with?' The prince, whose humour exceeded his passion for learning, replied, 'By going away.' 'Then I'll get up,' the scholar said. 'I'll jump up nimbler than you,' cried al-Mu'tazz, suiting action to word. But in his haste to leave the schoolroom he tripped over his long drawers and fell on his face; he looked up at his teacher, blushing furiously. The latter immediately quoted:

The noble youth is smitten for a slip of the tongue;  
a man is not smitten for a mere slip of the foot.  
A slip of the tongue will rob him of his head,  
but a slip of the foot heals in God's good time.

When Ibn al-Sikkīt related the incident next day to the Caliph, al-Mutawakkil made him a present of 50,000 dirhams.

A man able to recite so wittily on the dangers of not guarding the tongue might have been expected to know how to hold his own. But the celebrated philologist, who had by now written many erudite treatises important in securing the foundations of Arabic lexicography, shared the fanatical partisanship of so many Persians for the family of 'Alī; he was a Shī'ite, and believed that the rulership of Islam belonged by divine right to the family of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, and not to the house of his uncle al-'Abbās which tyrannised the world from Baghdad. One day al-Mutawakkil, who pressed hard against the remnants of the 'Alids, presumably to test his beliefs—for he was the Grand Inquisitor—asked Ibn al-Sikkīt, 'Whom do you love more—my two sons here, or al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusain?' 'Why,' the rash scholar replied, 'even Qanbar, 'Alī's servant, was better than you and your sons.' The Caliph roared, 'Pull out his tongue!' The Turkish bodyguard seized Ibn al-Sikkīt, plucked out his tongue by the roots and then trampled him to death. That was in the year 858, he being then 58 years old.

The only other exegesis of Ṭarafa's poetry which has survived is that written by al-Shantamarī who was born at Santa María in 1019, found fame in Cordova, and died a blind old man at Seville in 1083, having composed, in addition to the commentary on the six poets which Ahlwardt used, several other valuable works on Arabic literature. His career is a lively reminder of the vogue which the desert poetry enjoyed in fertile Andalusia as throughout all the mediaeval world of Islam, so making its first penetration of Western consciousness many centuries before the new science of orientalism gave it even wider currency. Considerable differences exist between the text as accepted by Ibn al-Sikkīt and that adopted by al-Shantamarī; the various recensions of the *Mu'allāqa* itself exhibit divergences no less substantial, a pointed comment on the bewildering problems which confront the modern interpreter. The source-books for Ṭarafa's biography, or rather for his legend (for that is an apter description of the ancient narratives) are the same as those enabling us to reconstruct the 'life' of Imr al-Qais and the other poets discussed in this volume.

Ṭarafa's *Mu'allāqa* was first printed in 1742 at Leiden, together with the commentary of Ibn al-Naḥḥās; the learned editor was J. J. Reiske, who later made known to Europe the scarifying letter written by the Cordovan poet Ibn Zaidūn (d. 1070) to his rival for the affections of the lovely poetess Wallāda, Ibn Jahwar's minister Ibn 'Abdūs. The collected poems first came into type in Ahlwardt's *Divans*, a masterly work founded upon a collation of no fewer than twenty-one manuscripts; the learned editor was very suspicious of the authenticity of the material he edited, remarking, 'I doubt whether we possess anything of Tharafa or 'Antara except their Mo-allāqāt.' This critical view was shared by B. Geiger, who put out a German translation of Ṭarafa's *Mu'allāqa* in the *Journal of the Vienna Oriental Society* in 1905. F. Krenkow, however, who devoted a long life to the intensive study of ancient Arabic poetry, observed that 'as regards the genuineness of his poems I must refer the readers to the conclusions of

Ahlwardt and Geiger, though I should like to suggest that perhaps more is genuine than these two authorities will admit. We may expect that his poems did come down to the time when they were finally commented by grammarians and are preserved with a certain amount of accuracy.' This was also the opinion of Ṭarafa's most devoted editor, Max Seligsohn, who published the *Diwān de Ṭarafa ibn al-'Abd al-Bakrī* with al-Shantamarī's commentary and with a full French translation at Paris in 1901. In the intervening years Father Cheikho had included Ṭarafa in his catholic *Poètes arabes chrétiens* (Beirut, 1890).

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Sir William Jones sets forth the plot of Ṭarafa's *Mu'allāqa* as follows.

#### *The Poem of Tarafa*

This poem was occasioned by a little incident highly characteristic of pastoral manners. TARAFa and his brother MABED jointly possessed a herd of camels, and had agreed to watch them alternately, each on his particular day, lest, as they were grazing, they should be driven off by a tribe with whom their own clan was at war; but our poet was so immersed in meditation, and so wedded to his muse, that he often neglected his charge, and was sharply reproved by his brother, who asked him sarcastically, *Whether, if he lost the camels, they could be restored by his poetry?* 'You shall be convinced of it,' answered TARAFa; and persisted so long in his negligence, that the whole herd was actually seized by the MODARITES. This was more than he really expected; and he applied to all his friends for assistance in recovering the camels: among others he solicited the help of his cousin MALEC, who, instead of granting it, took the opportunity of rebuking him with acrimony for his remissness in that instance, and for his general prodigality, libertinism, and spirit of contention; telling him, that *he was a disgrace to his family, and had raised innumerable enemies.*

The defence of a poet was likely to be best made in poetical language; and TARAFĀ produced the following composition in vindication of his character and conduct, which he boldly justifies in every respect, and even claims praise for the very course of life, which had exposed him to censure.

He glories in his passion for women, and begins as usual with lamenting the departure of his beloved KHAULA, or the tender fawn; whose beauty he describes in a very lively strain. It were to be wished, that he had said more of his mistress, and less of his camel, of which he interweaves a very long, and no very pleasing, description.

The rest of the poem contains an elege on his own fortitude, sprightliness, liberality, and valour, mixed with keen expostulations on the unkindness and ingratitude of MALEC, and with all the common topicks in favour of voluptuousness: he even triumphs on having slain and dressed one of his father's camels, and blames the old man for his churlishness and avarice. It is a tradition preserved by *Abu Obeida*, that one of the chiefs, whom the poet compliments in the *eightieth* couplet, made him a present of a hundred camels, and enabled him, as he had promised, to convince his brother, that poetry could repair his loss.

The metre is the same with that used by AMRIOLKAIS.

'It were to be wished, that he had said more of his mistress, and less of his camel.' So protests the romantic young Welsh heart of William Jones, who in his enchanted view of Arabia Felix fancied to discover the *Mu'allaqāt* to be pastorals, a quality which would greatly commend them to those genteel drawing-rooms of London society in which he was being received with such flattering esteem. But was he not a friend of Samuel Johnson, a protégé of Lady Spencer, a poet, a linguist, a rising barrister and, above all, still a bachelor? To be candid, many will share his regrets, for the anatomical dissection of the camel is not every one's favourite reading, especially when it is conducted in an

Arabic abounding in unfamiliar words. For all that, Tarafa's picture of his riding-beast, a succession of strange and most arresting images, has always been prized as the finest passage of its kind in Arabic poetry. Yet it is another sequence which happens to be the most suitable for our study in comparative translation. Jones does it like this:

- 55 O thou, who censurest me for engaging in combats and pursuing pleasures, wilt thou, *if I avoid them*, insure my immortality?
- 56 If thou art unable to repel the stroke of death, allow me, before it comes, to enjoy the good, which I possess.
- 57 Were it not for three enjoyments, which youth affords, I swear by thy prosperity, that I should not be solicitous how soon my friends visited me on my death-bed:
- 58 First; to rise before the censors awake, and to drink tawny wine, which sparkles when the clear stream is poured into it.
- 59 Next, when a warrior, encircled by foes, implores my aid, to bend towards him my prancing charger, fierce as a wolf among the GADHA-trees, whom the sound of human steps has awakened, and who runs to quench his thirst at the brook.
- 60 Thirdly, to shorten a cloudy day, a day astonishingly dark, by toying with a lovely delicate girl under a tent supported by pillars,
- 61 A girl, whose bracelets and garters seem hung on the stems of OSHAR-trees, or of *ricinus*, not stripped of their soft leaves.
- 62 Suffer me, whilst I live, to drench my head *with wine*, lest, having drunk too little in my life-time, *I should be thirsty in another state*.
- 63 A man of my generous spirits drinks his full draught to-day; and to-morrow, when we are dead, it will be known, which of us has not quenched his thirst.

This lively passage was presented by Philipp Wolff to the King of Württemberg in rollicking German couplets:

O du, der du die Kampflost, den Frohsinn rügst an mir,  
 Steht mir denn zu verleihen Unsterblichkeit bei dir?  
 Doch bist du nicht im Stande, den Tod zu halten fern,  
 Dann lass mich, eh' ich sterbe, thun was ich thue gern.  
 Und wenn nicht wär'n drei Dinge dem edlen Mann zur  
 Freud',  
 Macht' ich mir nichts draus wahrlich, wenn ich müsst'  
 sterben heut'.

Das Erst' ist, dass ich Tadeln zuvorkuzommen weiss  
 Durch einen Becher Weines gemischt mit Wasser heiss.  
 Das Zweit' ist, dass Bedrängten ich eil' zur Hülfe bass,  
 Auf einem Pferde bäumend, wild wie der Wolf Ghadha's.  
 Das Dritt' ist, dass, wenn's nebelt,—und Nebel auch gefällt—  
 Ich mir mit einer Schönen die Zeit verkürz' im Zelt.  
 Deren Fuss- und Armbänder am Baumesstamm Oskar  
 Zu hängen scheinen, oder am Wunderbaume gar.  
 Ein Edler stillet seinen Durst, weil er Tage zählt,  
 Morgen, wenn todt wir, wird sich's zeigen, wen Tod noch  
 quält.  
 Ich sehe, dass des Kargen und Gütergier'gen Grab  
 Ist wie das Grab des Frohen, der nicht schont seine Hab'.

The Blunts cadenced these lines after their own characteristic fashion.

You only did revile me. Yet say, ye philosophers,  
 was that same wealth eternal I squandered in feasting you?  
 Could all you my fate hinder? Friends, run we ahead of it,  
 rather our lives enjoying, since Time will not wait for us,  
 And truly, but for three things in youth's day of vanity,  
 fain would I see them round me the friends at my death-  
 bedding,

As first: to outstrip the sour ones, be first at the wine-  
 bibbing,  
 ay, at the blink of day-dawn when mixed the cup foams  
 for me;  
 And next, to ride their champion, who none have to succour  
 them,  
 fierce on my steed, the led one, a wolf roused and thirst-  
 stricken;  
 And third, to lie the day-long, while wild clouds are  
 wildering,  
 close in her tent of goat's hair, the dearest beloved of me.  
 O noble she, a tree-stem unpruned in her maidenhood,  
 tall as a branch of Khírwa, where men hang their  
 ornaments.  
 'Tis thus I slake my soul's rage, the life-thirst so wild in me.  
 If we two died to-morrow, think, which would go  
 thirstier?  
 For lo, his grave the miser's! Lo, next it the prodigal's!  
 Both are alike, scant favour to hoarder or squanderer.

R. A. Nicholson rhymed the movement, acknowledging at one point his indebtedness to the 'beautiful version' of Mr. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt:

Canst thou make me immortal, O thou that blamest me so  
 For haunting the battle and loving the pleasures that fly?  
 If thou hast not the power to ward me from Death, let me go  
 To meet him and scatter the wealth in my hand, ere I die.  
 Save only for three things in which noble youth take  
 delight,  
 I care not how soon rises o'er me the coronach loud:  
 Wine that foams when the water is poured on it, ruddy, not  
 bright,  
 Dark wine that I quaff stol'n away from the cavilling crowd;



And then my fierce charge to the rescue on back of a mare  
Wide-stepping as wolf I have startled where thirsty he cowers;  
And third, the day-long with a lass in her tent of goat's hair  
To hear the wild rain and beguile of their slowness the hours.

Lastly, Francesco Gabrieli in his admirable *Storia della letteratura araba* has this:

O tu che mi biasimi perché attendo alla pugna, e indulgo ai  
piaceri, mi puoi tu fare eterno?  
E se non puoi allontanare da me la morte, lascia che io le  
vada incontro con quanto io posseggio!  
Se non fossero tre cose di cui gode l'uomo, per i tuoi avi,  
non mi curerei della malattia suprema:  
una è il prevenire ogni muliebre rimprovero con una bevuta  
di vin rosso, che misto all'acqua spumeggia;  
l'altra è lo spronare, accorrendo al grido del supplice, un  
destriero come un lupo della macchia, calante a bere,  
e l'accorciare una giornata di insolita nuvolaglia, in compagnia  
di una bella, sotto la tendra drizzata. . . .

\* \* \*

Ṭarafa's great ode is of a casualness unusual even for the poetry of the ancient Arabs, who felt no pressing need to provide too close a connexion with the different movements of their compositions. It has already been mentioned that the various recensions exhibit considerable divergences in the order and contents of the poem; it is quite possible that even in the author's lifetime his *Mu'allāqa* was already being recited in several distinct versions, and indeed Ṭarafa himself may well have made changes from time to time; the poem was certainly not composed at a single sitting. The version which follows depends upon only one recension of the original, but that recension was made by an excellent scholar and is as acceptable as any.

#### MU'ALLAQA OF ṬARAFĀ

There are traces yet of Khaula in the stony tract of Thahmad  
apparent like the tattoo-marks seen on the back of a hand;  
there my companions halted their beasts awhile over me  
saying, 'Don't perish of sorrow; bear it with fortitude!'  
The litters of the Málíki camels that morn in the broad  
watercourse of Wadi Dad were like great schooners  
from Aduali, or the vessels of Ibn-i Yámin  
their mariners steer now tack by tack, now straight forward;  
their prows cleave the streaks of the rippling water  
just as a boy playing will scoop the sand into parcels.

A young gazelle there is in the tribe, dark-lipped, fruit-shaking,  
flaunting a double necklace of pearls and topazes,  
holding aloof, with the herd grazing in the lush thicket,  
nibbling the tips of the arak-fruit, wrapped in her cloak.  
Her dark lips part in a smile, teeth like a camomile  
on a moist hillock shining amid the virgin sands,  
whitened as it were by the sun's rays, all but her gums  
that are smeared with collyrium—she gnaws not against them;  
a face as though the sun had loosed his mantle upon it,  
pure of hue, with not a wrinkle to mar it.

Ah, but when grief assails me, straightway I ride it off  
mounted on my swift, lean-flanked camel, night and day racing,  
sure-footed, like the planks of a litter; I urge her on  
down the bright highway, that back of a striped mantle;  
she vies with the noble, hot-paced she-camels, shank on shank  
nimble plying, over a path many feet have beaten.  
Along the rough slopes with the milkless shes she has pastured  
in Spring, cropping the rich meadows green in the gentle rains;  
to the voice of the caller she returns, and stands on guard  
with her bunchy tail, scared of some ruddy, tuft-haired stallion,

as though the wings of a white vulture enfolded the sides of her tail, pierced even to the bone by a pricking awl; anon she strikes with it behind the rear-rider, anon lashes her dry udders, withered like an old water-skin. - Perfectly firm is the flesh of her two thighs— they are the gates of a lofty, smooth-walled castle— and tightly knit are her spine-bones, the ribs like bows, her underneck stuck with the well-strung vertebrae, fenced about by the twin dens of a wild lote-tree; you might say bows were bent under a buttressed spine. Widely spaced are her elbows, as if she strode carrying the two buckets of a sturdy water-carrier; like the bridge of the Byzantine, whose builder swore it should be all encased in bricks to be raised up true. Reddish the bristles under her chin, very firm her back, broad the span of her swift legs, smooth her swinging gait; her legs are twined like rope uptwisted; her forearms thrust slantwise up to the propped roof of her breast. Swiftly she rolls, her cranium huge, her shoulder-blades high-hoisted to frame her lofty, raised superstructure. The scores of her girths chafing her breast-ribs are water-courses

furrowing a smooth rock in a rugged eminence, now meeting, anon parting, as though they were white gores marking distinctly a slit shirt. Her long neck is very erect when she lifts it up calling to mind the rudder of a Tigris-bound vessel. Her skull is most like an anvil, the junction of its two halves meeting together as it might be on the edge of a file. Her cheek is smooth as Syrian parchment, her split lip a tanned hide of Yemen, its slit not bent crooked; her eyes are a pair of mirrors, sheltering in the caves of her brow-bones, the rock of a pool's hollow, ever expelling the white pus mote-provoked, so they seem like the dark-rimmed eyes of a scared wild-cow with calf.

Her ears are true, clearly detecting on the night journey the fearful rustle of a whisper, the high-pitched cry, sharp-tipped, her noble pedigree plain in them, pricked like the ears of a wild-cow of Haumal lone-pasturing. Her trepid heart pulses strongly, quick, yet firm as a pounding-rock set in the midst of a solid boulder. If you so wish, her head strains to the saddle's pommel and she swims with her forearms, fleet as a male ostrich, or if you wish her pace is slack, or swift to your fancy fearing the curled whip fashioned of twisted hide. Slit is her upper lip, her nose bored and sensitive, delicate; when she sweeps the ground with it, faster she runs.

Such is the beast I ride, when my companion cries  
'Would I might ransom you, and be ransomed, from yonder waste!'

His soul flutters within him fearfully, he supposing the blow fallen on him, though his path is no ambushade. When the people demand, 'Who's the hero?' I suppose myself intended, and am not sluggish, not dull of wit; I am at her with the whip, and my she-camel quickens pace what time the mirage of the burring stone-tract shimmers; elegantly she steps, as a slave-girl at a party will sway, showing her master skirts of a trailing white gown. I am not one that skulks fearfully among the hilltops, but when the folk seek my succour I gladly give it; if you look for me in the circle of the folk you'll find me there, and if you hunt me in the taverns there you'll catch me. Come to me when you will, I'll pour you a flowing cup, and if you don't need it, well, do without and good luck to you!

Whenever the tribe is assembled you'll come upon me at the summit of the noble House, the oft-frequented; my boon-companions are white as stars, and a singing-wench comes to us in her striped gown or her saffron robe,

wide the opening of her collar, delicate her skin  
to my companions' fingers, tender her nakedness.  
When we say, 'Let's hear from you,' she advances to us  
chanting fluently, her glance languid, in effortless song.

Unceasingly I tipp'd the wine and took my joy,  
unceasingly I sold and squandered my hoard and my patrimony  
till all my family deserted me, every one of them,  
and I sat alone like a lonely camel scabby with mange;  
yet I saw the sons of the dust did not deny me  
nor the grand ones who dwell in those fine, wide-spread tents.  
So now then, you who revile me because I attend the wars  
and partake in all pleasures, can you keep me alive forever?  
If you can't avert from me the fate that surely awaits me  
then pray leave me to hasten it on with what money I've got.  
But for three things, that are the joy of a young fellow,  
I assure you I wouldn't care when my deathbed visitors  
arrive—

first, to forestall my charming critics with a good swig  
of crimson wine that foams when the water is mingled in;  
second, to wheel at the call of the beleaguered a curved-  
shanked steed  
streaking like the wolf of the thicket you've startled lapping  
the water;  
and third, to curtail the day of showers, such an admirable  
season,  
dallying with a ripe wench under the pole-propped tent,  
her anklets and her bracelets seemingly hung on the boughs  
of a pliant, unriven gum-tree or a castor-shrub.  
So permit me to drench my head while there's still life in it,  
for I tremble at the thought of the scant draught I'll get when  
I'm dead.  
I'm a generous fellow, one that soaks himself in his lifetime;  
you'll know to-morrow, when we're dead, which of us is the  
thirsty one.

To my eyes the grave of the niggardly who's mean with his  
money  
is one with the wastrel's who's squandered his substance in  
idleness;

all you can see is a couple of heaps of dust, and on them  
slabs of granite, flat stones piled shoulder to shoulder.

I see Death chooses the generous folk, and takes for his own  
the most prized belonging of the parsimonious skinflint;  
I see Life is a treasure diminishing every night,  
and all that the days and Time diminish ceases at last. 2  
By your sweet life, though Death may miss a lad for the nonce  
he's like a loosened lasso, whose loops are firmly in hand.

How is it with me, that I observe my cousin Malik,  
whenever I approach him, sheers off and keeps his distance?  
He scolds me—and I haven't a clue as to why he should—  
just the way Kurt, A'bad's son, scolded me among the tribe.  
Whatever good I've asked him for, he's disappointed me—  
it's just as though we had laid him down in the hollow tomb.  
I don't know of anything wrong I've said to him; the only  
thing is

I searched, and not casually at that, for Ma'bad's lost baggage-  
camels.

I used our kinship as a close argument; and, by your luck,  
whenever there's anything requiring an effort, I'm always present;  
let me be summoned in a serious fix, and I'm there to defend,  
or let your enemies come against you sternly, I'm stern to help;  
if they assault your honour with dirty cracks, I don't waste time  
threatening, but pour down their throats draughts from the  
pool of Death.

There's nothing amiss I've occasioned; yet it's just as if I was  
cause  
of my own defamation, and being complained of, and made an  
outcaste.

If there'd been anyone else but him involved in the case  
he'd surely have eased my grief, or at least given me a day's  
respite;

but my fine master is a man who's forever throttling me  
and I must thank him, and fawn upon him, and be his ransom.  
Truly, the tyranny of kinsfolk inflicts sharper anguish  
upon a man than the blow of a trenchant Indian sabre.

So leave me to my own habits; I'll always be grateful to you  
even though my tent be pitched far-off, by Mount Darghad.

Had my Lord willed, I'd have been another Kais bin Khálid,  
and had my Lord willed, I'd have been another Amr bin Marthad;  
then I'd have been a man of much substance, visited  
by all the sprigs of the nobility, chiefs and sons of chiefs.  
I'm the lean, hard-bitten warrior you know of old,  
intrepid, lively as the darting head of a serpent;  
I have vowed my loins cease not to furnish a lining  
for an Indian scimitar sharp as to both its edges,  
trenchant—when I stand forth to take my revenge with it  
its first blow suffices; I need no repeat stroke; it's no pruning-  
hook—

a trusty blade, recoiling not from its target;  
say, 'Gently now!' and its edge would answer, 'Done!'  
When the tribesmen hurry to arms, you'll surely find me  
impregnable, let my hand but be gripping its handle.

Many's the kneeling, sleeping camel—the fear of me  
stalking with naked blade has oft startled the runaways;  
then some ancient she-camel with flaccid udders, huge, the pride  
of an elder thin as a stick, quarrelsome, has passed me by  
and he remarking to me (for her pastern and shank were slit)  
'Don't you see what ruination you've brought on me now?  
What think you,' this to the tribesmen, 'we should do with a  
drunkard  
whose wickedness presses hard on us, a wilful sinner?

But let him be,' he went on. 'He shall have the full benefit of  
her;

only if you don't halt those far-off kneelers, he'll go on killing.'  
Then the maidservants set to roasting her little foal,  
while the tender shredded hump was hastened to regale us.

If I should die, cry me, sweet daughter of Ma'bad,  
as my deeds deserve, and rend the collar of your gown for me;  
make me not out as a man whose zeal was not any way  
like my zeal, who served not in battle and tumult as I have  
served,

one who was slow to doughty enterprises, swift to foul  
mouthing,

inglorious, pushed away contemptuously by men's fists.  
Had I been such a poltroon in men's eyes, the enmity  
of the companioned, aye, and the solitary had mischiefed me;  
but my known daring, my bold demeanour, my honesty  
and my high ancestry—these repelled my enemies from me.  
I swear, by your life, the task that is on me perplexes me not  
in the daylight hours, neither is my night an eternity.

Many's the day I've braced myself, when the foemen pressed,  
guarding the threatened breaches, firm in the face of fear,  
taking my stand where the cavalier dreads destruction  
and the heart's muscles, rubbed together, twitch with terror.  
Many's the yellow arrow, smoke-blackened, whose win I've  
awaited

by the camp-fire, and then thrust it in the palm of the shuffler.

The days shall disclose to you things you were ignorant of,  
and he whom you never provisioned will bring you back  
tidings;

one that you purchased never a scrap for will come to you  
with news, though you appointed no time for him to keep

tryst.

## THREE

*The Moralist*

How war arose between 'Abs and Dhubyân from the Race of Dâhis: who fell therein, and who slew them: what famous days were gained by either kin: what songs were made to tell of valiant deeds done, and what dirges over brave men that died: how the heads of Dhubyân were slain at the cistern of el-Habâ'ah, and how 'Abs wandered forth thereafter through many strange lands: all this may be told at another season. What is now to be related is the manner in which peace was made, and the brother tribes reconciled together.'

With these words Charles Lyall of the Bengal Civil Service introduced his translation of the *Mu'allaqa* of Zuhair son of Abū Salmā in Volume XLVII, Part III, of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*—that Society which Sir William Jones had founded a little less than a century earlier—published at Calcutta in 1878. His half-promise to relate the history of the War of Dâhis appears never to have been kept, and it is no part of present purpose to stray so widely from the matter immediately in hand. It will not, however, be entirely irrelevant to retell how the long and melancholy vendetta started, using the words of R. A. Nicholson first printed in 1907:

'Qays, son of Zuhayr, was chieftain of 'Abs. He had a horse called Dâhis, renowned for its speed, which he matched against Ghabrá, a mare belonging to Ḥudhayfa b. Badr, the chief of Dhubyân. It was agreed that the course should be a hundred bowshots in length, and that the victor should receive a hundred

camels. When the race began Ghabrá took the lead, but as they left the firm ground and entered upon the sand, where the "going" was heavy, Dâhis gradually drew level and passed his antagonist. He was nearing the goal when some Dhubyánites sprang from an ambush prepared beforehand, and drove him out of his course, thus enabling Ghabrá to defeat him. On being informed of this foul play Qays naturally claimed that he had won the wager, but the men of Dhubyân refused to pay even a single camel. Bitterly resenting their treachery, he waylaid and slew one of Ḥudhayfa's brothers. Ḥudhayfa sought vengeance, and the murder of Málik, a brother of Qays, by his horsemen gave the signal for war. In the fighting which ensued Dhubyân more than held their own, but neither party could obtain a decisive advantage. Qays slew the brothers Ḥudhayfa and Ḥamal—

"Ḥamal I slew and eased my heart thereby,  
Ḥudhayfa glutted my avenging brand;  
But though I slaked my thirst by slaying them,  
I would as lief have lost my own right hand."

The war between 'Abs and Dhubyân is said to have lasted forty years, and the dates generally proposed for the conflict are *circa* A.D. 568–608. It is, however, advisable to treat this chronology with all reserve; 'forty years' may well have been intended by the old story-tellers as nothing more precise than a very long time. The circumstances that led up to the termination of one of the bitterest and bloodiest campaigns in ancient Arab history are given with customary picturesqueness by Abu 'l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī in his *Book of Songs*:

Among the great men of the tribe of Dhubyân was one named al-Ḥārith son of 'Auf son of Abū Ḥāritha. One day he remarked to his cousin Khārija son of Šinān, 'What do you think—is there anyone in the world who would refuse me if I asked his daughter's hand in marriage?'

'Yes,' Khārija replied.

'Who?' al-Hārith enquired in some surprise.

'Aus son of Hāritha son of La'm, of the tribe of Taiy.'

Thereupon al-Hārith commanded his servant to make ready his camel. Both mounted and rode off to the territory of Aus son of Hāritha, whom they found at home. As soon as Aus saw al-Hārith approaching he shouted a friendly welcome to him. When the usual politenesses had been exchanged Aus got down to business.

'What brings you here, Hārith?'

'I've come to look for a wife.'

'You've called at the wrong address,' Aus replied brusquely, and turned on his heel without another word. He went in in a fury to his wife, who was a woman of the rival tribe of 'Abs.

'Who called?' she enquired. 'You didn't have much to say to him.'

'That was the Lord of the Arabs, al-Hārith son of 'Auf son of Abū Hāritha the Murrīte,' Aus replied casually.

'Then why didn't you ask him in?'

'He behaved like a fool.'

'How?'

'He came looking for a wife, here!'

'Well, don't you want to marry off your daughters?' his wife's voice rose protestingly.

'Yes, of course.'

'Then if you won't marry any of them to the Lord of the Arabs, who will you marry them to?'

'What's done is done,' Aus answered abruptly.

'Oh no,' his wife insisted. 'Now you can go and make good the damage you've caused.'

'In what way?'

'Ride after him and bring him back.'

'How on earth can I do that, seeing how thoughtlessly I behaved towards him,' the chastened husband demanded.

'I'll tell you what to say,' his wife replied. 'You tell him, "You caught me in a bad mood. You put up a proposition you hadn't

said anything to me about before, and I had no answer ready—except what you heard me say. Now do come back, and you'll see I'll give you all you want.' You'll see, if you speak to him like that he'll return right enough.'

So Aus rode off to catch his visitors. The story continues as related by Khārija son of Sinān:

Upon my word, there was I jogging along quietly, when I happened to look round and saw Aus riding after us. I hailed al-Hārith, but he was in a temper and didn't answer me.

'Look,' I said. 'There's Aus son of Hāritha galloping after us.'

'What have we to do with him?' he replied. 'Ride on.'

When Aus saw we were not stopping for him, he shouted out.

'Hi, Hārith, wait for me a bit!'

So we halted, and he delivered the speech his wife had composed for him. When he had finished, al-Hārith wheeled about and returned with him thoroughly happy. What happened after that I only know by report. It seems that on entering his house Aus said to his wife:

'Call So-and-so,' naming his eldest daughter.

The girl came in.

'Daughter, this is al-Hārith son of 'Auf,' Aus explained. 'One of the Lords of the Arabs,' he added. 'He's come looking for a wife. I'd like to have him marry you. What do you say?'

'No, don't do that,' the girl entreated.

'Why ever not?' asked the surprised father.

'I'm no beauty, and I've an awkward character,' she explained. 'And it isn't as though I'm his cousin, that he should feel obliged to consider the fact of my being a kinswoman. He's no neighbour of yours either, so he doesn't need to be shy of you. In view of all that I'm not so sure that one day he won't get annoyed with me over something and divorce me, and then I'll be in a fine mess.'

'Very well. You can go, God bless you,' Aus said. 'Call me So-and-so,' mentioning his second daughter.

She summoned her, and Aus spoke to her as he had spoken to her sister. She gave him a similar answer.

'I'm a bit of a fool, and I've no accomplishments,' she said. 'I'm not so sure that one day he won't get annoyed with me over something and divorce me, and you know what'll happen to me then. It isn't as though he's my cousin, that he should feel obliged to consider my rights. He's no neighbour of yours either, so he doesn't need to be shy of you.'

'God bless you, go,' Aus said. 'Call me Buhaisa,' referring to his youngest daughter.

She was fetched, and he said the same thing to her as to the two others.

'It's up to you,' Buhaisa answered meekly.

'I put up the same proposal to your two sisters, but they both refused,' Aus explained. However, he didn't tell her what their answer had been.

'Well, I'm the pretty one,' the young girl said. 'I'm accomplished, I've a very lofty character—and a most distinguished father,' she added with a smile. 'If he divorces me, God will never be good to him again.'

'God bless you,' her father exclaimed happily. He then came out to give us the news.

'Hārith, I'll marry you to Buhaisa daughter of Aus.'

'I accept,' al-Hārith replied.

Aus bade her mother make her ready and put her trousseau in order. He commanded them to pitch a tent, and invited al-Hārith to take up his abode there. When the girl was dressed up as befitted a bride, Aus sent her in to al-Hārith. She entered the tent and remained with him a while. Then (said Khārīja son of Sinān) he came out to me.

'Have you finished your job?' I asked delicately.

'No, by God,' al-Hārith frowned.

'How's that?'

'When I stretched out my hand towards her she cried, "Stop that! What, here in front of my father and brothers? That's utterly impossible."'

Then he ordered the camels to be brought, and we went on our way, taking her along with us. We rode on for a considerable distance, then he shouted to me.

'You go on ahead.'

I went on ahead, while he turned off the road with her. It wasn't long before he caught me up again.

'Finished?' I asked.

'No, by God.'

'Why not?'

'She said to me, "What, would you treat me like a slave-girl out of the market, or a woman taken in battle? No, first you must kill the camels and slaughter the sheep and invite the Arabs, and do all that should be done for the like of me."'

'Ah, I see she's a girl of spirit and good sense,' I remarked. 'I've high hopes she'll be a wife who'll bear you fine sons, inshallah.'

With that we rode on, until we arrived back in our own country. There he prepared the camels and sheep, then he went in to her, but soon came out again.

'Finished?' I asked once more.

'No,' he answered.

'Why not now?'

'I went in to her, desiring her mightily. "You see, we've made ready the flocks," I said to her. "I was told you were a man of honour," she said to me. "I don't see much sign of it in you." "How's that?" I asked. "Why," she answered, "how is it you find time to go about marrying women, while the Arabs are busy killing each other?" (For all this happened during the war between 'Abs and Dhubyān.) "Then what do you want me to do?" I demanded. "Go out and make peace between those people, then return to your family, and you shan't miss anything that time."'

'Ah,' I said again, 'I see she's a girl of spirit and good sense. She's spoken well.'

'Then you come out with me,' al-Ḥārith answered.

So we went forth to the warring tribes, and proposed peace to them. They made peace on condition that the slain should be counted, and the side that had killed the greater number should pay proportionate reparations to the other. We ourselves collected the blood-dues—3,000 camels, in three years—and then returned home in the highest repute.

The chronicler adds that their fame and the honoured name they thus won continued fresh in men's memories down to his own day. So finally al-Ḥārith went in to his wife, and she bore him many sons and daughters.

Even so, the peace was within an ace of being broken again, before it had been firmly established; and once more it was al-Ḥārith, with another, who came to the rescue. This is how Sir Charles Lyall reports the precarious events:

'Now while 'Abs and Dhubyân were covenanting together for peace, a thing befell that came nigh to setting them at war again. 'Abs had pitched their tents in esh-Sharabbeh at a place called Qaṭan, and near them were many tents of Dhubyân. Now there was a man of Dhubyân, Ḥoseyn son of ḌamḌam by name, whose father ḌamḌam had been slain in the war by 'Antarah son of Sheddâd, and his brother Herim by Ward son of Ḥâbis, both of the house of Ghâlib, of 'Abs; and Ḥoseyn swore that he would not wash his head until he had slain Ward or some other man of the line of Ghâlib; but none knew of this oath of his. And el-Ḥārith son of 'Auf son of Abû Ḥārith and his cousin Khârijuh son of Sinân had already taken upon themselves the burden of the price of blood, and 'Abs and Dhubyân mixed freely together. And a man of 'Abs, of the house of Makhzûm, came to the tent of Ḥoseyn son of ḌamḌam and entered therein. "Who art thou, O Man?" said Ḥoseyn. "Of 'Abs," said he; and Ḥoseyn did not cease to ask his lineage until he found that he was of the house of Ghâlib; and he slew him. And news of this came to el-Ḥārith son of 'Auf and Herim son of Sinân his cousin, and it was grievous

to them. And the news came also to the men of 'Abs, and they mounted and rode in a body towards el-Ḥārith's tent. And when el-Ḥārith heard of the anger that was in their hearts, and how they purposed to slay him in requital for the death of their brother, (for Ḥoseyn son of ḌamḌam was also of the line of Murrah, as was el-Ḥārith son of 'Auf,) he sent to meet them a hundred camels, and with them his son, and said to the messenger—"Say to them—'Are the camels dearer to you, or your own lives?'" And the messenger went forth to meet them, and spoke after this wise. And er-Rabî' son of Ziyâd, who was the leader of 'Abs in that day (—for Qeys son of Zuheyr, their chief in the war, though he counselled the peace, yet took no part therein himself, but withdrew from his kin and went away to 'Omân, where he became a Christian and spent the remainder of his days in prayer and repentance: for he said—"By God! never again can I look in the face a woman of Ghatafân: for verily I have slain her father or her brother or some other dear to her")—er-Rabî' cried to his following—"O my people! your brother has sent you this message—'Are the camels dearer to you, or will ye rather take my son and slay him in the stead of your slain?'" And they said—"We will take the camels and be reconciled, and conclude our covenant of peace." So peace was made, and el-Ḥārith and Herim gained the more praise.'

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Such is the background to the *Mu'allaqa* which Zuhair son of Abû Salmâ composed in his old age to stress the horrors of internecine strife and to celebrate the virtues of peace. It was a very tired man indeed who uttered the pathetic lines:

Weary am I of the burdens of life; whoever lives  
fourscore years, believe you me, grows very weary.  
I have seen the Fates trample like a purblind camel; those  
they strike  
they slay, those they miss are left to live on into dotage.



His real name was Rabī'a son of Rabāh, son of Qurra, of the tribe of Muzaina. His mother was a woman of Dhubyān, and he grew up not among the Muzaina but in the territory of the Ghatafān in Nejd. He belonged to a remarkable family of poets; not only did his father compose, but also his uncle Bashāma son of al-Ghadīr and his sisters Salmā and al-Khansā'—the latter indeed survived him to speak his death-dirge. His son Ka'b wrote many verses including one of the most famous poems in the Arabic language, the *Ode of the Cloak*, commemorating his conversion to Islam; a second son, Bujair, was a poet too, as also was his grandson 'Uqba and his great-grandson al-'Auwām. In addition to uttering his own verses, Zuhair transmitted those of his stepfather Aus son of Hajar; the celebrated 'dwarf' poet al-Ḥuṭai'a performed a like service for him, and so his influence passed on to Jamīl, and after him to Kuthaiyir.

Very little is related of Zuhair's life. Unlike Imr al-Qais and Tarafa he always enjoyed affluent circumstances and did not need to employ his talent upon courting potential patrons; instead he appears as the typical spokesman of his adopted tribe of Ghatafān, and affords a good illustration of the political function of poetry in ancient Arabia. Later critics praised his work as being free of fulsome panegyric, and couched in simple language without a straining after rare and out-of-the-way words. He was described by al-Aṣma'ī as being, like al-Ḥuṭai'a, a 'slave to poetry'; by this the eminent philologist meant that he was not a 'natural' composer, but polished his verses with meticulous care. Evidence of this characteristic is furnished by his seven *ḥauliyāt*, odes the production of which occupied a whole year each.

Ibn Qutaiba remarks on the element of religion and self-control present in Zuhair's verse. Two couplets from his *Mu'allaqā* are often cited as proof that he believed in a resurrection:

Do not conceal from Allah whatever is in your breasts  
hoping it may be hidden; Allah knows whatever is concealed

and either it's postponed, and put in a book, and stored away for the Day of Reckoning, or it's hastened, and punished betimes.

Yet Father Cheikho's decision to call him a Christian poet is without justification; neither did he become a Muslim, though his son Bujair was an early convert, while Ka'b after first attacking the new faith afterwards made handsome amends with *The Cloak*. 'Probably he died before Islam,' writes R. A. Nicholson, 'though it is related that when he was a centenarian he met the Prophet, who cried out on seeing him, "O God, preserve me from his demon!"'—a reference to the old desert belief that poets were inspired by supernatural beings.

The moral, not to say moralising flavour of his poetry, sprung no doubt of a combination of factors—the religious consciousness awakening in Arabia towards the end of the sixth century, and his own advanced years—naturally enough recommended him warmly to the first generation of the Faithful. The Caliph 'Umar called him 'the poet's poet,' explaining his approval by the fact that Zuhair 'never indulged in obscurity and never used outlandish words.' The poet al-Ḥuṭai'a was pardonably partial to his master, of whom he said, 'I never saw any man like him who so nimbly rode the backs of rhymes and so firmly grasped their reins whatever the purpose he may have had in mind, whether encomium or censure.' Jarīr is stated by his son 'Ikrama to have said on one occasion that Zuhair was 'the most poetical' of the pre-Islamic poets; the same estimate was reached by the Umayyad critic al-Aḥnaf son of Qais. Yet there were those who picked holes in his verses—a favourite diversion of the pedants; a good instance of their approach is the objection taken to Zuhair's description of frogs.

They emerge from water-channels the water whereof is  
turbid  
clambering on the palm-trunks for fear of grief and drowning.

'Frogs don't come out of the water for fear of grief and drowning,' the humourless reviewers remarked. 'The true reason they do that is to lay their eggs on the banks.'

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Zuhair's poetry was first collected by al-Aṣma'ī, whose recension as usual underlies the commentary of al-Shantamarī and Ahlwardt's edition, followed by that of the Swedish scholar C. Landberg who printed verses and glosses in the second volume of his *Primeurs arabes* (Leiden, 1889). Ibn al-Nadīm mentions further recensions made by al-Sukkārī and Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 939); of the former more will be said hereafter. Though the text of Ahlwardt and Landberg is excellent as it goes, it has been wholly superseded by the edition prepared by Aḥmad Zakī al-'Adawī and printed at the Egyptian State Library in 1944. Behind this last publication is a long and not uninteresting story.

'In the year 1869,'—I quote the account given by the late Friedrich Krenkow—'the two German Arabic scholars Socin and Prym on their journey to the East found in the possession of a private person the ancient manuscript' which is the subject of the present discussion. 'The owner was not willing to sell it but permitted a copy to be made which was completed according to a final note in the transcript on the day when the crown prince of Prussia (late emperor Frederic) entered Damascus.' Such was the prelude. When Albert Socin paid his second visit to Damascus in 1873 he called on his friend Amīn al-Zaitūnī, the reluctant possessor of the coveted volume, once again, and this time found him in a more amenable mood; a price was agreed, and the book, which had passed through many hands since it was compiled more than seven centuries earlier, changed hands again. It contained the collected poems of Zuhair and of his son Ka'b, with commentaries; the scribe had completed his task on 24 April 1139. Socin returned with his prize to Germany, and he and Prym wrote a brief description of the manuscript, 'Die Diwane des Zuhair und Ka'b,' which was printed in Volume XXXI of the

*Journal of the German Oriental Society*. The title-page of the codex bore an inscription, admittedly in a later hand, assigning authorship of the commentary to Tha'lab. However, 'Prym had not noticed'—I return to Krenkow—'that the first leaf of the manuscript is a later addition as also the title-page which attributes the recension to Ta'lab, a scholar known to have published an edition of the *Diwān* of Zuhair of which a number of old copies exist. Prym had overlooked that at the end of the *Diwān* of Zuhair there is a note which clearly states that the text is that of the earlier scholar as-Sukkārī, who is known as the editor of a number of collections of the pagan and early Islamic poets. A comparison made by me of the *Diwān* of Zuhair in the recension of Ta'lab as found in the Escorial manuscript shows that though both recensions are based upon the work of older authors, they differ in the arrangements of the poems and each recension has some verses not found in the other.'

We must now return to 1892, when K. Dyroff published at Munich a dissertation, *Zur Geschichte der Überlieferung des Zuhairdiwans*, in which he took particular account of the two manuscripts preserved in the rich Escorial collection. At his death Socin bequeathed his valuable library to the German Oriental Society. Krenkow's interest was engaged rather by the part of Socin's codex containing the poems of Ka'b, and 'in 1908 the German Oriental Society lent me, a private person, the transcript made in Damascus and I made a copy which I completed in October of that year. As the transcript was apparently made in great haste and not very satisfactory I asked the Society for the loan of the original and made a second copy some time in 1910, adding in an appendix verses by the poet found in other works. At that time I had not the time to devote to an edition nor had I the help of a library containing the books needful for such work as I was living far away from any centre of learning. Through my friend Dr Geyer I became acquainted with Dr Kowalski who had recently published his valuable edition of the poems of Ka'is ibn al-Ḥaṭīm and our correspondence led to him deciding to

undertake the publication of the *Dīwān* . . . and some time in 1914 I sent him my two copies. To make sure that my copies were accurate he asked the German Society for the loan of the original which they granted with their usual liberality and he was able to rectify the errors I had made in copying, as the manuscript is deteriorating on account of the corrosive nature of the ink in which it is written. I am not sure, but I believe, that he had the original before the war of 1914-18.'

Krenkow had long established his home in Cambridge by the time he wrote these reminiscences of a distant past. The tale he had to tell was all concerned with the son's poetry and not the father's, but the fascination of his narrative will compensate, I think, for its irrelevance. 'The war changed everything and in the following years Professor Kowalski devoted most of his studies to Turkish literature and dialects and the *Dīwān* of Ka'b was laid aside, though in the period between the two world-wars I had several times occasion to ask him about verses cited in the *Kitāb al-Ma'ānī* by ibn ẖutaiba in order to verify them with the text of the *Dīwān*. With the end of the second war Professor Kowalski again turned to the poems of Ka'b and after several attempts by him and myself to find a publisher in England or Egypt he was able to write me that he had arranged to have the work printed in Krakow. He was then already very ill and the printing progressed very slowly, partly due to his illness in hospital, and at the time of his untimely death in May 1948 only fifty-six pages of the Arabic text had received his Imprimatur. As I had been reading the proofs with him, Mme Kowalska asked me if I would see the remainder of the work through the press, to which I agreed, considering it a sacred duty to a departed friend.' Friedrich Krenkow does not mention, what I know and feel should be recorded, that he was himself by 1948 an old and ailing man; it was truly heroic of him to undertake this last labour, though sustained by the memory of a lifetime's friendship. Kowalski's edition finally came out under the auspices of the Polish Academy in 1950. Krenkow died shortly afterwards.

We resume the history of the first part of Socin's manuscript back in 1934 when Krenkow wrote in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*: 'The poems of Zuhair have come down to us, apart from the *Mu'allaka*, in three collections, the oldest by al-Sukkarī (died 275 = 888) preserved in the unique MS. Socin in the possession of the German Oriental Society, the recension by the Kūfī grammarian Tha'lab (d. 291 = 904) preserved in two manuscripts in the Escorial and two or three in Stambul, and a third abbreviated text with the commentary of the Spanish scholar al-A'lam (d. 476 = 1083). The printed editions are all based upon the latter, which is supposed to contain the text as edited by the Baṣrian grammarian al-Aṣma'ī. As the latter employed methods which obscured the ancient tradition rather than elucidated it, by making selections, it is highly desirable that we should have a new edition of the poems of Zuhair based upon the two older recensions, which are in the spirit of the older school of Arabic scholars. The work of K. Dyroff has only partly cleared the issue, especially as he did not recognise that we had two entirely different recensions in the texts which he used.' In 1937 Professor Carl Brockelmann in the first supplement of his immortal *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* echoed this view: 'Eine Neubearbeitung nach as-Sukkarī und Ta'lab ist erwünscht.'

A new chapter in this tangled romance of high scholarship opened with a conversation between the late Professor August Fischer and Professor Maṣṣūr Fahmī, by then Director of the Egyptian State Library; the setting was presumably an early meeting of the Royal Egyptian Academy of which both were original members. Later Fischer wrote an elegant and learned letter to:

'My dear Professor Doctor Maṣṣūr Fahmī Bey, Director-General of the Egyptian Library,

'I send you my best greetings, and thereafter: I am sending to you to-day the ancient manuscript about which I spoke to you previously, that manuscript which is in the possession of the German Oriental Society at Halle, acquired as a legacy from Professor Albert Socin. This ancient manuscript contains two

*Diwāns* of ancient Arabic poetry, one being that of the great pre-Islamic poet Zuhair son of Abū Salmā, while the other is that of his son Ka'b son of Zuhair, author of *The Cloak*. I told you before that in my opinion this ancient manuscript deserves to be photographed, and the photograph added to the collection of manuscripts in the Egyptian Library, and that it also deserves to be published in an edition based upon this photographic copy. To-day I am still of the same opinion. . . .

In the course of this letter Fischer discussed the authorship of the commentary on Zuhair, which he unhesitatingly assigned to Tha'lab and not to al-Sukkari. As for the latter, he agreed that he wrote the commentary on the *Diwān* of Ka'b as clearly stated in the colophon; the ascription to Tha'lab on the later, but still respectably old title-page was an error. The arguments advanced by the veteran German orientalist were cogent and well-reasoned, and may be studied by specialists at their leisure; it is not proposed to rehearse them here. His advice was taken; the Socin manuscript, which had made so many journeys and was now back in the Muslim world again, was duly photographed and returned to Germany. The new edition was set in hand. It is only to be regretted that, doubtless owing to the difficulties created by the outbreak of war in 1939, the Egyptian scholar charged with this honourable task did not collate the Escorial and Istanbul manuscripts but contented himself with comparing the three copies at hand in Cairo. In the course of his work Aḥmad Zakī al-'Adawī investigated afresh the question of authorship, and came to the same conclusion as Fischer—the commentary on Zuhair was from Tha'lab's pen, that on Ka'b was written by the older al-Sukkari.

\* \* \*

Abu 'l-'Abbās Aḥmad son of Yaḥyā, son of Zaid, son of Saiyār, al-Baghdādī al-Shaibānī, commonly Tha'lab ('Fox'), was born at Baghdad in 815, in the second year of al-Ma'mūn's reign. His earliest memory was connected with that great Caliph: 'I saw al-Ma'mūn when he arrived from Khorasan in the year 204

(= 819). He came out by the Gate of Iron, making for the Palace of al-Ruṣāfa, and the people were drawn up in two ranks in the Prayer-ground. My father had hoisted me on his hand, and as al-Ma'mūn passed by he lifted me up and said to me, "That is al-Ma'mūn, and this is year 4." I remember that to-day as clearly as when it happened; I was about four at the time.' Another childhood reminiscence was of a different kind: 'I remember very well indeed the death of al-Farrā'; it happened when I was at the elementary school.' Tha'lab must already have been a very impressionable scholar, for the esteemed Kufan grammarian died in 822. Perhaps it was this incident which inspired him later to commit all the writings of al-Farrā' to memory. 'I began to look at Arabic linguistics, poetry and philology in 216 (= 831); then I began to study the *Rules* of al-Farrā' when I was 18. By the time I was 25 there was not a single proposition of his which I had not by heart, together with its exact place in the book. There remains at the present time not a single item in any of al-Farrā's books which I have not memorised. I devoted myself to grammar more than to anything else,' he adds. 'It was only after I had mastered grammar perfectly that I turned my attention to poetry, etymology and rare words. I studied under Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-A'rābī for more than ten years.' Ibn al-A'rābī, himself an eminent philologist who died about 845 at the age of 81, conceived such a respect for the erudition of his brilliant young pupil that he would often consult his opinion on points about which he was doubtful.

Though a native of Baghdad, Tha'lab was reckoned by the Kufans as one of their three most outstanding grammarians. This was because the teachers under whom he placed himself were all of that school—especially Ibn al-A'rābī, who introduced him to the writings of al-Kisā'ī (d. 805). Yet despite his perfect book-knowledge, it is said that in conversation he was quite capable of breaking all the rules of grammar, and his epistolary style is described as most commonplace, if not positively vulgar. He lived in the days when the rivalry between al-Kufa and al-Basra

was reputedly at its sharpest, and he singled out as a representative of the Basran school eminently worthy of his challenge the illustrious al-Mubarrad (d. 898), author among other books of the great *al-Kāmil* which William Wright so capably edited. Yet it is well to be mindful of Rudi Paret's remarks: 'The later Arab grammarians class Tha'lab as belonging to the so-called Kūfa school, which is said to have reached its zenith and also its end in him. But, as G. Weil has shown, one cannot really talk of a regular school of "Kūfan" grammarians; when its alleged representatives are considered to form an independent group, this is simply an invention of the later grammarians, who considered themselves the natural continuers of the Baṣra tradition and thought that the state of affairs in grammatical study with its opposing schools in their time must also have existed in the past. Tha'lab no doubt continued the tradition of al-Farrā' but he was no more able than the other "Kūfans" to do more than establish his grammatical method, still less to develop it. His interest also was too much devoted to accumulating material to be memorised and to acquiring a knowledge of special linguistic forms, to enable him to develop a fruitful activity in the field of method.'

Tha'lab was engaged by the Governor of Baghdad, Muḥammad son of 'Abd Allāh, son of Ṭāhir, as private tutor to his son Ṭāhir, and a special apartment in the Governor's residence was placed at his disposal; the arrangement continued for thirteen years, his monthly stipend being 1,000 dirhams in addition to a very substantial daily allowance in kind—seven measures of brown bread, one measure of white wheat-loaf, seven pounds of meat, and fodder for his beast. He also earned considerably as a public teacher, and, at the vizier Ismā'il son of Bulbul's suggestion, the Caliph al-Muwaffaq granted him a handsome official stipend. For all that, he is stated to have been a great miser, and spent so little on himself that when he died in 904, having seen no fewer than eleven Caliphs, he left his daughter a fortune. The manner of his death was pathetic enough. In his later years he had become very deaf. One Friday he was returning home from mosque,

accompanied by a group of friends, and as he went he had his nose buried in a copy-book and paid heed to nothing else. It happened that presently a boy came along riding a mule, which shied at the bunch of savants clattering the roadway. Tha'lab's companions scattered when they heard the clatter of hoofs, but he was too deaf and too preoccupied to notice anything amiss; the mule charged into him, and he fell head-first into a hole in the road, whence he was carried dying to his house. He trained many pupils who achieved eminence in their turn, the most notable among them being Abū 'Umar al-Zāhid al-Muṭarriz (d. 956), affectionately called Ghulām Tha'lab ('Tha'lab's Servant').

Ibn al-Nadīm lists 22 books of Tha'lab's known to him; curiously enough there is no special mention, in his *Catalogue* or elsewhere, of a commentary on the poetry of Zuhair, though we have a reference to a collection he made of the great pre-Islamic poets 'such as al-A'shā, the two al-Nābighas, Ṭufail, al-Ṭirimmāḥ, etc.' Of this massive production only five works have survived; the best-known is *al-Faṣīḥ*, on correct Arabic usage. It was my good fortune to find, in Sir Chester Beatty's library in Dublin, and to publish in fascimile a hitherto unknown supplement to his work, composed by Ibn Fāris (d. 1005); the unique manuscript is in the handwriting of Yāqūt, the famous geographer, who transcribed it from the author's holograph when he was in Merv, shortly before the Tartars descended and set all Persia aflame.

\* \* \*

Zuhair's *Mu'allāqa* first appeared in Arabic types at Leipzig in 1792, the editor being F. C. Rosenmüller. Before that the poem had of course been published in Latin transliteration by Sir William Jones, who gave this summary of its 'argument.'

#### *The Poem of Zohair*

The war of DAHIS, of which *Amriolkais* is by some supposed to have been the cause, had raged near forty years, if the *Arabian*

account be true, between the tribes of ABS and DHOBYAN, who both began at length to be tired of so bloody and ruinous a contest; a treaty was therefore proposed and concluded; but HOSEIN, the son of DEMDEM, whose brother HAREM had been slain by WARD, the son of HABES, had taken a solemn oath, not unusual among the Arabs, *that he would not bathe his head in water*, until he had avenged the death of his brother, by killing either WARD himself, or one of his nearest relations. His head was not long unbathed; and he is even supposed to have violated the law of hospitality by slaying a guest, whom he found to be an ABSITE descended lineally from the common ancestor GALEB. This malignant and vindictive spirit gave great displeasure to HARETH and HAREM, two virtuous chiefs of the same tribe with HOSEIN; and, when the ABSITES were approaching in warlike array to resent the infraction of the treaty, HARETH sent his own son to the tent of their chief with *a present of a hundred fine camels*, as an atonement for the murder of their countryman, and a message importing his firm reliance on their honour, and his hope, *that they would prefer the milk of the camels to the blood of his son*. Upon this *Rabeiah*, the prince of ABS, having harangued his troops, and received their approbation, sent back the youth with this answer; that 'he accepted the camels as an expiatory gift, and would supply the imperfection of the former treaty by a sincere and durable peace.'

In commemoration of this noble act, ZOHAIK, then a very old man, composed the following panegyrick on *Hareth and Harem*; but the opening of it, like all the others, is amatory and elegiack: it has also something of the dramattick form.

The poet, supposed to be travelling with a friend, recognises the place where the tent of his mistress had been pitched twenty years before: he finds it wild and desolate; but his imagination is so warmed by associated ideas of former happiness, that he seems to discern a company of damsels, with his favourite in the midst of them, of whose appearance and journey he gives a very lively picture; and thence passes, rather abruptly, to the praises of the

two peace-makers and their tribe; inveighs against the malignity of HOSEIN; personifies *War*, the miseries of which he describes in a strain highly figurative; and concludes with a number of fine maxims, not unlike the proverbs of *Solomon*, which he repeats to his friend as a specimen of his wisdom acquired by long experience.

The measure is the same with that of the first and second poems.

A suitable passage to illustrate both the moralising strain in Zuhair and the styles of the various translations is the sequence on the horrors of war. Jones was first in the field:

- 27 Attempt not to conceal from GOD the designs which your bosoms contain; for that, which you strive to hide, GOD perfectly knows.
- 28 He sometimes defers the punishment, but registers the crime in a volume, and reserves it for the day of account; sometimes he accelerates the chastisement, and heavily it falls!
- 29 War is a dire fiend, as you have known by experience; nor is this a new or a doubtful assertion concerning her.
- 30 When you expelled her from your plains, you expelled her covered with infamy; but, when you kindled her flame, she blazed and raged.
- 31 She ground you, as the mill grinds the corn with its lower stone: like a female camel she became pregnant; she bore twice in one year; and, at her last labour, she was the mother of twins.

There are serious errors in this rendering, as not infrequently in Jones's version; but his achievement was for all that very solid. We will pass over Hartmann's German prose, and go forward to the German verse translation published by Rückert at Stuttgart in 1846, in the first volume of his *Hamása, oder die ältesten arabischen Volkslieder*.

Verberget nicht vor Gott, was ihr hegt in eurer Brust,  
verheimlichend! was Gott ihr verbergt, ist ihm bewuszt;

Sei es nun aufgehoben, und in das Buch gestellt  
zum Tag der Rechnung, oder die Strafe gleich gefällt.

Der Krieg ist, wie gekostet ihr habet sein Gericht,  
nicht ein vom Hörensagen mutmasslicher Bericht.

Ja, wo ihr ihn erwecket, erweckt ihr eine Schand,  
und wo ihr auf ihn störet, ist aufgestört ein Brand.

Das Weh wird euch zermalmen, schwer wie ein Mülstein  
ruht;  
zweimal im Jahr wirds hecken, und werfen Zwillingsbrut.

The following year A. P. Caussin de Perceval, Professor of Arabic at the Collège Royal de France, published his three-volume *Essai sur l'histoire des arabes* in which he offered a prose version of some extracts from Zuhair's *Mu'allaga*.

Ne tentez pas de dérober aux regards de Dieu vos secrets  
sentiments; Dieu connaît tout ce qui est caché.

Si quelquefois il diffère sa vengeance, il l'inscrit sur le livre de  
ses décrets, et la réserve pour le jour où il tiendra compte à  
chacun de ses actions; souvent aussi il punit le crime par un  
châtiment soudain.

Vous connaissez les maux de la discorde; vous en avez fait la  
dure expérience, et ce n'est point sur les rapports douteux que  
vous vous en formez une idée.

Si vous ranimez la guerre, vous attirerez sur vous l'ignominie;  
la guerre, comme un animal féroce, s'acharnera sur vous, si vous  
l'excitez; comme le feu, elle vous embrasera;

comme la meule qui broie le grain, elle vous écrasera; comme  
la chamelle qui conçoit chaque année et produit chaque fois des  
jumeaux, elle sera féconde en malheurs.

It is a free and elegant rendering, and one cannot help wishing that its maker had attempted more. In 1856 came Wolff with his version, interesting to compare with Rückert's:

Verberget doch nicht Gotte, was ist in eurer Brust;

Denn was man auch verbirget, Gott ist es wohl bewusst.

Bald wird die Straf' verschoben, und in das Buch gestellt

Zum Tag der Rechenschaft, bald unplötzlich sie herfällt.

Und was der Krieg sei, habt ihr erfahren und verschmeckt,

Und was von ihm ich melde, ist nimmer euch verdeckt.

Wenn ihr ihn aufregt, reget ihr immer Arges auf;

Und wenn ihr ihn anzündet, wird zündend gleich sein Lauf.

Und er zermalmt euch, wie der Mühlstein zermalmt die Frucht,

Und zweimal jährlich werden ihm Zwillings' ungesucht.

Thereafter in 1878, at Calcutta, came C. J. Lyall's rhythms:

It boots not to hide from God aught evil within your breasts:  
it will not be hid—what men would hold back from God,  
He knows.

It may be its meed comes late; in the Book is the wrong set  
down

for the Reckoning Day; it may be that vengeance is swift  
and stern.

And War is not aught but what ye know well and have  
tasted oft:

not of her are the tales ye tell a doubtful or idle thing.

When ye set her on foot, ye start her with words of little  
praise;

but the mind for her grows with her growth, till she  
bursts into blazing flame.

She will grind you as grist of the mill that falls on the skin  
beneath;

year by year shall her womb conceive, and the fruit thereof  
shall be twins.

'The translation offered is as literal as I have found it possible to make it consistently with English idiom and the rhythm,' Lyall appended. 'Where it seemed necessary, I have explained deviations from absolute literalness in his notes.' The notes are abundant and learned, but it is there that we have to look to discover the arresting symbol of the she-camel in the last line of the passage quoted.

In 1903 the Blunts offered the following:

For you may not hide from God your dealings, what though  
in secrecy  
deep in your heart of hearts you seal it. Nathless He  
knoweth it,  
Knoweth and taketh note in patience, sure of His reckoning  
till the day of the great counting, waiteth or hasteneth.  
War! Ye have learned it all, its teachings, well have ye  
tasted them.  
These no tales are that I tell you. Each is a certainty.  
A smouldering coal ye flung it lightly, blindly despising it.  
Lo, into raging flame it leapeth, wind-lit, destroyeth you.  
Ye are ground as corn by Hate's ill-grinding, flat on her  
grinding-skin.  
Nay, a too fruitful camel she. Twins hath she borne to you.

In 1905 J. Hausheer published at Berlin the text of Zuhair's *Mu'allāqa* with the commentary of Abū Ja'far Aḥmad son of Muḥammad al-Naḥḥās (d. 950); he had successfully presented this learned exercise as part of his doctoral dissertation at Halle as long ago as 1889, but such are the vicissitudes of scholarship. Two years later R. A. Nicholson gave us this:

Will ye hide from God the guilt ye dare not unto Him  
disclose?  
Verily, what thing soever ye would hide from God, He  
knows.

Either it is laid up meantime in a scroll and treasured there  
For the day of retribution, or avenged all unaware.  
War ye have known and war have tasted: not by hearsay are  
ye wise.

Raise no more the hideous monster! If ye let her raven, she  
cries  
Ravenously for blood and crushes, like a mill-stone, all  
below,  
And from her twin-conceiving womb she brings forth woe  
on woe.

In 1913 O. Rescher, who had two years previously published at Istanbul the commentary of Abū Bakr Muḥammad son of al-Qāsim al-Anbārī (d. 939) on the *Mu'allāqa* of Ṭarafa, printed in the *Monde Oriental* the same scholar's glosses on Zuhair's ode.

The work of publication and interpretation continues, as we stand within twenty-five years of the bicentenary of Sir William Jones's splendid initiative. Much remains yet to be done; meanwhile it is time to have a new version of Zuhair in English, and that is now presented.



## MU'ALLAQA OF ZUHAIR

Are there still blackened orts in the stone-waste of Ed-Darráj  
and El-Mutathallam, mute witnesses to where Umm Aufá once  
dwelt?

A lodging where she abode in Er-Rakmatán, that appears  
like criss-cross tattooings upon the sinews of a wrist—  
there the wild cows and white antelopes wander, herd upon  
herd,

and their young ones spring up out of their several couches.  
There it was I stood after twenty livelong years,  
hard put to it to recognise the lodging, deeply as I meditated:  
blackened stones marking the spot where the cauldron was  
slung

and a trench like the debris of a cistern still unbreached.  
When I recognised the abode, I said to that lodging-place,  
'Good morning to you, lodging-place: well may you fare!'

Look well, my friend—do you see any litter-borne ladies  
travelling along the high land above the waters of Jurtham?  
They will have passed El-Kanán to the right and the rough  
grounds thereabouts

(and in El-Kanán how many foes, aye, and friends are  
dwelling)

their howdahs hung with costly cloths, and fine-spun veils  
whose fringes are rose-red, the very hue of dragon's blood;  
issuing from Es-Soobán, they have threaded its twisting course  
mounted on Kainite camels sleek and excellently nourished,  
swerved through hollow Es-Soobán, ascended its rugged ridge  
wearing the sweet coyness of the luxuriously nurtured;  
it is as though the thrums of dyed wool littering every spot  
where they alighted were uncrushed berries of the red faná.  
With the dawn they arose, and sunrise saw them stirring,  
then into Wadi Er-Rass they plunged like hand into mouth,

and when they came to the waters blue in the brimming well  
they cast down their sticks, as one who pitches his tent to  
stay;

a sweet diversion are they to the gentle, a pretty sight  
well worth the scrutiny of those who like looking at beauty.

The two conciliators from Ghaiz bin Murra laboured for peace  
after the tribe's concord had been shattered by bloodshed:  
so I swear, by the Holy House about which circumambulate  
men of Koraish and Jurhum, whose hands constructed it,  
a solemn oath I swear—you have proved yourselves fine  
masters

in all matters, be the thread single or twisted double.

You alone mended the rift between Abs and Dhubyán  
after long slaughter, and much grinding of the perfume of  
Manshim,

and you declared, 'If we achieve peace broad and sure  
by ample giving and fair speaking, we shall live secure.'

So thereafter you found yourselves in the best of situations,  
far removed from refractoriness and awful guilt,  
great in the councils of Ma'add (be you ever right guided!);  
and he who takes lawful treasure of glory is truly great.

Various spoils of your inheritance were then driven forth  
among the people, many young camels with ears slit:  
the wounds were healed by that offering of hundreds of beasts  
paid in parcels successive by one who sinned not in the strife;  
beasts paid in parcels by one tribe to another as indemnity  
and they shed not between them so much as a cupper's glass of  
blood.

Ho, carry this message from me to the Confederates  
and Dhubyán: 'Have you now sworn every binding oath?'

Do not conceal from Allah whatever is in your breasts  
hoping it may be hidden; Allah knows whatever is concealed,

and either it's postponed, and put in a book, and stored away for the Day of Reckoning, or it's hastened, and punished betimes.

War is nothing else but what you've known and yourselves tasted,  
it is not a tale told at random, a vague conjecture;  
when you stir it up, it's a hateful thing you've stirred up;  
ravenous it is, once you whet its appetite; it bursts aflame,  
then it grinds you as a millstone grinds on its cushion;  
yearly it conceives, birth upon birth, and with twins for issue—  
very ill-omened are the boys it bears you, every one of them  
the like of Ahmar of Ad; then it gives suck, and weans them.  
Yes, war yields you a harvest very different from the bushels  
and pieces of silver those fields in Iraq yield for the villagers.

Tell this to a tribe dwelling in concord, whose authority  
secures  
the whole people, whenever a night of dark trouble visits them,  
a great-hearted folk—the rancorous attains not his vengeful  
purpose  
of them, the refugee though in the wrong is not betrayed.  
They pastured their flocks awhile, thirsting, then brought them  
down  
to deep pools gushing with weapons and gout of blood;  
there they fulfilled dire doom together; then they led back  
their beasts to a pasture noisome and un stomachable.

By my life, a fine tribe they are, that Husain bin Damdam  
brought such grievous and inappropriate wrong upon!  
A secret purpose he had concealed in his heart,  
showed it not openly, displayed not his hand in advance,  
but said, 'I'll accomplish my will, then I'll defend myself  
against my foe with a thousand bridled horses behind me.  
So he charged alone, not alarming the many tents

where already the swift rider Death had cast his baggage  
close by a lion in full panoply, tried in battle,  
mane a-bristle, with sharp claws that were never clipped,  
daring, swift indeed when assaulted to take revenge  
counter-assaulting, ready to assail ere himself was assailed.  
By your life, it was not their lances that drew on them the  
blood

of Ben Naheek, or of him slaughtered at El-Muthallam,  
their spears shared not on the battlefield in the blood of  
Naufal,

no part had they in Wahn's slaying, or Ben El-Mukhazzam's;  
yet I behold they every one paid in full the bloodwit,  
a thousand superadded after a thousand complete.

Whoever refuses to yield to the ends of the spears' iron heels  
shall surely bow to the sharp tips mounted on their upper  
shafts.

Whoever keeps his word goes unblamed; he whose heart is set  
on the sure path of piety needs not to fear or falter.

Whoever is in terror of the ways Death may come, Death shall  
yet slay him

though he aspire to mount to heaven on the rungs of a ladder.

Whoever, being in abundance, grudges to give of his abundance  
to his own folk, shall be dispensed with and reviled.

Whoever suffers people always to be riding upon him,  
and never spares himself humiliation, shall come to rue it.

Whoever fares to foreign parts, reckons an adversary his friend;  
whoever respects not himself is not respected by others.

Whoever defends not his water-tank with his goodly weapons  
will see it broken; whoever assaults not others is himself  
assaulted.

Whoever acts not blandishingly in many matters  
shall be ground by sharp molars and trampled by camel's pads.

Whoever makes of benevolence a shield for his good name  
enhances his honour; whoever is not wary of abuse soon gets it.

Weary am I of the burdens of life; whoever lives  
 fourscore years, believe you me, grows very weary.  
 I have seen the Fates trample like a purblind camel; those they  
 strike  
 they slay, those they miss are left to live on into dotage.

Whatever be the true nature a man possesses,  
 though he may fancy it's hidden from his fellows, it will surely  
 be known.

I know what is happening to-day, and what passed before that  
 yesterday,  
 but as for knowing what to-morrow will bring, there I'm  
 utterly blind.

## FOUR

*The Centenarian*

ON the night (says Ibn Sa'd in his *Annals*) when Mu'āwiya the arch-plotter, having assumed the Caliphate at Jerusalem, came to al-Nukhaila to make his peace with murdered 'Alī's elder son the abdicating al-Ḥasan, in a house in near-by al-Kufa a very old man lay dying. As his death-bed visitors whispered into his ears the Muslim profession of faith, the rehearsing of which would ease his soul's passage into a brighter world, memories of a fantastically long life crowded into his clouded mind; he was, by common report, within sight of his hundred and fiftieth year—some said even more. This was Year 40 of the Flight; in his time the Prophet of Allah had been born, preached the true religion, delivered the Koran, and died—it was already nearly thirty years since he had been laid in the grave at Medina, and much Muslim blood had been shed, some of it by Muslims, in the intervening hectic days of wide conquests and narrow quarrels.

What was it that Muḥammad had said to him? No, that was wrong; it was 'Umar, his second Caliph. 'Recite me some of your poetry, Labīd!' And what had he recited? The Chapter of the Cow, the longest in the Holy Book! 'I would never compose verses again,' he had told 'Umar. 'Not since God taught me the Chapter of the Cow.' How scrupulously had he kept that vow, made in the days of his great enthusiasm for the Faith that removes mountains?

No son waited by the patriarchal poet's bed to close his eyes. Sons he had but they had returned to the desert when he decided

to settle, a townsman, in the brash new garrison city of al-Kufa. Where were they now? Perhaps dead; but here at least was his brother's son, and to him he could utter his last request. 'My boy'—but he was already a greybeard himself—'my boy, your father isn't dying. He's simply fading away. When your father is taken, turn him towards Mecca, then wrap him up in his own robe—let that be his winding-sheet. And don't wail over him. Look out those two platters I used for feeding the poor; fill them, and carry them to the mosque. Then, when the Imam has pronounced the blessing, offer them to the hungry. When they have eaten, say to them, "Come to your brother's funeral!"' The dying man raised his head, and chanted in a wavering voice:

And when you bury your father, lay  
wooden boards over him, and clay,  
and hard, unshifting slabs of stone  
to plug the gaps in the branches strewn  
to keep his cheek from the cold thrust  
of the clinging earth, till he is dust.

He blinked his tired eyes open, and recognised his two daughters who were already weeping. It was to them that he addressed his last words, and they were a poem.

My daughters desire that their father should live on;  
but am I other than a sprout of Rabi'a or Mudar?  
If the time should be come that your father must die,  
pray do not tear your cheeks, or clip your hair.  
Only say, 'He was a man who never betrayed  
his comrade, or cheated his friend, or played him false.'  
So say for a year; then may peace be upon you—  
who weeps for a whole year is beyond reproach.

In his last hours Labid had returned to his first love. Poetry had been his passion, long before the voice of the Prophet crying

in the wilderness had summoned him to the more serious occupation of working for his soul's salvation.

\* \* \*

According to one story it was al-Nābigha, himself one of the six and of the seven, who first recognised Labid's poetical talent. It happened at al-Hira, where al-Nābigha was enjoying the patronage of al-Nu'mān and Labid had newly arrived from the desert. For Abū Qābūs al-Nu'mān III, son of al-Mundhir IV, was now on the Lakhmid throne, destined to be the last of his house that had so long loved poets and served Persia; he was also the first of his line to be baptized a Christian. In those days the Banū 'Āmir were at odds with the Banū 'Abs, and al-Rabi' the 'Absite had wormed his way into the king's favour and influenced him against the rival clan.

Abū 'Aqīl Labid son of Rabi'a, son of Mālik, son of Ja'far, son of Kilāb, son of Rabi'a, son of 'Āmir, son of Ṣa'ṣa'a, son of Mu'āwiya, son of Bakr, son of Hawāzin, son of Manṣūr, son of 'Ikrima, son of Khaṣafa, son of Qais, son of 'Ailān, son of Muḍar was born deep in the Days of Ignorance, long before the incessant feuds of the desert gave way to the miraculous but fragile peace of Islam. His father, a man famed for his generosity, was known as 'the Beggars' Springtime'; his uncle's nickname, 'the Lance-player,' betokened a somewhat grimmer predilection. On his mother's side he was descended from 'Abs, and thus he had an interest in the War of Dāhis.

Now Labid had come to al-Hira upon a deputation from his tribe; and he so brilliantly lampooned the royal favourite that thereafter al-Nu'mān looked more lovingly on the 'Āmirites. It was the first of many occasions on which he stood out as a champion of his tribe in the medium beloved by the ancient Arabs. Al-Rabi' was dismissed ignominiously to the wilderness, while Labid's reputation grew with each new poem he uttered. It is said, however, that he would not allow his verses to be published abroad until after he had composed his greatest ode,

the *Mu'allāqa* which qualified him to take his place beside Imr al-Qais, Ṭarafa and the rest.

But to return to the incident of Labīd's recognition. According to the *Book of Songs*, al-Nābigha observed the young Labīd sitting with his uncles at the gate of al-Nu'mān's palace, and enquired who he might be. On being informed of his genealogy, he went up to him and remarked, 'Boy, your eyes are the eyes of a poet. Do you compose?' 'Yes, uncle,' Labīd replied. 'Then recite me something of your own,' al-Nābigha requested. Labīd thereupon recited the poem beginning:

Spent she not the Spring at the deserted camping-ground?

'Boy,' al-Nābigha exclaimed, 'you are the best poet of the Banū 'Āmir. Let me hear more.' This time Labīd chanted the ode which commences:

There are traces yet of al-Khaula in Er-Rasees, of days long  
past.

This was obviously a complimentary reference to Ṭarafa's *Mu'allāqa*, and an indication of the young bard's ambition to be counted among the great. Al-Nābigha smote his thighs and cried, 'Away with you! Why you're the best poet of all Qais.'

It was in about 630 that Labīd became a Muslim; he was a prominent member of the delegation which went to Medina to arrange the terms on which his tribe and others closely related would adhere to the new political confederation based on acceptance of Muḥammad's claim to be the Messenger of Allah. If the report that Islam silenced his Muse is a fiction, as Brockelmann has argued, at all events he seems to have composed very little poetry during the last thirty years of his life; but increasing senility may also have been a contributory factor in diminishing his inventiveness. When he reached the age of 110 he asked:

Is there not any life left for a man who has lived  
a hundred years, and ten more superadded thereto?

He marked his hundred and twentieth birthday with a weary protest:

I have grown tired of life, and the length my days drag on,  
and of men for ever asking, 'How is Labīd to-day?'  
Time conquers all men, Time the unconquerable  
freshly renewed evermore and ever more extended.  
I see the day come upon me, and after that the night,  
and each of them, alas! departs but to return.

One story reveals Labīd's daughter as a poetess herself, deputising for her father in his extreme old age. Labīd, like his father, was one of the most open-handed of all the Arabs, and had sworn an oath long ago, in the Days of Ignorance, that the East wind should never blow without his giving food to the needy. He had two platters (we have already seen how he remembered them on his death-bed) which he would fill morning and evening and offer for the refreshment of the hungry. One day, when al-Walīd son of 'Uqba was governor of al-Kufa (this would be during 'Uthmān's reign, for he was the third Caliph's half-brother and profited by his nepotic policy, despite the fact that he had once spat in the Prophet's face), the East wind began to blow fiercely. In this emergency al-Walīd mounted the pulpit and addressed the congregation; after counselling them to be patient and put their trust in God, he continued, 'Your brother Labīd vowed in the Days of Ignorance that the East wind should never blow without his feeding the needy. This is such a day; so give him a hand. I'll be the first to do so.' He descended from the rostrum and sent to Labīd a hundred young she-camels with a letter in verse.

I see the butcher whetting his pair of carving-knives  
whenever the winds of Abu 'Aqīl begin to blow.  
Proud-nosed he is, high of head, a man of 'Amir,  
his arms long as the blade of a polished sword.

The son of the Ja'farite is true to his oath  
 despite his infirmities and slender possessions,  
 slaughtering big-humped camels when the swirling skirts  
 of the East wind sweep over him at eventide.

Labīd read these verses and said to his daughter, 'You answer  
 him. By my life, I've lived quite a time, and I'm too tired to reply  
 to a poet.' So his daughter sent this answer:

Whenever the winds of Abu 'Aqīl begin to blow,  
 the moment they blow we call on al-Walīd to help.  
 Proud-nosed he is, right handsome, an 'Abshamī;  
 out of his humanity he has given succour to Labīd  
 with camels humped like hillocks, as though a troop  
 of the sons of Ham were seated on their backs.  
 Abu Wahb, I pray God to requite you with good!  
 We have slaughtered them; now feed us with broth.  
 Be generous twice; the generous man gives again,  
 and I am prepared to swear you'll give once more.

'Excellent!' Labīd exclaimed. 'Only you oughtn't to have  
 asked him for more food.' 'Why, kings are never ashamed of  
 being asked for things,' his daughter replied. 'Now, my dear,  
 you're proving yourself a true poet,' the old courtier laughed.

Though Islam may have taught Labīd that there were higher  
 things to strive after than poetic fame, his ardour for the Faith  
 by no means engendered in him an excessive humility. A mes-  
 senger came to him one day when he was in the mosque to ask  
 him a question on behalf of a certain tribe; he found him leaning  
 as usual on his famous crooked staff. 'Abū 'Aqīl,' the envoy said,  
 'your brothers salute you, and ask you to tell them who is the  
 best poet of all the Arabs.' 'The Wandering King, the Man with  
 the Ulcers,' he replied at once. 'And who after him?' 'The  
 Murdered Boy of the Banū Bakr,' Labīd said, meaning Tarafa.  
 'And who then?' the questioner persisted. 'The Man with the

Crooked Staff,' Labīd pronounced, and quoted in support his  
 own verses:

The best of all spoils is the fear of the Lord.  
 It is by God's leave that I dally or hasten;  
 I give praise to God, God who has no compeer—  
 in His hands is all good; He does what He wills.  
 Whom he guides on the good path, he is well guided  
 and tranquil of heart; whom He wills, He sets astray.

So after all it was in his religious poetry, echoing the very words  
 of the Koran, that Labīd took greatest pride. 'God forgive me,'  
 he added, fearing that his conceit might be written against him as  
 a sin.

In his unregenerate days Labīd had been the typical Bedouin  
 poet, boasting of his own martial prowess and the superiority of  
 his tribe over all others:

When alarmed to battle, there they are with their helmets on  
 and their coats of mail, the rings of them gleaming like stars:  
 unsullied is their honour, their deeds are not ineffectual,  
 for their prudent minds incline not after capricious lust.  
 They have built for us a house whose roof reaches very high  
 and to it have mounted alike the elders and young of the tribe.  
 So be satisfied with what the Sovereign has allotted;  
 He has divided the qualities among us, knowing them well,  
 and when trustworthiness came to be apportioned among a  
 tribe  
 the Apportioner bestowed on us an exceeding share.

So he glories in his *Mu'allāqa*; yet even as a pagan he recognised  
 a higher Power as the dispenser of virtue among men.

It was above all as a man of religion that Labīd won the  
 applause of later generations. Had he not celebrated his con-  
 version with a memorable jubilate?

Praised be God, that my end came not upon me  
ere I had clothed myself in the robe of Islam.

And it was remembered how 'Uthmān himself sat among the  
people to hear him recite the famous lines:

Why, surely everything save God is but vanity,  
and every pleasure must inescapably pass away;  
and every man shall one day know what he has earned  
when the account-books are laid open before God.

The Caliph al-Mu'taṣim, younger brother of al-Ma'mūn and  
his successor, had a great admiration for Labīd's poetry. He was  
drinking one night with his boon-companions, and the wine had  
stirred in his veins a gentle melancholy. Suddenly he demanded,  
'Who can recite for me his poem beginning:

We wither away, but the stars that rise in heaven wither not  
and the hills and the tall towers abide after we are gone.  
Once I dwelt in the shelter of a house highly esteemed;  
now my neighbour in Arbad, my sure refuge, is gone from me?'

And al-Mu'taṣim wept until the tears ran down his cheeks, as he  
remembered his dead brother al-Ma'mūn. 'Such a one was he,  
God have mercy on his soul,' he exclaimed. Then he chanted the  
rest of Labīd's ode, waiting for none to complete it.

Yet do not grieve, if Time has parted us for ever;  
the day must come when Fate falls upon every man.  
Men are as desert encampments, whose brief inhabitants  
one day quit with the dawn, and they remain desolate;  
troop by troop they depart, and it abides after them  
like the palm of a hand, fingers clutching an emptiness.  
Man is naught but a shooting flame whose effulgency  
flashes awhile broadly, but then sinks into ashes.

Man is a hidden thought, a purpose of piety;  
all he possesses is but a loan, given him on trust.  
What waits ahead of me, if my doom should drag out yet?  
A stick to lean upon, my fingers twisted about its crutch,  
the while I tell the tales of generations departed  
and creep along, my back bent double when I would stand.  
I am become as a sword whose scabbard is all worn out;  
gone are the days of its forger, yet its point is still keen.  
Hurry not away; Death has a tryst to keep with all of us—  
close upon us is its coming; nay, it is here already!  
You who reproach me, what do you know, save by con-  
jecture?  
When lads take their departure, who'll bring them back again?  
What, do you grieve over what Time has done to a brave  
fellow?  
Was there ever a generous spirit the Fates smote not down?  
By your sweet life, they know not, those who cast the pebbles  
and scare the birds of augury, what God is up to doing.

\* \* \*

Labīd is not among the authors of *Mu'allaqas* included in al-  
Shantamari's commentary on al-Aṣma'i's recension. That his  
*Diwān* has survived at all, even in its present attenuated form, is  
thanks to the industry of a Persian philologist, Abu 'l-Ḥasan  
'Alī son of 'Abd Allāh son of Sinān al-Taimī of Tus. Ibn al-  
Nadīm indeed mentions that al-Aṣma'i, al-Sukkarī, Abū 'Amr  
al-Shaibānī and Ibn al-Sikkīt all published editions of Labīd, but  
their texts have all perished. What remains from al-Ṭūṣī is a  
mere handful of twenty poems; a further thirty-five have been  
recovered from an independent source; modern researchers have  
in addition scraped together a certain quantity of fragments out  
of various books. This is not a great deal, but Labīd has not fared  
so very much worse than the generality of ancient Arab poets.

Meagre indeed is the information that has come down to us

concerning Abu 'l-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī. The dates of his birth and death are unrecorded, but he is reported to have been an inveterate enemy of Ibn al-Sikkīt, for no better reason—and what better reason could scholars look for?—than that they both studied under the same teacher, Naṣrān al-Khurāsānī, and after his death quarrelled about the contents of his books. He is said to have attended 'all the Kufan and Basran grammarians,' but to have taken most from Ibn al-A'rābī; it is therefore safe to assume that he lived into the second half of the ninth century. The omniscient Ibn al-Nadīm declares that he wrote no independent books, and his title to fame rests solely on his commentaries upon Labīd and Imr al-Qais. Al-Marzubānī is quoted by Yāqūt for the information that al-Ṭūsī was a poet, but all that remains as witness to his talent for rhyming is a single set of three melancholy couplets:

The bitter cold of winter has launched its assault  
and all I possess is the Arabic I can recite  
and a single shirt, and if the wind begins to blow hard  
not a shred of that will remain on my shoulders.  
Little use to me will be my assortment of learning  
when the icy North whistles through my nakedness.

Certainly al-Ṭūsī could have done with Labīd's platters to fortify him against the winds of Abū 'Aqīl. It may be some consolation to us, even if it was none to him, that a certain Aḥmad son of Abū Ṭāhir thought sufficiently well of the luckless philologist to mourn his death in a long dirge out of which the following verses are taken:

A mountain of glory has fallen; if all the towering, fast-  
anchored  
mountains were weighed against him, they would weigh  
nothing.  
The cord—the firm-knit cord of religion has become broken;  
learning and al-Tusi are wrapped in the same winding-sheet.

In all the times before him there was never one like him;  
never his like shall be seen in all the times yet remaining.

He had a son, but Ibn al-Nadīm knew so little about him that he left a blank in his manuscript after the words 'and his name was.' 'A transmitter he was,' he adds of his father, 'of the tales of the tribes and the poems of the giants.'

\* \* \*

The *editio princeps* of Labīd's poems with al-Ṭūsī's commentary appeared at Vienna in 1880. The editor was Yūsuf Diyā' al-Dīn al-Khālīdī, styling himself 'Professor in the Royal Oriental Academy of Vienna, owner of the unique manuscript.' It is an elegantly produced little book, well maintaining the brilliant standard of the Austrian oriental typographers. It came out during those stirring years when the study of old Arabic poetry was being breathlessly pursued in every German university. Dr. A. Huber, who died much too young, left behind him among his papers a draft translation of al-Khālīdī's text, and with his mother's permission Carl Brockelmann, unhappily no more with us, revised the manuscript and published it at Leiden in 1891. The translation is printed as an introduction to the supplementary text of Labīd's *Dīwān* derived from a very recent transcript, dated 23 May 1880 at Medina, which Leiden University Library had acquired in 1883. Since then no further edition has seen the light, though other manuscripts of Labīd's poems await exploitation.

The *Mu'allāqa* of Labīd was first separately printed in Arabic types at Lund in 1826, edited by J. G. Billberg whose ambition was doubtless fired by the example of his compatriot J. Bolmeér's publication of Imr al-Qais's *Mu'allāqa* at Lund two years earlier. The commentary of al-Zauzanī (d. 1093) was issued by C. R. S. Peiper at Vratislav in 1828. But the great French savant Silvestre de Sacy had already anticipated the work of these two scholars. In 1806 he had published his three-volume *Chrestomathie arabe*, which he had followed up in 1810 with his two-volume *Grammaire*



arabe. Now in 1816 the Imprimerie Royale, with Napoleon banished to St. Helena, printed de Sacy's pioneer edition of *Calila et Dimna* in the splendid, bold types which Savary had cut a century earlier; no other designer before or since ever imitated so brilliantly the gracious lines and curves of the calligraphic *naskh* hand. With Bidpai's *Fables* de Sacy included 'la Moallaka de Lébid, en arabe et en françois,' preceded by a full-length translation of Labīd's biography extracted from the as yet un-edited *Book of Songs*. 'En même temps que j'offrois aux jeunes amateurs des langues de l'Orient, un ouvrage en prose, d'un style facile à entendre, j'ai cru qu'ils me sauroient gré de leur présenter un des poèmes les plus estimés parmi ceux que les Arabes placent au premier rang de leur littérature, et qui portent le nom de *Moallaka*, parce qu'ils ont mérité d'être suspendus ou affichés aux portes du sanctuaire de la Mecque, de l'antique et vénérable Caaba. Plusieurs de ces poèmes fameux ont été publiés en original: la *Moallaka* de Lébid, que je donne ici, ne l'a été qu'en partie, et d'une manière peu satisfaisante. J'ai joint au texte le commentaire entier de Zouzéni. Une traduction françoise de ce poème m'a paru devoir aussi accompagner la publication du texte.'

But before quoting from de Sacy's version, let us first read Sir William Jones's synopsis and an extract from his translation.

### *The Poem of Lebeid*

Although the opening of this poem be that of a love-elegy, and the greater part of it be purely pastoral, yet it seems to have been composed on an occasion more exalted than the departure of a mistress, or the complaints of a lover; for the poet, *who was also a genuine patriot*, had been entertained at the court of NOMAAN, king of HIRA in *Mesopotamia*, and had been there engaged in a warm controversy with RABEIAH, son of *Zeiad*, chief of the *Absites*, concerning the comparative excellence of their tribes: LEBEID himself relates, what might be very naturally expected from a man of his eloquence and warmth, *that he maintained the*

*glory of his countrymen and his own dignity against all opponents;* but, in order to perpetuate his victory, and to render his triumph more brilliant, he produced the following poem at the annual assembly, and, having obtained the suffrages of the criticks, was permitted, we are told, to hang it up on the gate of the Temple.

The fifteen first couplets are extremely picturesque, and highly characteristic of *Arabian* manners: they are followed by an expostulatory address of the poet himself, or of some friend, who attended him in his rambles, on the folly of his fruitless passion for *Nawara*, who had slighted him, and whose tent was removed to a considerable distance. Occasion is hence taken to interweave a long description of the camel, on which he intended to travel far from the object of his love, and which he compares for swiftness to a cloud driven by the wind, or a wild-ass running to a pool, after having subsisted many months on herbage only; or rather to a wild-cow hastening in search of her calf, whom the wolves had left mangled in the forest: the last comparison consists of *seventeen* couplets, and may be compared with the long-tailed similies of the *Greek* and *Roman* poets. He then returns to *Nawara*, and requites her coyness with expressions of equal indifference; he describes the gaiety of his life, and the pleasures which he can enjoy even in her absence; he celebrates his own intrepidity in danger, and firmness on his military station; whence he takes occasion to introduce a short, but lively, description of his horse; and, in the seventieth couplet, alludes to the before-mentioned contest, which gave rise to the poem: thence he passes to the praises of his own hospitality; and concludes with a panegyrick on the virtues of his tribe.

The measure is of the fifth class, called *perfect* verse, which regularly consists of the compound foot *benedicerent*, six times repeated, in this form:

'Tria grata sunt | animo meo, ut | melius nihil,  
Oculi nigri, | cyathus nitens, | roseus calyx.'

But when the couplet admits the third epitrite, *pastoribus*, and

the double iambus, *amantium*, it may be considered as belonging to the seventh, or *tremulous*, class; between which and the *perfect*, the only distinction seems to be, that the *tremulous* never admits the *anapestick* foot. They are both, in the language of *European* prosody, *iambicks*, in which the even places are invariably pure, and the odd places always exclude the dactyl: when the uneven feet are *trochees* or *pyrrhicks*, the verses become *choriambick* or *peonick*; but of this change we have no instance in the poem before us.

Lord Teignmouth, in the course of his biography of Sir William Jones, printed in a footnote the following remark: 'It may be satisfactory to the reader who does not possess the works of Sir Wm. Jones, to read his metrical imitation of a passage in the 4th Eclogue.' He appends these lines, paraphrasing verses 57-61 of Labid's *Mu'allaga*:

But ah! thou know'st not in what youthful play,  
Our nights, beguil'd with pleasure, swam away;  
Gay songs, and cheerful tales, deceiv'd the time,  
And circling goblets made a tuneful chime;  
Sweet was the draught, and sweet the blooming maid,  
Who touch'd her lyre beneath the fragrant shade;  
We sipp'd till morning purpled every plain;  
The damsels slumber'd, but we sipp'd again;  
The waking birds, that sung on every tree  
Their early notes, were not so blythe as we.

It is, however, the opening sequence which has been selected for illustrating the methods of the various translators. Here is Jones's version:

- 1 Desolate are the mansions of the fair, the stations in MINIA, where they rested, and those where they fixed their abodes! Wild are the hills of GOUL, and deserted is the summit of RIJAAM.

- 2 The canals of RAYAAN are destroyed: the remains of them are laid bare and smoothed by the floods, like characters engraved on the solid rocks.
- 3 Dear ruins! Many a year has been closed, many a month, holy and unhallowed, has elapsed, since I exchanged tender vows with their fair inhabitants.
- 4 The rainy constellations of spring have made their hills green and luxuriant: the drops from the thunder-clouds have drenched them with profuse, as well as with gentle, showers;
- 5 Showers, from every nightly cloud, from every cloud veiling the horizon at day-break, and from every evening-cloud, responsive with hoarse murmurs.
- 6 Here the wild eringo-plants raise their tops: here the antelopes bring forth their young by the sides of the valley; and here the ostriches drop their eggs.
- 7 The large-eyed wild-cows lie suckling their young, a few days old; their young, who will soon become a herd on the plain.
- 8 The torrents have cleared the rubbish, and disclosed the traces of habitations, as the reeds of a writer restore effaced letters in a book;
- 9 Or as the black dust, sprinkled over the varied marks on a fair hand, brings to view with a brighter tint the blue stains of woad.
- 10 I stood asking news of the ruins concerning their lovely inhabitants; but what avail my questions to dreary rocks, who answer them only by their echo?

In 1796 Joseph Dacre Carlyle, newly elected Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, published at Cambridge University Press his *Specimens of Arabian Poetry*. As the first in his varied selection he chose the opening scene from Labid's *Mu'allaga*, accompanying the original with a verse translation. 'This elegy,' he remarked, 'as is evident from its

nature, must have been written previous to Lebid's change of religion. Its subject is one that must be ever interesting to a feeling mind—the return of a person, after a long absence, to the place where he had spent his early years—it is in fact an Arabian *Deserted Village*.' The comparison with Oliver Goldsmith is indeed interesting. 'I am sensible,' Carlyle continues, 'that many of its beauties can be very inadequately represented in a translation, and that many passages which were considered as beauties by the author and his countrymen, will no longer appear such to an European critic; but still I shall hope this production of Lebid must give pleasure to any person of true taste, by its picturesque descriptions, appropriate images, and simple delineation of pastoral manners. The learned reader will perceive that the MS. I have made use of (which belongs to the public library at Cambridge) differs in some few places from the text given by Sir W. Jones.' It is worth while to look again at this long-forgotten product of eighteenth-century orientalism, and to feel in Carlyle's measured cadences the influence of Thomas Gray:

Those dear abodes which once contain'd the fair,  
Amidst MITATA's wilds I seek in vain,  
Nor towers, nor tents, nor cottages are there,  
But scatter'd ruins and a silent plain.

The proud canals that once RAYANA grac'd,  
Their course neglected and their waters gone,  
Among the level'd sands are dimly trac'd,  
Like moss-grown letters on a mouldering stone.

RAYANA say, how many a tedious year  
Its hallow'd circle o'er our heads hath roll'd,  
Since to my vows thy tender maids gave ear,  
And fondly listened to the tale I told?

How oft, since then, the star of spring, that pours  
A never failing stream, hath drench'd thy head?

How oft, the summer cloud in copious showers  
Or gentle drops its genial influence shed?

How oft, since then, the hovering mist of morn  
Hath caus'd thy locks with glittering gems to glow?  
How oft hath eve her dewy treasures borne  
To fall responsive to the breeze below?

The matted thistles, bending to the gale,  
Now clothe those meadows once with verdure gay;  
Amidst the windings of that lonely vale  
The teeming antelope and ostrich stray:

The large-ey'd mother of the herd that flies  
Man's noisy haunts, here finds a sure retreat,  
Here watchès o'er her young, till age supplies  
Strength to their limbs and swiftness to their feet.

Save where the swelling stream hath swept those walls  
And giv'n their deep foundations to the light,  
(As the retouching pencil that recalls  
A long-lost picture to the raptur'd sight).

Save where the rains have wash'd the gather'd sand  
And bared the scanty fragments to our view,  
(As the dust sprinkled on a punctur'd hand  
Bids the faint tints resume their azure hue).

No mossy record of those once lov'd seats  
Points out the mansion to inquiring eyes;  
No tottering wall, in echoing sounds, repeats  
Our mournful questions and our bursting sighs.

It is painfully obvious that the maker of these verses had never seen an Arabian desert.

So in 1816, and in Paris after Waterloo, de Sacy prayed that his new book would prove acceptable. 'Puisse ce nouveau travail, qui a été pour moi une consolation dans les jours d'affliction et

d'effroi, et un délaissement au milieu d'occupations graves et pénibles, mériter l'approbation des savans, et la reconnoissance de ceux qui aspirent à le devenir! C'est la seule récompense que je puisse encore ambitionner, après l'honneur que m'a fait, en daignant en accepter l'hommage, le Prince qui fait le bonheur et la gloire de la France.' For it was to King Louis XVIII that de Sacy had dedicated his latest volume; and this was what His Majesty might read of Labid's ode, made into gracious French prose.

Ils sont évanouis des lieux où elles avoient établi leur campement, les vestiges de leur demeure passagère; pour Mina, qui fut long-temps leur résidence, une affreuse solitude y règne aujourd'hui sur Goul, sur Ridjam, et sur les escarpemens de la montagne de Reyyan. Là, semblable aux caractères confiés au roc (dont la dureté résiste aux efforts des ans), les traces de leurs habitations ont reparu, découvertes par les torrens qui ont entraîné ce qui les déroboit aux regards. Depuis que ces lieux ont perdu leurs habitans, déjà plusieurs années se sont écoulées; plusieurs fois déjà les mois de la guerre ont succédé aux mois de la paix. Les constellations printanières ont versé sur ces campagnes désertes leurs rosées fécondes, et les nuées orageuses de l'été les ont inondées de leurs torrens d'eaux, ou rafraîchies de leurs douces ondées; tour à tour elles ont reçu le tribut et des nuages de la nuit, et de ceux qui obscurcissent le ciel au lever de l'aurore, ou qui, vers le coucher du soleil, font retentir au loin l'écho répété de la foudre. Là, la roquette sauvage se couvre de rameaux longs et vigoureux; la gazelle devient mère sur les deux rives du lit des torrens, et l'autruche y dépose ses œufs. Les antilopes aux grands yeux y habitent paisiblement près de leurs tendres nourrissons, à peine sortis de leurs flancs, et qui un jour couvriront ces plaines de leurs nombreux troupeaux. Les torrens, entraînant la poussière qui couvroit les traces de ces demeures abandonnées, les ont rendues à la lumière: ainsi la plume d'un écrivain renouvelle les traits des caractères que le temps avoit effacés; ainsi renaissent

les cercles imprimés sur la peau, lorsque la main d'une femme instruite dans son art les couvre de nouveau de la poudre colorante que déjà elle y avoit répandue. Je me suis arrêté près de ces ruines chéries, pour les interroger sur le sort de leurs anciens habitans. Mais hélas! pourquoi interroger des pierres sourdes et immobiles, qui ne peuvent produire que de vains sons inarticulés?

It must have been in 1850 or thereabouts that the next version of Labid's *Mu'allāqa* was made, a version which has hitherto remained unpublished. In the library of the Institute of Oriental Studies at Cambridge there is a copy of August Arnold's *Septem Mo'allakāt* which bears on the title-page the signature Wm. Wright, with the date Halle 1850; this was the very year of publication. William Wright, born on the Nepal frontier in 1830 and already a St. Andrews graduate, had gone to Halle to study Arabic under Rödiger before proceeding to Leiden, Dozy and an honorary doctorate at the age of 23; in 1870 he was to be elected Sir Thomas Adams's Professor, and as such to transmit his erudition to men like the tragically short-lived Ion Grant Neville Keith-Falconer, E. G. Browne and A. A. Bevan, achieving a truly universal reputation before his death in 1889. Inserted in Wright's copy of Arnold, which later belonged to Bevan and was by him bequeathed to Cambridge, are some sheets of note-paper containing a complete translation of Labid's ode which it does not seem too fanciful to suppose a relic of his Halle days, perhaps a souvenir of a class with Rödiger who was no doubt as rigorous a teacher as most German professors of his time. This is not the place for the reproduction in full of this valuable document; the first ten couplets are rendered thus:

- 1 Effaced are the dwelling-places at Minā, whether temporary or permanent; desolate are their Ghaul and their Rijām,
- 2 and the slopes of ar-Raiyān; their traces are laid bare, but old and worn, just as the rocks retain the letters graven on them.

- 3 Sites of dwellings are these, over which, since they were last inhabited, many a long year has passed with its full tale of sacred and profane months.
- 4 They have been gifted with the showers of the constellations of spring, and the rains of the thunderclouds have fallen on them in torrents and in drizzle;
- 5 rains from every cloud of the night, and morning cloud that covers the sky, and evening cloud whose thunderpeals answer one another.
- 6 And so the shoots of the wild rocket have sprung up over them, and the gazelle and the ostrich have their young on the two sides of the valley;
- 7 and the antelopes lie quietly by their young, to which they have newly given birth, while their fawns roam in flocks over the plain.
- 8 And the torrents have newly laid bare the marks of the tents, as if they were lines of writing whose text the pens retrace;
- 9 or the lines which a woman tattooing traces afresh, rubbing in her lampblack in circles, on which her pattern reappears.
- 10 And so I stood there questioning them—but why should we question the hard and lasting stones that have no clear speech to answer with?

Philipp Wolff made a rhymed German version of Labīd's *Mu'allaqa*, but it offers no features of particular interest. We therefore pass on to another buried document. It was actually with this poem that Sir Charles Lyall first occupied himself when he planned his never-realised translation of the seven *Mu'allaqāt*; he published its prose rendering in 1877 in the *Bengal Journal*, but did not reprint this piece in his *Ancient Arabian Poetry*.

- 1 Effaced are her resting-places—where she stayed but a while and where she dwelt long in Mina: desolate are her camps in Ghaul and er-Rijām,

- 2 And by the torrents of er-Rayyân: the traces thereof are laid bare and old and worn, as the rocks still keep their gravings:
- 3 Tent-traces over which have passed, since the time that one dwelt there, long years, with their rolling months of war and peace.
- 4 The showers of the signs of Spring have fallen on them, and there have swept over them the rains of the thundering clouds, torrents and drizzle both—
- 5 The clouds that came by night, those of the morning that hid the sky, and the clouds of even-tide, with their antiphons of thunder;
- 6 There have sprung up over them the shoots of the rocket, and in the sides of the valley the deer and the ostriches rear their young;
- 7 The large-eyed wild kine lie down there by their young ones just born, and their calves roam in herds over the plain.
- 8 The torrents have scored afresh the traces of the tents, as though they were lines of writing in a book which the pens make new again,
- 9 Or the tracery which a woman draws afresh as she sprinkles the blue over the rings, and the lines shine forth anew thereon.
- 10 And I stood there asking for tidings—and wherefore did I ask aught of deaf stones that have no voice to answer?

In introducing their version of Labīd the Blunts remarked: 'In this Ode, as in Zohéyr's, the special accentuation of the "long measure" has been followed, and somewhat emphasized with a view to variety.' They seem to have failed to realise that the metre of Labīd's poem is different to that of the three preceding.

Gone are they the lost camps, light flittings, long sojournings in Miná, in Gháula, Rijám left how desolate.  
Lost are they. Rayyán lies lorn with its white torrent beds, scored in lines like writings left by the flood-water.

Tent-floors smooth, forsaken, bare of all that dwelt in them,  
 years how long, the war-months, months too of peace-  
 pleasures.  
 Spots made sweet with Spring-rains fresh-spilled from the  
 Zodiac,  
 showers from clouds down-shaken, wind-wracks and  
 thunder-clouds;  
 Clouds how wild of night-time, clouds of the dawn darkening,  
 clouds of the red sunset,—all speak the name of her.  
 Here, in green thorn-thickets, does bring forth how fearlessly;  
 here the ostrich-troops come, here too the antelopes.  
 Wild cows, with their wild calf-sucklings, standing over them,  
 while their weanlings wander wide in the bare valleys.  
 Clean-swept lie their hearth-stones, white as a new manuscript  
 writ with texts fresh-graven, penned by the cataracts,  
 Scored with lines and circles, limned with rings and blazonings,  
 as one paints a maid's cheek point-lined in indigo.  
 All amazed I stood there. How should I make questionings?  
 Dumb the rocks around me, silent the precipice.

In making his paraphrase of these verses R. A. Nicholson boldly attempted the well-nigh impossible—to imitate the monorhyme of the original Arabic. The result is curious, but not unpleasing:

Waste lies the land where once alighted and did wone  
 The people of Miná: Rijám and Ghawl are lone.  
 The camp in Rayyán's vale is marked by relics dim  
 Like weather-beaten script engraved on ancient stone.  
 Over this ruined scene, since it was desolate,  
 Whole years with secular and sacred months had flown.  
 In spring 'twas blest by showers 'neath starry influence shed,  
 And thunder-clouds bestowed a scant or copious boon.  
 Pale herbs had shot up, ostriches on either slope  
 Their chicks had gotten and gazelles their young had thrown;

And large-eyed wild-cows there beside the new-born calves  
 Reclined, while round them formed a troop the calves  
 half-grown.

Torrents of rain had swept the dusty ruins bare,  
 Until, as writing freshly characterized, they shone,  
 Or like to curved tattoo-lines on a woman's arm,  
 With soot besprinkled so that every line is shown.  
 I stopped and asked, but what avails it that we ask  
 Dumb changeless things that speak a language all unknown?

This concludes the survey of previous translations of Labīd's great ode.

## MU'ALLAQA OF LABĪD

The abodes are desolate, halting-place and encampment too,  
 at Miná; deserted lies Ghaul, deserted alike Rijám,  
 and the torrent-beds of Er-Raiyán—naked shows their trace,  
 rubbed smooth, like letterings long since scored on a stony slab;  
 blackened orts that, since the time their inhabitants tarried there,  
 many years have passed over, months unhallowed and sacro-  
 sanct.

The star-borne showers of Spring have fed them, the out-  
 pouring  
 of thundercloud, great deluge and gentle following rain,  
 the cloud that travels by night, the sombre pall of morn,  
 the outspread mantle of eve with muttering antiphon.  
 Then the branches of aihakan shot up, and the ostriches  
 and antelopes brought forth their young on both valley-slopes,  
 and the great-eyed cows that had lately calved stand over their  
 brood

while in the spreading plain the little lambs form their flocks.  
 Then the torrents washed the dusty ruins, until they seem  
 like scrolls of writing whose text their pens have revived,  
 or the back and forth of a woman tattooing, her indigo  
 in rings scattered, the tattooing newly revealed above them.

So I stood and questioned that site; yet how should we  
 question rocks  
 set immovable, whose speech is nothing significant?  
 All is naked now, where once the people were all forgathered;  
 they set forth with dawn, leaving the trench and panic-grass  
 behind;  
 and the womenfolk—how they stirred your passion, the day  
 they climbed  
 and hid themselves in the curtained howdahs with creaking  
 tents,

each litter well-upholstered, its pole overshadowed by  
 a brocaded hanging, with fine veil and crimson overlay.  
 So borne they parted in throngs, wild cows of Toodih and  
 gazelles of Wajra belike, their calves gathered close to them;  
 the troop was urged, to be swallowed up in the shimmering  
 haze  
 till they seemed as tamarisk-shrubs and boulders in Bîsha's vale.

But what think you still of the Lady Nawár, so far away  
 and every bond with her broken, new cord alike with old?  
 A Murrite she, who dwells now in Faid and for neighbours  
 takes

the Hejázi folk: how can you aspire then to come to her?  
 In the eastern parts of the Two Mountains, or in Muhajjar  
 she lodges, surrounded by Farda and near-by Rukhám,  
 and Suwá'id, if she fares to the right, then presumably  
 the black ridge of El-Kahr, or Tilhám thereabouts.  
 So cut off your longing for one whom you may no more  
 attain—

the best knotters of friendship sever the bond at need—  
 and bestow your gifts in plenty on him who entertains you fair;  
 you can always break, when his love falters and swerves away,  
 with a lean camel to ride on, that many journeyings  
 have fined to a bare thinness of spine and shrunken hump,  
 one that, when her flesh is fallen away and her strength is spent  
 and her ankle-thongs are worn to ribbons of long fatigue,  
 yet rejoices in her bridle, and runs still as if she were  
 a roseate cloud, rain-emptied, that flies with the south wind,  
 or a great-uddered she-ass, pregnant of a white-bellied sire  
 worn lean

by the stampeding and kicking and biting of fellow-stallions.  
 Bitten to the bone, he mounts with her the humps of the hills  
 disquieted by her refractoriness and insatiable craving;  
 in the stony reach of Eth-Thalaboot he outclimbers her  
 to the barren watchposts, fear lurking in every waymark.

Till, with Jumáda and the six months past, content with grass and unwatered, a long fasting for them together, they returned at last determined upon a firm resolve unwavering—and success in a decision is of solid purpose—the thorns pricking her hinder hoofs, the summer winds swelling and swirling about them in scorching blasts. They kicked up a long column of dust, its shadow flying like the smoke of a bonfire, its flames soaring aloft fanned by the north wind, stoked with fresh arfaj branches, like the smoke of a blaze, high-billowing its ardent mass. On he went, pushing her ahead of him as was his wont to push her ahead whenever she threatened to swing aside; then they plunged into the middle of a rivulet, and split through a brimming pool, where the kalam-rods grew close together, encompassed about by the reeds overshadowing it, a veritable thicket, part trampled down, part upstanding.

Is such my camel? Or shall I liken her to a wild cow, whose calf the beasts of prey have devoured, lagging, though true herd-leader?

Flat-nosed, she has lost her young, and therefore unceasingly circles about the stony waste, lowing all the while as she seeks a half-weaned white calf, whose carcass the grey robber-wolves

in greed unappeasable have dragged hither and thither; they encountered her unawares, and seized her little one from her,

and of a truth the arrows of Fate miss not their mark. All that night she wandered, the raindrops streaming upon her in continuous flow, watering still the herb-strewn sands; she crouched under the stem of a high-branched tree, apart on the fringes of certain sand-hills, whose soft slopes trickled down

while the rain uninterruptedly ran down the line of her back, on a night the clouds blotted the starlight out,

yet she shone radiantly in the face of the gathered murk as the pearl of a diver shines when shaken free from its thread; but when the shadows dispersed, and the dawn surrounded her, forth she went, her feet slipping upon the dripping earth. Distraught with sorrow, for seven nights and successive days ceaselessly she wandered among the pools of Sawá'id till at last she gave up hope, and her swelling udders shrank that no suckling and no weaning had ever wrung so dry. Now she heard the murmur of men's voices, that startled her coming from the unseen—for man is her sickness of old—and on both sides, behind and before her, so she deemed, danger awaited, the awful apprehension of doom.

Then, when the huntsmen, despairing to come to grips, unleashed

their flap-eared hunting-dogs with collars of untanned hide, they closed in on her, and she turned upon them with her horn pointed and altogether like to a Samhari spear to repel them, for she was sure that if she repelled them not Fate inexorable was imminent, and certain death. So Kasáb came to her doom, a fine hound, horribly smeared in blood, and Sukhám, another, left on the battlefield.

Upon such a camel, when dances the shimmering forenoon haze and the hills draw on their vaporous mantle, the white mirage, I fulfil my yearning, not neglecting an inward doubt nor leaving any handle for fault-finders to fasten on.

Did Nawár not know then, and was she not aware that I am skilled to knot the bonds of friendship, and break them too? I am quick to be gone from places when they're unpleasing to me except, as happens, its destiny fetters my spirit there. Ha, but you have no idea, my dear, how many nights of agreeable warmth, delicious in sport and companionship, I have passed chatting, how many a taverner's hoisted flag I have visited, when the wine it proclaimed was precious dear,



and I've forked out a pretty penny for an old, brown wineskin  
 or a pitch-smear'd jar, newly decanted and seal broken,  
 for the pleasure of a song on a wet morning, and a charming  
 girl plucking  
 with nimble fingers the strings of her melodious lute;  
 yes, I've raced the cock bright and early, to get me my spirit's  
 need

and to have my second wetting by the time the sleepers stirred.  
 And many's the morning of wind and cold I've kept at bay  
 when its reins lay in the fingers of the bitter north  
 and defended the knights, my bristling panoply burdening  
 a swift-stepper, its bridle at dawn flung about my shoulders.  
 I have climbed to a look-out post on the brow of a fearful ridge  
 the dust of whose summits hung closely about their standards  
 till, when the sun flung its hand into dusk's coverlet  
 and darkness shrouded the perilous marches of the frontiers,  
 I came down to the plain; my horse stood firm as the trunk  
 of a tall, stripped palm-tree the gatherers shrink to ascend.  
 Then I pricked her on, to run like an ostrich and fleeter still  
 until, when she was warm and her bones were light and pliant,  
 her saddle slipped about, and her neck streamed with sweat  
 and the foam of her perspiration drenched her leather girth;  
 she tosses her head, and strains at the rein, and rushes on  
 as a desert dove flutters with the flight swiftly to water.

And oft in an unfamiliar muster of many strangers  
 where gifts were hoped for, and the voice of reproach was feared,  
 thick-necked men, ranting together of blood-revenge  
 like very devils of El-Badí, feet planted firm,  
 I've disowned the wrong, and boldly maintained the right  
 as I saw it, and none of those noble gentry could glory over me.  
 And many a time I've called for the gambling-arrows, so like  
 each to each in shape, to kill a gamblers' slaughtering-beast,  
 called for the arrows to choose a barren or bearing camel  
 whose flesh was distributed to the poor relations of all;

and the guest and the poor stranger must have thought them-  
 selves  
 come down upon Tabála, whose valleys are ever green.  
 To the shelter of my tent-ropes comes every forweared woman  
 starved as a tomb-tethered camel, her garments tattered and  
 shrunk.  
 When the winds blow into each other's teeth, they crown  
 canals  
 of heaped-up platters, and the orphans hurl themselves on them.

When the assemblies meet together, we never fail  
 to supply a match for the gravest issue, strong to shoulder it,  
 a partitioner, bestowing on all the tribe their due,  
 granting to some their rights, denying the claims of some  
 for the general good, generous, assisting liberality,  
 gentlemanly, winning and plundering precious prize,  
 sprung of a stock whose feathers laid down a code for them,  
 and every folk has its code of laws and its high ideal.  
 When alarmed to battle, there they are with their helmets on  
 and their coats of mail, the rings of them gleaming like stars:  
 unsullied is their honour, their deeds are not ineffectual,  
 for their prudent minds incline not after capricious lust.  
 They have built for us a house whose roof reaches very high  
 and to it have mounted alike the elders and young of the tribe.  
 So be satisfied with what the Sovereign has allotted;  
 He has divided the qualities among us, knowing them well,  
 and when trustworthiness came to be apportioned among a tribe  
 the Apportioner bestowed on us an exceeding share.  
 They are the strivers, whenever the tribe is visited  
 by distress; they are the tribe's knights and high arbiters;  
 to those who seek their protection they are as the bounteous  
 Spring  
 as also to widows in their long year of widowhood.  
 Such a tribe they are, that no envier succeeds to hold back  
 nor any reviler assists the enemy's reviling tongue.

## FIVE

*The Black Knight*

THE greatest of the early half-castes of our own era, a lineal giant amongst that virile band of mulattoes whose lives have helped to sustain hope and endeavour through the centuries.' So Mr. Cedric Dover describes the author of the fifth *Mu'allāqa* in his thoughtful and inspiring paper 'The Black Knight,' published in 1954 in *Phylon*, the Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture.

In approaching the gigantic figure of 'Antara we find ourselves confronted by a great ocean of legend; before plunging into its waves, let us measure what facts are generally agreed to be authentic. He was born presumably towards the middle of the sixth century. His father's name was Shaddād son of 'Amr (or 'Amr son of Shaddād), son of Mu'āwiya, of a long lineage reaching back through 'Abs to Mudar; he was thus a very distant kinsman of Labīd, and as an 'Absite took a prominent part in the War of Dāhis. His mother was a black slave-girl called Zabība, an Abyssinian doubtless brought over to Arabia after one of the countless slaving raids on the coasts of Africa. His father refused to recognise him as a legitimate son until, as Ibn Qutaiba and others inform us, he proved his fighting qualities in an obscure affray. A certain tribe raided a group of the Banū 'Abs and plundered them. The 'Absites pursued the aggressors, overtook them and did battle with them for their spoils, 'Antara being in the avenging column. His father cried to him, 'Charge, 'Antara!' 'Antara replied, 'A slave is no good at charging; he's only good for milking camels and binding their udders.' 'Charge!' his father

repeated. 'You're a free man.' So 'Antara charged, shouting (and here the verses are as quoted in the *Book of Songs*):

I am the mongrel Antara!  
Every man defends his woman  
whether she be black or white,  
whether she be smooth or hairy.

That day he fought nobly, and recovered the booty from the enemy's hands. Then his father claimed him as a true son, and attached his genealogy to him. Ibn Qutaiba adds that 'Antara was known as one of the three Arab 'ravens—a reference to his negroid descent.

The War of Dāhis, that began following the unsportsmanlike behaviour of a horse-race gang, gave 'Antara the 'Absite full opportunity to display his military prowess, a chance which he took eagerly. In the account of the fighting as recorded in the biography of Zuhair we have seen how 'Damdam had been slain in the war by 'Antarah son of Sheddād; it might have been Damdam that he had in mind when he boasted in his great ode:

Many's the bristling knight the warriors have shunned to  
take on,  
one who was not in a hurry to flee or capitulate,  
my hands have been right generous to with the hasty thrust  
of a well-tempered, strong-jointed, straightened spear  
giving him a broad, double-sided gash, the hiss of which  
guides in the night-season the prowling, famished wolves;  
I split through his accoutrements with my solid lance  
(for even the noblest is not sacrosanct to the spear)  
and left him carrion for the wild beasts to pounce on,  
all of him, from the crown of his head to his limp wrists.

In no other poem from ancient Arabia do we get such a powerful impression of the heroic savagery of those bitter times.

Few passages in the whole of literature equal in dramatic poignancy 'Antara's tender description of his horse in battle:

When I beheld the people advancing in solid mass  
 urging each other on, I wheeled on them blamelessly;  
 'Antara!' they were calling, and the lances were like  
 well-ropes sinking into the breast of my black steed.  
 Continuously I charged them with his white-blazed face  
 and his breast, until his body was caparisoned in blood,  
 and he twisted round to the spears' impact upon his breast  
 and complained to me, sobbing and whimpering;  
 had he known the art of conversation, he would have  
 protested,  
 and had he been acquainted with speech, he would have  
 spoken to me.

The horses frowning terribly plunged into the crumbling  
 soil,  
 long-bodied mare along with short-haired, long-bodied  
 stallion,  
 and oh, my soul was cured, and its faint sickness was healed  
 by the horsemen's cry, 'Ha, Antara, on with you!'

It is in his poetry more than in the exiguous details of his life to be gleaned from such sources as Ibn Qutaiba and the *Book of Songs*, and far more than in the great but legendary *Romance of Antar* which we shall presently discuss, that we descry dimly through the mists of time the historic 'Antara. For what further do we know of his career? That he loved his cousin, a girl called 'Abla (he names her in the second couplet of his *Mu'allāqa*); and that he was eventually slain in battle, as he would have longed to be, an aged warrior still in the saddle, when his tribe was at odds with Ṭaiy. Father Cheikho, who most improbably makes him a Christian poet, gives the year 615 for his death, on very slender evidence.

Theodor Nöldeke, most erudite of the German erudites,

fancied that 'Antara 'betrays himself as a half-caste in lines 25 and 27 of his *Mu'allāqa*, where like a true upstart, he refers to black slaves in somewhat contemptuous terms'; on the other hand 'it is not very probable that he was known by the nickname al-Falhā, "of the cleft lip," as in that case he would hardly have represented a man with this infirmity in his *Mu'allāqa* (line 41).' So Carl Brockelmann summarises his master's intricate argument. 'Such niceties of scholarship,' comments Cedric Dover, 'might become merely entertaining someday. Meanwhile, they tell us more about Brockelmann and the Aryanist Nöldeke than about Antar. The quality of their judgment is further illuminated by reference to the lines concerned, which indicate no more than the use of metaphors common among the desert Arabs of those days.' What is the context of the supposed slighting reference to negroes? The poet is comparing his camel to an ostrich, and Sir William Jones represents him as saying:

- 25 The young ostriches gather themselves around him, as a multitude of black YEMENIAN camels assemble round their Abyssinian *herdsman*, who is unable to express himself in the *language of Arabia*.
- 27 His head, *though lofty*, is small: when he is going to visit the eggs, *which his female left* in DHULASHEIRA, he looks like an *Ethiop* with short ears in a trailing garment of furred hides.

But the actual words of 'Antara contain no specific mention of Abyssinian or Ethiop. In line 25 the precise term used is *a'jam*, the meaning of which (as given in E. W. Lane's most authoritative lexicon) is '*others than Arabs*; such as are not Arabs; often used as implying disparagement, like *barbarians*; and often especially meaning *Persians*.' It is only the Persian commentator al-Zauzani, writing in his study some five centuries after the poem was composed, who offers the assertion 'he meant by *a'jam* Abyssinian.' The more cautious al-Tibrīzī (d. 1109) makes no such

categorical statement; all he says is that 'a'jam is used of a man whose speech is not understood.' As for line 27, here the key word is 'abd', which cannot imply anything else but 'slave'; even al-Zauzani is quite innocent in this instance, for he thinks that 'the poet made him a slave because of the whiteness of his legs and neck with a touch of redness about them, that is to say the properties of Byzantines; slaves in those days were never anything but white.' His information is not correct, but at least he did not introduce any Ethiop into the picture; that came straight out of Jones's imagination, as (to be fair) he indicated by italicising the word.

So Nöldeke's learned conjecture rests upon even weaker foundations than Cedric Dover has supposed. The Blunts avoided the Abyssinian trap, but they fell headlong into Jones's Ethiop snare:

Troops like the cohorts of Yémen, herded by 'Ajemis,  
she-camel cohorts of Yémen, herded by stammerers . . .  
Him, the small-headed, returning, fur-furnished Ethiop,  
black slave, to Thu-el-Ashíra;—there lie his eggs in it.

But a less fanciful and more honest version of the whole passage is that which I now offer:

At eventide it is as though I am breaking the hillocks  
upon an ostrich close-footed, that lacks for ears,  
to which the young ostriches flutter, as herds of Yemeni camels  
flock to the call of a barbarous, incomprehensible voice;  
they follow after the crest of his head; he is like a litter  
laid upon a sort of a bier, and tented for them,  
small-headed, visiting his eggs in Dhul Ushaira,  
like an ear-lopped slave swaggering in long furs.

So much for the ridiculous charge that 'Antara 'betrays himself as a half-caste'! As for the physical disability of which Nöldeke

with a surprising delicacy of feeling acquits him, the proof cited in fact proves nothing:

And many's the good wife's spouse I have left on the floor  
the blood whistling from his ribs like a harelip hissing. . . .

It is a wonderful comparison which might or might not have occurred to a man with a cleft palate; if 'Antara was indeed a harelip, he hardly seems the man, as I read his self-revelation in the *Mu'allaqa*, to be deterred by that fact from jesting about his own deformity.

\* \* \*

Our editions of the collected poems of 'Antara depend upon the Andalusian al-Shantamari's commentary on al-Aşma'i's recension; he was therefore included in Ahlwardt's *Divans*. His judgment, 'I doubt whether we possess anything of Tharafa or 'Antarah except their Mo'allaqât,' has already been quoted as putting the case for extreme scepticism. The problem with 'Antara is, however, unusually confused, and that for a remarkable reason. Alone among the authors of the *Mu'allaqât* he fired popular imagination to such an extent that, as 'Antar—the shortened form of his name—he became the hero of a vast repertory of folk-legend, the famous *Romance of Antar*.

The importance, indeed the existence of this stupendous compilation, which in one printed edition (Cairo, 1889-93) occupies thirty-two volumes and in another (Beirut, 1868-71) is made up of 154 books, was first advertised to Europe by Sir William Jones in his *Poeseos Asiaticae Commentariorum* (London, 1774). At the time of writing he was only 28 years of age, but very little in Arabic or Persian (as in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French and Italian) had escaped his universal curiosity. 'I have only seen the fourteenth volume of this work,' he remarks—his chaste Latin is given in Terrick Hamilton's version—which comprises all that is elegant and noble in composition. So lofty,

so various, and so bold is its style, that I do not hesitate to rank it among the most finished poems.'

Nearly thirty years later the first substantial account of the *Romance* was published, in Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's *Fundgruben des Orients* (Vienna, 1802). 'This work,' the learned Austrian declared—his German is rendered by Hamilton—'which must be reckoned as very instrumental towards learning the manners, dispositions, and habits of the Arabs, seems to us more interesting than the celebrated "Thousand and One Nights"; not indeed with respect to the fictions, in which this work almost entirely fails; but as a picture of true history. . . . The whole of the work may be esteemed as a faithful account of the principal tribes of the Arabs, and particularly of the tribe of Abs, from which sprung Antar, in the time of Nushirvan, King of Persia, more faithful in painting manners than in describing events. . . . This work, which is generally called a romance of chivalry, though impossible to be translated, owing to the number of volumes, may be gleaned; every part appertaining to history should be carefully collected, and nothing relative to manners omitted. Such, with God's help, we intend to publish.' In this time-honoured fashion Hammer-Purgstall staked out his claim; he had been to considerable pains to assemble a complete set of the Arabic original in Vienna, and he wished to be the first to exploit what he regarded as his own perquisite.

But the years went by, and nothing further on Antar emerged from Vienna. The excited explorer of oriental mines busied himself presently with other treasures. In 1812-13 he published the first complete translation of the poems of Hāfiz, in nearly a thousand pages; he was actively delving into Persian and Turkish history; he would in due course be producing a seven-volume history of Arabic literature. The manuscripts were piling up on his desk; was the *Romance of Antar* buried beneath a weight of abstruse erudition?

So it may well have appeared to Terrick Hamilton, lately servant of the East India Company (he resigned in 1813 after

thirteen chequered years) and now Oriental Secretary to the British Embassy in Constantinople. He had read what Hammer-Purgstall had written in 1802; indeed, 'the above engaged the attention of persons interested in oriental literature, and copies have been demanded, but are with difficulty procured, owing to the unwillingness of those, who live by reading the stories in the coffee-houses, to part with them; and the expense of transcribing is very heavy.' However, Hamilton was at last the proud possessor of 'a copy procured at Aleppo, by the kind exertions of Mr. Barker. It proved to be a very valuable work, being comprised in a smaller form than any other as yet sent to Europe.' A footnote records the distribution of copies known to the writer:

The possessors of copies are—

1. Mr. Rich, at Bagdad.
2. M. d'Italinsky.
3. M. Aidé, at Constantinople.
4. Lord Aberdeen.
5. Imperial Library at Vienna.
6. Cambridge Library.

Some few volumes in the possession of Mr. Hamilton.

The translator has two.

Some of them are imperfect.

And so Terrick Hamilton whiled away many happy hours on the Bosphorus putting the *Romance* into English. 'Whilst he was engaged on the work, he had the advantage of receiving from Mr. Burkardt a letter, in which he accounted for the abridged state of that copy of Antar, stating that the voluminous work had been curtailed of many of its repetitions and much of its poetry, by some learned inhabitants of Syria, and was therefore called the Shamiyeh, or Syrian Antar, in contradistinction to the original large work, which was called the Hijaziyeh, or Arabian Antar. Mr. Burkardt strongly urged the translator to persist in his

undertaking, by adhering strictly to the abridgment; anticipating the most complete success, and even a popularity equal to that so long enjoyed by the Arabian Nights, "to which," he adds, "it is in every respect superior."

The famous Arabian traveller had had his own experience of the *Romance*. 'Mr. Burkardt,' Hamilton footnotes, 'in a letter to the translator, mentions that when he was reading a portion of it to the Arabs, they were in ecstasies of delight, but at the same time so enraged at his erroneous pronunciation, that they actually tore the sheets out of his hands.' However, fortified by his encouragement, the intrepid Scotsman pushed ahead with his formidable task. In 1819 he had the satisfaction, thanks to the approval of Lord Byron's 'dear Mr Murray,' of launching a trial volume on the British public: *Antar, a Bedoueen Romance*. (So eager indeed was the publisher to get his discovery on the market that at page 298 the printing had to be temporarily stopped, with the editorial apology *The Continuation of this History has not yet been received in England*. But John Murray's 'damn'd hurry' did not prove fatal; the 'ultimate canto' arrived in time to catch the binders.)

The reception accorded to the book, if not rapturous, at least did not chill the publisher's heart. Three other volumes followed in 1820. This represented about one-third of the whole work; the remainder never appeared. The full story of the early promise and ultimate failure of Hamilton's brave attempt is told at length by Cedric Dover in his paper 'The Black Knight,' and again in 'Terrick Hamilton: a Forgotten Orientalist' printed in the December 1954 issue of the *Calcutta Review*. As he skilfully traces the course of this rather sordid transaction, primary responsibility for killing so luckless a child lies at the door of the learned Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. Waking out of a philological trance when news of the doings of a Scottish amateur came to him, 'he lost no time in publishing a feline review, remarkable for its blend of insinuation and special knowledge, in the *Jahrbücher der Literatur* of Vienna; and saw to it that the leading journals had copies. The *New Monthly Magazine* Englished it

elegantly (January and February, 1820), and with full justice to the Baron's provocativeness. It left no doubt of the almost alarming importance of *Antar*, and it was equally clear about the outrage his "discoverer" had suffered at the hands of "the Englishman." The Viennese blandly announced that he had already made a French abridgment of the *Romance*, which it was assumed would correct the unfortunate impression made by the voluminous and unreadable mistranslation of an interloper.

Poor Mr. Murray! The broadside had been fired too late to prevent the three supplementary volumes from coming out, to be hammered by the very reviewers who had so kindly applauded the preliminary experiment; the reputation of German scholarship being what it was, who should spring to the defence of a Scottish diplomat lying abroad? Poor Terrick Hamilton! He resigned from the foreign service early in 1824 and survived in retirement until 1876, dying untrumpeted in his ninety-fifth year without another page of *Antar* published. Such was the inglorious end of hopes engendered so long, long ago in Constantinople, of an enterprise reasonably conceived and approached in a comely spirit of humility. 'The translator, unwilling to quit this original without having some decided landmark to guide him when deviating from the straight course, has adhered as closely as possible to the Arabic idiom, only endeavouring to render it intelligible to the English reader; and if he has succeeded at all in combining what is rarely compatible, an easy English style with the character of the Oriental, he will not consider his perseverance misapplied, or his opinion of the original as erroneous. If, on the other hand, the public should form a different opinion, he begs their judgment may rest solely on the translation, and he will readily join in wishing that the task had devolved on one more capable of doing justice to its merits.'

Terrick Hamilton's *Antar* has never been reprinted since its publication nearly 140 years ago. As for Hammer-Purgstall's version, by an extraordinary irony of fate it never saw the light during its author's lifetime, but had to wait until 1868 for M.

Poujoulat to resurrect it in Paris. Poujoulat had visited the ancient scholar in Vienna in 1852, and had found him full of Viennese charm. 'Ce n'était pas seulement un très-savant homme, mais un homme d'un très-aimable esprit; j'admiraits son active et féconde vieillesse. Il me montra, à la bibliothèque impériale, le manuscrit d'*Antar* qu'il avait apporté d'Égypte, et, rentré chez lui, il me communiqua sa traduction française qui dormait dans un vieux coffre depuis longtemps. . . . M. de Hammer m'offrit en don le manuscrit de sa traduction si je voulais me charger de la publier et d'en revoir la forme qui, selon lui, trahissait trop l'écrivain allemand.' 'Les *Aventures d'Antar*,' the publisher Amyot announced, 'seront publiées en dix feuilletons d'environ cent cinquante pages chacun; il en paraîtra deux par mois'; and he added, French currency being what it was then, 'Prix de chaque feuilleton: 1 fr. 25c.' But destiny had another trick to play yet; of the ten volumes promised, only four ever appeared. Hammer-Purgstall in his grave fared no better than his survivor Terrick Hamilton had done. No greater fortune had attended L. M. Pevic either with his *Les Aventures d'Antar, fils de Cheddad* four years earlier.

Hamilton and Hammer-Purgstall have been buried a very long time now. Let us exhume their corpses, which at least will be free of the animosities that poisoned the relations of two men who might so easily have been friends, but instead made cause against each other; though it must surely in justice be said that if the Scotsman erred, he did so out of ingenuousness rather than malice, and scarcely deserved the cruel injury inflicted on him by an eminent but petty scholar. Which of the two acquitted himself better as a translator, and as a presenter of this famous but neglected epic? The passage selected for the comparison is the touching scene in which Antar, having by his proved accomplishments won the favour of 'King Zuhair,' first declares his love for Ibla. Hamilton represents the Arabic as follows:

In every society, the people, assembled round their wine, repeated Antar's verses, mentioned his actions, and talked of his

love for Ibla, and his discourses. This continued some time, till at length it reached the ears of Ibla's father and mother, and when they heard Antar's amorous poetry repeated, they ridiculed it, and would not receive him on friendly terms; but shewed their aversion to him, in every way, and made him perform every menial office; for Antar, in their eyes, was only considered as a slave. But when the talk about Ibla gained ground, her mother ordered Ibla into the presence of her father, and sent also for Antar. 'So, you love my daughter Ibla,' said she, 'and make verses upon her, and cannot conceal your feelings.' Ibla was standing by her mother, and when she heard her speak to Antar, she smiled. This increased Antar's confusion, and he was much disordered, as it called forth all his love.

'O mistress,' said he, 'did you ever see any one who hated his mistress, particularly when his life and death were in her hands! verily, I do love her, and my only wish in this world is to be near her: her form is ever before me, her name is ever in my heart and soul: and I exalt in my verses, all that God has granted her of beauty and loveliness.'

When Ibla heard Antar speak in her praise, her surprise increased, and Antar made great progress in her heart. 'If,' said her mother to Antar, 'you are earnest in what you say, let us hear some of your verses in praise of her charms.' Upon this, Antar hung down his head, and thus spoke:

'I love thee with the love of a noble born hero; and I am content with thy imaginary phantom. Thou art my sovereign in my very blood; and my mistress; and in thee is all my confidence. O Ibla, my description cannot pourtray thee, for thou comprehendest every perfection. Were I to say thy face is like the full moon of heaven, where in that full moon, is the eye of the antelope? Were I to say thy shape is like the branch of the Erak tree; O thou shamest it in the grace of thy form. In thy forehead is my guide to truth; and in the night of thy tresses I wander astray. Thy teeth resemble stringed jewels; but how can I liken them to lifeless pearls? Thy bosom is created as an enchantment.

O may God protect it ever in that perfection! To be connected with thee, is to be connected with every joy, but separated from all my world is the bond of thy connexion. Under thy veil is the rosebud of my life, and thine eyes are guarded with a multitude of arrows; round thy tent is a lion warrior, the sword's edge, and the spear's point. O thy face is like the full moon of heaven, allied to light, but far from my hopes.'

When Antar ceased, Ibla and her mother were astonished, and their dislike towards him diminished; and Ibla regarded him with affection. And Ibla's mother said to Antar—'I had no idea that you could talk after this style, and speak with so much elegance and propriety: by the faith of a noble Arab, you are endowed with high and noble qualities. I intend to-night to speak to my husband, that he may marry you to Khemisa, Ibla's servant; who is the prettiest of all the girls of the place.' 'Never,' said Antar, 'will I be united to a woman who is a slave, and not free born; and never but with her my soul adores.' 'May God,' said Ibla, 'accomplish thy wishes; and may he grant thee the woman thou lovest, and may thou live in peace and happiness!' 'Amen, Amen, Amen,' replied Antar.

The corresponding scene runs thus in Hammer-Purgstall:

Partout on loua ses qualités supérieures, partout l'on récita ses vers et surtout les vers en honneur d'Abla; et l'on parla tant de sa passion pour elle, qu'enfin ce bruit parvint aux oreilles de la mère d'Abla. Un jour Samiya lui dit en présence de sa fille: 'Malheur à toi, Antar; les gens disent que tu aimes ma fille, et que tu as même chanté ton amour; as-tu perdu l'esprit?' Abla souriait, et ce sourire ne fit qu'augmenter la passion d'Antar. 'Oui, ma maîtresse, s'écria-t-il, j'aime Abla, oui je l'aime! et j'ose célébrer dans mes vers les beautés que le ciel a si généreusement répandues sur elle.' Ces paroles firent une grande impression sur Abla, mais, cachant l'émotion de son cœur, elle dit en plaisantant: 'Eh bien! Antar, si tu es si occupé de moi, fais-moi entendre quelques-uns de tes

vers; mais, écoute, je prétends que tout en ma personne soit loué des pieds à la tête, du bout de mes cheveux jusqu'au bout de mes ongles, sans oublier une seule de mes beautés.' Sa mère riait de la gaieté de sa fille. Antar, après avoir baissé pendant quelque temps la tête comme un coursier qui ronge son frein, fit entendre ces accents:

'Je t'aime, ô Abla! comme aiment les cœurs généreux, et je me contente de te voir en songe.

'En toi j'espère, et pour toi je verse mon sang.

'O Abla! qui pourrait décrire ta beauté? Elle surpasse ce que la beauté a de plus parfait.

'Dirai-je que ton visage égale l'éclat de la lune? mais la lune a-t-elle des yeux de gazelle?

'Dirai-je que ta taille ressemble à une branche d'arah? mais la branche d'arah a-t-elle ta grâce?

'Tes dents effacent la blancheur des perles: comment pourrais-je les comparer à des perles?

'La lumière de la vérité resplendit sur ton front, et la nuit de l'erreur s'est réfugiée dans tes cheveux.

'Sous ton voile sont écloses les roses du paradis, gardées par les flèches de tes cils.

'Ton indifférence pour un homme comme moi est le sujet de mes plaintes: elle me serre le cœur.

'Au delà de ta beauté sont les lions des savanes, les lames des épées et les hautes lances.

'Ton visage est comme la lune au ciel: elle resplendit de près, mais son éloignement empêche de l'atteindre.'

Abla et sa mère restèrent enchantées de la douceur et de la richesse de sa poésie; Abla ne dit rien, mais ses yeux portèrent à Antar l'expression de ses sentiments, car les yeux, comme dit un proverbe arabe, sont les messagers du cœur.

'En vérité, Antar, lui dit la mère d'Abla, tu as surpassé mon attente; tu parles si bien que tu étais digne d'une autre origine que la tienne; je demanderai à mon époux qu'il te marie avec Chamissa, l'esclave de ma fille Abla, qui est très-belle; car la beauté est la meilleure récompense de l'éloquence et du courage.'



Antar la remercia respectueusement, mais en lui disant qu'il ne prendrait jamais pour épouse qu'une femme qu'il aimerait de tout son cœur, et qu'en attendant il ne voulait ni esclave ni affranchie, ni blanche ni noire.

'Eh bien, dit Abta, je souhaite que tu puisses trouver une épouse au gré de tes vœux.'

Antar, qui étouffait, ne put répondre que ces mots: 'Dieu le fasse!'

We resume the history of Europe's discovery of Antar in the year 1833 with the appearance in successive issues of the *Journal Asiatique* of episodes from the *Romance* translated by Caussin de Perceval, Cardin de Cardonne and G. Dugat, to serve as source-materials for a distinguished poet's later attention. Then in 1836 came the publication of the first edition, 'under the superintendence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge,' of that splendid travel-book, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. Edward William Lane, who was afterwards to enhance his popular reputation with a three-volume abridgment of the *Arabian Nights*, and to earn the applause and lasting gratitude of the learned world with his monumental *Arabic-English Lexicon*, had visited Egypt in 1825-1828 and again in 1833-1835. During that time, as he tells us, 'I devoted much of my attention to the manners and customs of the Arab inhabitants. . . . I was induced to cover some quires of paper with notes on the most memorable of their usages, partly for my own benefit, and partly in the hope that I might have it in my power to make some of my countrymen better acquainted with the domiciliated classes of one of the most interesting nations of the world. . . . I have associated, almost exclusively, with Moos'lims, of various ranks in society: I have lived as they lived, conforming with their general habits; and, in order to make them familiar and unreserved towards me on every subject, have always avowed my agreement with them in opinion whenever my conscience would allow me, and in most other cases, refrained from the expression

of my dissent, as well as from every action which might give them disgust; abstaining from eating food forbidden by their religion, and drinking wine, &c.; and even from habits merely disagreeable to them; such as the use of knives and forks at meals.' Lane's exquisite tact enabled him to collect information of the highest value on a wide variety of subjects, at a time when the mediaeval life of Islam was still flourishing, as yet hardly affected by European influences.

Among the matters that engaged Lane's passionate interest was what he terms the public recitation of romances. 'The Egyptians are not destitute of better diversion than those described in the preceding chapter:—watching puppet shows—'reciters of romances frequent the principal *cah'wehs*, or coffee-shops, of Cairo and other towns, particularly on the evenings of religious festivals, and afford attractive and rational entertainments. The reciter generally seats himself upon a small stool on the *mus'tub'ah*, or raised seat, which is built against the front of the coffee-shop: some of his auditors occupy the rest of that seat; others arrange themselves upon the *mus'tub'ahs* of the houses on the opposite side of the narrow street; and the rest sit upon stools or benches made of palm-sticks; most of them with the pipe in hand; some sipping their coffee; and all highly amused, not only with the story, but also with the lively and dramatic manner of the narrator. The reciter receives a trifling sum of money from the keeper of the coffee-shop, for attracting customers: his hearers are not obliged to contribute anything for his remuneration: many of them give nothing; and few give more than five or ten *fud'dahs*.' The most popular story was that of 'the Life of *Ab'oo Zeyd*'; next in favour was 'the Life of *Ez-Za'hir*.'

But 'there is, in Cairo, a third class of reciters of romances, who are called '*Ana'tireh*, or '*Anteree'yeh* (in the singular, '*An'ter'ee*); but they are much less numerous than either of the other two classes before mentioned; their number at present, if I be rightly informed, not amounting to more than six. They bear the above appellation from the chief subject of their recitations;

which is the romance of 'An'tar (*See'ret 'An'tar*). As a considerable portion of this interesting work has become known to English readers by Mr. Terrick Hamilton's translation, I need give no account of it. The reciters of it read it from the book: they chant the poetry; but the prose they read, in the popular manner; and they have not the accompaniment of the raba'b. As the poetry in this work is very imperfectly understood by the vulgar, those who listen to it are mostly persons of some education.'

It is a pity that Lane should have felt deterred by the existence of Hamilton's translation from giving a fuller account of the *Romance of Antar*, the more so since in his description of the other romances he introduces fragmentary translations of his own, including some rare and interesting specimens of his little-used gift for versification. He makes incidentally an important comment on the surprising fact that recitations from the romance of 'Seyf Zoo-l-Yez'en' and from 'the Thousand and One Nights' had in recent years greatly diminished. 'The great scarcity of copies of these two works is, I believe, the reason why recitations of them are no longer heard: even fragments of them are with difficulty procured; and when a complete copy of "the Thousand and One Nights" is found, the price demanded for it is too great for a reciter to have it in his power to pay. I doubt whether the romances of Ab'oo Zeyd, Ez-Za'hir, 'An'tar, and Del'hem'eh, are chosen as the subjects of recitation, because preferred to "the Thousand and One Nights"; but it is certain that the modern Moos'lims of Egypt have sufficient remains of Bed'awee feeling to take great delight in hearing tales of war.'

Lane's evidence for the relative unpopularity of the Antar cycle in Egypt of the 1830's is significant, especially when set beside what an American observer of the Moroccan scene reported a century later. 'One of the big surprises of my living in North Africa,' writes Mr. Claude McKay in his *A Long Way from Home* (New York, 1937), 'was the discovery that even the illiterate Moor is acquainted with the history and poetry of Antar. Often in the Arab cafés, when I was especially enthralled by the phrasing

of a song, I was informed that it was an *Antari*. When I was first introduced as a poet there was not a suspicion of surprise among the natives. Instead, I was surprised by their flattering remarks: "A poet! *Mezziane! Mezziane!* Our greatest poet, Antar, was a Negro."

The fame of Antar was sufficiently established in Europe by the mid-nineteenth century for a Danish version of Hammer-Purgstall's abridgment to be published in 1871, and for a Norwegian, C. A. Holmboe, in 1881 to compare him with Bayard. In the same year W. A. Clouston in his popularising *Arabian Poetry for English Readers* made a very bold claim indeed. 'It is far from improbable that the famous Arabian Romance of Antar furnished the model for the earliest of the regular romances of chivalry which were current in Europe during the Middle Ages; indeed a comparison of incidents with others found in the so-called Gothic Romances will show some very striking parallels, sufficient of themselves to lead to this conclusion.' But more remarkable than these ephemeral tributes, the French romantic Lamartine, who had paid a visit to the Levant in 1832-1833, published as one of the appendices to his four-volume *Voyage en Orient* (Paris, 1849) 'Fragments du Poème d'Antar.' The great poet and small politician was newly elected a member of the Constituent Assembly; he had lately been Foreign Minister in the provisional government set up after the abdication of Louis-Philippe; he was now running up those debts which would presently be estimated at five million francs, and the *Voyage en Orient* succeeded no better than his later desperate pot-boilers in rescuing him from miserable poverty at the last. As a specimen of Lamartine's *réchauffage* of the great romance, this is how he presents the 'Pensées d'Antar':

'Que vos ennemis craignent votre glaive! Ne restez pas là ou vous seriez dedaigné.

'Fixez-vous parmi les témoins de vos triomphes, ou mourez glorieusement les armes à la main.

'Soyez despote avec les despotes, méchant avec les méchants.

'Si votre ami vous abandonne, ne cherchez pas à le ramener; mais fermez l'oreille aux calomnies de ses rivaux.

'Il n'est pas d'abri contre la mort.

'Mieux vaut mourir en combattant que vivre dans l'esclavage. . .

'Je suis fils d'une femme au front noir, aux jambes d'autruche, aux cheveux semblables aux grains de poivre.

'O vous qui revenez de la tribu, que s'y passe-t-il?

'Portez mes saluts à celle dont l'amour m'a préservé de la mort.

'Mes ennemis désirent mon humiliation; sort cruel! mon abaissement fait leur triomphe.

'Dites-leur que leur esclave déplore leur éloignement pour lui.

'Si vos lois vous permettent de me tuer, satisfaites votre désir; personne ne vous demandera compte de mon sang.'

Later sporadic attempts to popularise the *Romance of Antartar* met with no greater success, though Rimsky-Korsakov composed as his Opus 9 the *Antar Symphony*. So at last the story comes down to the 1950's, and Cedric Dover's impassioned plea for a new approach to the old legend. 'A fruitful and reasonably compact translation of the *Sirat Antarah* should engage the early attention of an Arabist more concerned with poetry than with footnotes. And I hope he will be a Negro, for his name will live along with Antartar's. Meanwhile, as I have said, the available materials on Antartar in European languages should tempt the ambitions of a happy combination of author, artist and publisher, who will at least present his story for young people. The trio should know where the finger points, since I do.' There, for the time being, the matter rests; will the future prove kinder to the myth of Antartar than the past has been?

To conclude this long digression, it remains to discuss briefly the enigma of the authorship of the *Romance*. Hammer-Purgstall in 1802 wrote that 'the author, from beginning to end, appears to be Asmaee, a famous philologist and poet at the court of Haroon Rasheed; but sometimes other authors and sources are mentioned,

who, according to our opinion, appear to have been inserted by the story-teller in the coffee-houses.' Hamilton was even more certain, and goes so far as to raise the problem of al-Aṣma'ī's sources. 'It would be interesting as a fact in literary history, could we trace, with any certainty, the source whence the materials which furnished the basis of his romance were drawn, that it might be ascertained how far historical evidence may be cited to authenticate the different events, and how far they were only subjects of oral tradition, down to the period when they were committed to writing by Asmaee, during the reign of Haroon Rasheed.' The curious Scotsman's confidence was not shaken by the fact that 'in the course of this tale, Asmaee once breaks the thread of his narrative to state, that as he was relating before Haroon and his courtiers one of Antartar's astonishing exploits, both the monarch and the ministers joined in expressing their doubts of the truth of such tremendous powers, and even ventured to question the probability of the leading subjects of his story. Asmaee faces these objections, asserting that every fact rested on undoubted authority, and that the story was a perfect picture of manners existing at that time; and moreover (to place all further hesitation beyond dispute), he boldly states that he himself had witnessed many of the scenes he so forcibly describes, saying, that he was then four hundred years of age, and had consequently been alive long before the coming of Mohommed. What,' Hamilton wonders, 'could be the object of this extraordinary falsehood (for it is frequently repeated, and some of his heroes are also mentioned as having reached that patriarchal age), is difficult to imagine; however,' he reassures himself, 'the general points of the narrative are not to be invalidated by so bold an impossibility; and it may be presumed that the tale, as it now stands, comprises every tradition that he deemed worthy of notice, either as matter of history or of amusement. . . . It is, therefore, no matter of doubt,' he concludes boldly, 'that this romance was composed or compiled at that period; and that it was a book highly esteemed seems equally notorious. It is,

however, a very surprising circumstance that, from that time almost down to the present century, no orientalist of Europe should have mentioned its existence. Asia possesses men of ingenuity and talents, who have, with infinite labour, made commentaries on those books, generally considered as objects of research, but Haji Calfa, the most celebrated of the bibliographers of Asia, only cursorily mentions it.' In point of fact, as Heinrich Thorbecke later pointed out; even Ḥājji Khalīfa does not mention the *Sīrat 'Antar* in his considerable list of Arab romances.

It was Caussin de Perceval who first cast serious doubt on al-Aṣma'ī's authorship. In 1833 he named Saiyid Yūsuf ibn Ismā'īl as the compiler; and so the ascription stands in the Beirut edition of the Arabic text. But who was Yūsuf ibn Ismā'īl? There have been many Yūsufs in history whose fathers' names were Ismā'īl, and the conjecture, mentioned by Brockelmann, that he is to be identified with a particular Abu 'l-Maḥāsin Yūsuf ibn Ismā'īl occurring in Ibn Khallikān's *Biographical Dictionary* (the man was a minor poet who died at Aleppo in 1237) is extraordinarily hazardous. In 1838 Hammer-Purgstall came forward with a new theory; he had read in Ibn Abī Uṣaibi'a's *Dictionary of Physicians* that a certain Abū Mu'ayyad Muḥammad ibn al-Mujallī ibn al-Ṣā'igh, who flourished about 1150 and was known as al-'Antarī, 'collected stories concerning 'Antar,' a fact which Brockelmann pronounces 'worthy of attention.' But what are Ibn Abī Uṣaibi'a's actual words? He quotes one Sadīd al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar for the statement that al-'Antarī 'in his early days used to transcribe the stories of 'Antar al-'Absī and thus became known by his nomenclature.' There is nothing in the phraseology which need be understood as meaning more than that the learned physician, who was also a talented poet, eked out a livelihood in his student days by making manuscript copies of the *Antar* legend, presumably for the use of the professional reciters; surely there is no justification for claiming him as a compiler of the *Legend*. It is further significant that, though Ibn Abī Uṣaibi'a gives a fairly

long list of al-'Antarī's works as known to him, he mentions nothing on *Antar*. Yet subsequent scholars, from F. Wüstenfeld onwards, have been complacent to repeat Hammer-Purgstall's 'discovery.' But the reference is valuable at any rate as proving that manuscripts of the *Legend* were being made as early as the twelfth century.

The assigning of the *Romance of Antar* to al-Aṣma'ī is wholly indefensible, despite Mr. Cedric Dover's preference for 'Hammer-Purgstall's suggestion that As'mai actually wrote it, by royal command, during the reign of al-Mamun, the mulatto son of Harun al-Rashid.' The picture of the meticulous philologist which is presented to us by the biographers of al-Aṣma'ī, and by his genuine writings, hardly accords with such activities as the spinning of tall yarns about a semi-mythical Bedouin hero. The appearance of his name in the *Sīra*, along with the names of his rival Abū 'Ubaida (a subtle jest, that!) and the notorious forger Wahb ibn Munabbih, means at best that the reciters in an age when the memory of the historical al-Aṣma'ī had faded into a schoolboy's incubus, thought well to impress their gaping audiences by fathering their stock-in-trade upon an awe-inspiring know-all; or was it a take-off of the learned professors and their passion for quoting ancient authorities? The unpretentious style of the compilation is unmistakably akin to that of the other popular cycles, including the *Arabian Nights*. It was never intended, or regarded by the Arabs, as a serious history even of the kind that fills the pages of the *Book of Songs*, much less the dry narratives of a Wāqidi or a Ṭabari; otherwise the compiler or compilers would have made an attempt to construct plausible chains of transmission for the several incidents, as scholars with a pretence to erudition always did. But all this is not to dispute the antiquity of the *Romance*; Miss Nabia Abbott has reported the discovery of a fragment of the *Arabian Nights* as old, in her judgment, as the ninth century; and Ibn al-Nadīm's extensive list of the popular tales current in his days encourages the supposition that the story of *Antar* had been entertaining Arab audiences for at least a

thousand years before Lane listened to them in the coffee-houses of Muḥammad 'Alī's Cairo.

\* \* \*

Let us now revert to the historical 'Antara and his masterpiece, the *Mu'allāqa* which goes by his name. The reservation is used advisedly, for some scholars have thought to detect insertions in the poem; there is further the critical opinion, as expressed by Brockelmann, that 'it may be in allusion to this'—the unusual length of the erotic prelude—'that a later poet prefixed to his *Mu'allāqa* that line in which he complains that the poets had left him nothing "to patch."' The line under discussion is the opening couplet of the poem:

Have the poets left a single spot for a patch to be sewn?  
Or did you recognise the abode after long meditation?

It is a fact that this rhyming couplet is immediately followed by a second rhyming couplet, a feature almost without parallel. It is also a fact that the second couplet makes by itself an excellent conventional opening:

O abode of Abla at El-Jawá, let me hear you speak:  
I give you good morning, abode of Abla, and greetings to  
you!

But to discard the first couplet on these grounds is to miss two things, both of them important. The rhyme chosen by 'Antara is the same as that employed by Zuhair, though the metre is different; and it is to be recalled that Zuhair composed his *Mu'allāqa* to celebrate the end of the War of Dāḥis, in which 'Antara himself fought. It can be argued, and it has been argued, that 'Antara made his poem before Zuhair; there are, however, not negligible indications that things happened the other way round. The second half of 'Antara's second couplet looks like a reference

to the second half of Zuhair's sixth couplet; 'Antara mentions the place-name El-Mutathallim in his fourth couplet, Zuhair brings it in at the end of his first. It might therefore be supposed that 'Antara intended to challenge comparison with Zuhair's already famous ode, by selecting the same rhyme and by introducing these slight but readily recognisable imitations. If his opening couplet should now be allowed to stand, an even more remarkable fact emerges; the second half is very nearly a complete quotation from the second half of Zuhair's fourth couplet. With these features in mind, the poet's search for 'a single spot for a patch to be sewn' becomes strikingly vivid. Composing, as on this supposition 'Antara must have done, at the end of the sixth century, he could well look back on a great output of poetry widely known and highly esteemed, and wonder what room for innovation was left for a late-comer like himself. And the repeated double rhyme would admirably express his predicament.

Sir William Jones was first in the field with 'Antara's *Mu'allāqa*, which he analysed thus.

#### *The Poem of Antara*

This poem appears to have been a little older than that of ZOHAIK; for it must have been composed during the war of DAHIS, which the magnanimity of the two chiefs, extolled by ZOHAIK, *so nobly terminated*. ANTARA, the gallant *Absite*, of whom so much has already been said in the preliminary discourse, distinguished himself very early in the war by his valour in attacking the tribe of DHOBYAN, and boasts in this composition, that he had slain DEMDEM, the father of HOSEIN and of HAREM, whom WARD, the son of HABES, afterwards put to death. An old enmity subsisted, it seems, between our poet and those two young men, who, as ANTARA believed, had calumniated him without provocation; and his chief object in this poem was to blazon his own achievements and exploits, and to denounce implacable resentment against the calumniators, whom his menaces were likely to intimidate: yet so

harsh an argument is tempered by a strain in some parts elegiac and amatory; for even this vengeful impetuous warrior found himself obliged to comply with the custom of the ARABIAN poets, *who had left*, as he complains, *little new imagery for their successors*.

He begins with a pathetick address to the bower of his beloved ABLA, and to the ruins of her deserted mansion: he bewails her sudden departure, the distance of her new abode, and the unhappy variance between their respective clans: he describes his passion and the beauties of his mistress with great energy: thence he passes to his own laborious course of life, contrasted with the voluptuous indolence of the fair, and gives a forcible description of his camel, whom he compares to a male ostrich hastening to visit the eggs, which the female, whose usual neglect of them is mentioned by the naturalists, had left in a remote valley. He next expatiates on his various accomplishments and virtues; his mildness to those who treat him kindly, his fierceness to those who injure him; his disregard of wealth, his gaiety, his liberality; and above all, his military prowess and spirit of enterprise, on which he triumphantly enlarges through the rest of the poem, except four couplets, in which he alludes obscurely to a certain love-adventure; and, after many animated descriptions of battles and single combats, he concludes with a wish, that he may live to slay the two sons of DEMDEM, and with a bitter exultation on the death of their father, whom *he had left a prey to the wild beasts and the vultures*.

The metre is iambick, like that of the poem immediately preceding.

The next step in the publication of this ode, which Jones had of course transliterated, came in 1808. In that year Alexius Boldyrew brought out at Göttingen, at his own expense, a slender and diminutive pamphlet of 24 pages entitled *Duae Moallakat Antara et Hareth*; it comprises the Arabic text of this and the seventh *Mu'allaga* together with a brief Latin preface in which he quoted E. F. C. Rosenmüller's appraisal of Jones's

'versio Anglica elegantissima' and regrets that the great Welshman had not used Arabic types. Then in 1814 at Amsterdam another Latin pamphlet appeared with the following title-page:

Disputatio philologica | de | Antara | ejusque poëmate arabico Moallakah: | quam, favente suo numine, | praeside viro clarissimo | Joanne Willmet, | . . . die xxx Junii MDCCCXIV, hora I pomeridiana, | in auditorio majore, | ad publicam disceptationem proponit, | Vincentius Elias Menil, | Rotterdamensis, | S.S. Min. Ecclesiae Wallonicae cand.

V. E. Menil of Rotterdam, candidate for holy orders, successfully defended the thesis which he offered for his degree, and interested his Chairman on the occasion of the disputation, J. Willmet, to such an extent that two years later he was able to include his name on the title-page (Leiden, 1816) of:

Antarae | poëma arabicum Moallakah, | cum integris | Zouzenii scholiis. | E codice manuscripto edidit, in Latinum | sermonem transtulit | et | lectionis varietatem | addidit | Vincentius Elias Menil. | Observationes ad totum poema subjunxit | Joannes Willmet.

So came out the *editio princeps* of al-Zauzani's commentary, and the first Latin version of 'Antara's *Mu'allaga*.

In 1857, the year after his present to the King of Württemberg, Philipp Wolff published, again at Rotweil, his *Muallakat*, German verse-renderings of all the Seven Odes. In the preface to his translation of 'Antara he is able to refer to the edition of three other poems ascribed to him which Baron de Slane had published in the *Journal Asiatique* for May 1838, as well as to Hammer-Purgstall's change of mind about the authorship of the *Romance of Antar*. Eleven years later, at Heidelberg, Heinrich Thorbecke produced his '*Antarah, des vorislamischen Dichters Leben*', an annotated edition of the 'biography' of 'Antara

abstracted from the *Book of Songs*. Another nine years, and E. H. Palmer, Lord Almoner's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge (the Chair was abolished in 1933), published his *The Song of the Reed*, a volume of poems translated and original, in which he included a version of 'Antara's *Mu'allaga*.

Palmer, whose name now appears in these pages for the first and only time, had already travelled extensively in the Arab world and brought out much when he delivered his verdict and printed his rendering of 'Antara. 'The imagery of the poem, though vigorous, is, as we might expect, often extremely rude and erratic, passing with sudden transition from a gentle pastoral utterance to the fierce breathings of battle and revenge; at one time dwelling fondly on the image of a beloved maiden, at another conjuring up, with grim delight, the image of a slaughtered foe. I have given it, as far as possible, in its native simplicity, without seeking, by suppression or embellishment, to adapt it to modern European taste.' The reader will presently have the opportunity of judging how far Palmer succeeded in his laudable purpose; his brilliant career, still so full of rich promise, was cut short five years later when, at the lamentably early age of 42, he was murdered by Bedouins.

Sir Charles Lyall did not try his hand at 'Antara; and so we are left only to enumerate the Blunts' version, and the extracts versified by R. A. Nicholson. The sequence chosen for comparison is where the poet boasts of his fighting prowess to his mistress.

Sir William Jones:

- 44 Go, ask the warriors, O daughter of MALEC, if thou art ignorant  
of my valour, *ask them* that, which thou knowest not;
- 45 *Ask how* I act, when I am constantly fixed to the saddle of  
an elegant horse, swimming in his course, whom my  
bold antagonists alternately wound;
- 46 Yet sometimes he advances alone to the conflict, and some-  
times he stands collected in a multitudinous throng of  
heroes with strong bows.

- 47 *Ask*, and whoever has been witness to the combat, will  
inform thee, that I am impetuous in battle, but regardless  
of the spoils.
- 48 Many a warrior, clad in a suit of mail, at whose violent  
assault the boldest men have trembled, who neither had  
saved himself by swift flight nor by abject submission,
- 49 Has this arm laid prone with a rapid blow from a well-  
straitened javeline, firm between the knots:
- 50 Broad were the lips of the wound; and the noise of the  
rushing blood called forth the wolves, prowling in the  
night, and pinched with hunger:
- 51 With my swift lance did I pierce his coat of mail; and no  
warrior, however brave, is secure from its point.
- 52 I left him, like a sacrificed victim, to the lions of the forest,  
who feasted on him between the crown of his head and  
his wrists.

Philipp Wolff:

Wohlan, o Maleks Tochter, frag bei den Reitern an,  
Wenn du nicht wissen solltest, was ich sei für ein Mann.

Ich sitz auf meines Renners Sattel bei Tag und Nacht,  
Des starken, der mit Wunden schon reichlich ward bedacht.

Bald wird er hingejaget in Einzelkampfsgefahr,  
Bald ist er zwischen einer gewaltigen Heereschaar.

Es kann dirs Jeder sagen, der bei der Fehde war,  
Dass ich drein schlag im Kampfe, die Beut abweise gar.

Wie manchem Waffenträger, den Tapfern selbst ein Graun,  
Von Flucht und von Ergeben nichts wissen wollend, traun,

Hat meine Hand freigebig durch einen schnellen Stoss  
Gezeigt sich mit dem Speere gerad und tadellos!

Ich hab mit diesem Speere ihm dann durchbohret ganz  
Die Rüstung; denn auch Edle verfallen ja der Lanz.

So hab ich ihn zur Speise des Wilds gelassen, das  
In kurzer Zeit der Finger Schöne mit Gier ihm frass.

E. H. Palmer:

But if my valour needeth warranty,  
Go ask the hero horseman of thy tribe,  
Ask them how fares it, when I once bestride  
My steed, whom every lance by turn assails,  
Now rushing singly to defy the host,  
Now plunging headlong where the bowmen crowd.  
Each glad survivor of the fierce affray  
Will tell thee truly how I love the fight,  
How little care I have to share the spoils.

The fiercest warrior armed *cap-à-piè*,—  
No craven coward he to yield or fly,  
But one whose onslaught e'en the bravest dread,—  
Assails me; grasping in my quick right hand  
A lance, in fashion like a weaver's beam;  
I pierce his armour, run him through and through,  
And read this lesson to the wondering hosts:—  
"That spears respect not birth or bravery!"  
I leave his carcase for the beasts to rend,  
To munch his fingers and his comely wrists.

W. S. Blunt and Lady Anne Blunt:

Ask of the horsemen of Málek, O thou his progeny,  
all they have seen of my high deeds. Then shalt thou  
learn of them  
How that I singly among them, clad in war's panoply,  
stout on my war-horse the swift one charged at their  
chivalry.  
Lo, how he rusheth, the fierce one, singly in midst of them,  
waiting anon for the archers closing in front of us.  
They that were nearest in battle, they be my proof to thee  
how they have quailed at my war-cry, felt my urbanity.

Many and proud are their heroes, fear-striking warriors,  
men who nor flee nor surrender, yielding not easily.  
Yet hath my right arm o'erborne them, thrust them aside  
from me,  
laid in their proud backs the long spear,—slender the  
shaft of it.

See, how it splitteth asunder mail-coat and armouring;  
not the most valiant a refuge hath from the point of it.  
Slain on the ground have I left him, prey to the lion's  
brood,  
feast of the wrists and the fingers. Ha, for the sacrifice!

R. A. Nicholson:

Learn, Málik's daughter, how  
I rush into the fray,  
And how I draw back only  
At sharing of the prey.

I never quit the saddle,  
My strong steed nimbly bounds;  
Warrior after warrior  
Have covered him with wounds.

Full-armed against me stood  
One feared of fighting men:  
He fled not oversoon  
Nor let himself be ta'en.

With straight hard-shafted spear  
I dealt him in the side  
A sudden thrust which opened  
Two streaming gashes wide,

Two gashes whence outgurgled  
His life-blood: at the sound  
Night-roaming ravenous wolves  
Flock eagerly around.



## THE SEVEN ODES

So with my doughty spear  
 I trussed his coat of mail—  
 For truly, when the spear strikes,  
 The noblest man is frail—  
 And left him low to banquet  
 The wild beasts gathering there;  
 They have torn off his fingers,  
 His wrist and fingers fair!

## MU'ALLAQA OF 'ANTARA

Have the poets left a single spot for a patch to be sewn?  
 Or did you recognise the abode after long meditation?  
 O abode of Abla at El-Jawá, let me hear you speak;  
 I give you good morning, abode of Abla, and greetings to you!  
 For there I halted my she-camel, huge-bodied as a castle,  
 that I might satisfy the hankering of a lingerer;  
 while Abla lodged at El-Jawá, and our folk dwelt  
 at El-Hazn and Es-Sammán and El-Mutathallim.  
 All hail to you, ruins of a time long since gone by,  
 empty and desolate since the day Umm el-Haitham parted.  
 She alighted in the land of the bellowers; and it has become  
 very hard for me to seek you out, daughter of Makhram.  
 Casually I fell in love with her, as I slew her folk  
 (by your father's life, such a declaration is scarce opportune),  
 and you have occupied in my heart, make no doubt of it,  
 the place of one dearly beloved and highly honoured.  
 But how to visit her, now her people are in spring-quarters  
 at Unaizatan, while ours are dwelling in El-Ghailam?

If you were resolved upon departing, assuredly  
 it was a dark night your camels were bridled on;  
 nothing disquieted me, but that her people's burthen-beasts  
 were champing khimkhim-berries amid their habitations,  
 two and forty milch-camels among them, all black  
 as the inner wing-feathers of the sable raven.  
 When she captures you with that mouthful of sharp white teeth,  
 sweet indeed the kiss of it, delicious to taste,  
 you might think a merchant's musk-bag borne in its basket  
 has outstripped the press of her side-teeth, wafted from her  
 mouth to you,  
 or an untrodden meadow that a good rain has guaranteed  
 shall bear rich herbage, but sparsely dinged, not known of men,

visited by every virgin raincloud bountiful in showers  
 that have left every puddle gleaming like a silver dirham,  
 deluging and decanting, so that at every eve  
 the water is streaming over it in unbroken flow;  
 and there the fly sits alone, unceasingly  
 humming away, like a toper raising his voice in song,  
 trilling, the while he rubs one leg against another  
 just like a one-armed man bending to strike the flint.  
 She lolls evening and morning lazily upon a pillow  
 while I ride through the night on a black, well-bridled mare  
 with a saddle for my cushion, laid on a stout-legged beast  
 very large in the flanks, generous in the girth.  
 Would I indeed be brought to her dwelling by a Shadani  
 she-camel  
 cursed by an udder barren of milk and withered up,  
 lashing her tail after all night travelling, still a-swagger,  
 stamping the sand-mounds with pads heavily tramping?  
 At eventide it is as though I am breaking the hillocks  
 upon an ostrich close-footed, that lacks for ears,  
 to which the young ostriches flutter, as herds of Yemeni camels  
 flock to the call of a barbarous, incomprehensible voice;  
 they follow after the crest of his head; he is like a litter  
 laid upon a sort of bier, and tented for them,  
 small-headed, visiting his eggs in Dhul Ushaira,  
 like an ear-lopped slave swaggering in long furs.  
 My camel drank of the waters of Ed-Duhrudán  
 then swerved and fled, avoiding the pools of Ed-Dailam,  
 as though she twisted her right side to get away  
 from a big-headed beast that screams at evening,  
 a cat padding beside her, and every time she turns  
 to him in anger he wards her off with claws and teeth.  
 Long journeying has left her with a strong-built back,  
 high-hoisted, supported on props like a tent-pitcher's.  
 She knelt down at the waters of Er-Ridá', and you might have  
 said

it was upon crackling cleft reeds that she knelt down,  
 and it was like as if thick butter-fat or molten pitch  
 that is used to kindle a blaze about a boiler  
 welled out from the back of the neck of an angry, spirited  
 proud-stepping she, the match of a well-bitten stallion.

If you should lower your veil before me, what then? Why,  
 I am a man skilled to seize the well-armoured knight.  
 Praise me therefore for the things you know of me; for I  
 am easy to get on with, provided I'm not wronged;  
 but if I am wronged, then the wrong I do is harsh indeed,  
 bitter to the palate as the tang of the colocynth.  
 It may also be mentioned how often I have drunk good wine,  
 after the noon's sweltering calm, from a bright figured bowl  
 in a glittering golden glass scored with lines  
 partnered to a lustrous filtered flask on its left,  
 and whenever I have drunk, recklessly I squander  
 my substance, while my honour is abounding, unimpaired,  
 and whenever I have sobered up, I diminish not my bounty,  
 my qualities and my nobility being as you have known them.  
 And many's the good wife's spouse I have left on the floor  
 the blood whistling from his ribs like a harelip hissing,  
 my fists having beaten him to it with a hasty blow  
 and the spray of a deep thrust, dyed like dragon's blood.  
 I could advise you, daughter of Malik, to ask the horsemen  
 if you should happen to be ignorant and uninformed,  
 for I'm never out of the saddle of a strong swimmer,  
 sturdy, assaulted again and again by the warriors, wounded,  
 now detached for the lance-thrusting, and anon  
 resorting to the great host with their tight bows.  
 Those who were present at the engagement will acquaint you  
 how I plunge into battle, but abstain at the booty-sharing.  
 Many's the bristling knight the warriors have shunned to take  
 on,  
 one who was not in a hurry to flee or capitulate,

my hands have been right generous to with the hasty thrust  
of a well-tempered, strong-jointed, straightened spear  
giving him a broad, double-sided gash, the hiss of which  
guides in the night-season the prowling, famished wolves;  
I split through his accoutrements with my solid lance  
(for even the noblest is not sacrosanct to the spear)  
and left him carrion for the wild beasts to pounce on,  
all of him, from the crown of his head to his limp wrists.

Many's the time I've ripped with my sword the links of a long  
well-riveted mail-coat off a signal defender of the right;  
nimble his hands were with the gaming-arrows in winter,  
he tore down traders' inn-signs, and was much chided.  
When he beheld me come down in the field against him  
he bared his back-teeth, and not in a grin I may say;  
so I thrust him with my lance, then I came on top of him  
with a trenchant Indian blade of shining steel,  
and when the sun was high in the heavens I descried him  
his fingers and his head as it were dyed with indigo—  
a true hero, as if he were a clothed sarha-tree,  
shod in shoes of tanned leather, no weakling twin.

O lovely fawn, huntable indeed for those who may enjoy her  
but to me denied—and would to God she were lawful to me—  
I sent my slave-girl to her, telling her, 'Off with you now,  
scout out news of her for me, and tell me truly.'  
She said, 'I saw the enemy were off their guard  
and the fawn was attainable to any good marksman.'  
As she turned, her throat was like a young antelope's,  
the throat of a tender gazelle-fawn with spotted upper lip.

I am told that Amr is ungrateful for my beneficence,  
and ingratitude is a heaviness to the soul of the benefactor.  
I have minded well the counsel my uncle gave me in the fore-  
noon

when fearfully the lips drew back from the mouth's white teeth  
in the thick of death, of whose agonies the true hero  
utters no complaint, other than a muffled cry:  
when my comrades thrust me against the lances, I did not  
shrink

from them, but my field of advance was narrowly choked.  
When in the midst of the battle-dust I heard the cry  
of Murra ascend shrill, and the two sons of Rabi'a,  
and all Muhallim were striving beneath their banner  
and death stalked beneath the sons of Muhallim's banner,  
then I knew for sure that when the issue was joined with them  
such a blow would fall as to scare the bird from its snuggling  
chicks.

When I beheld the people advancing in solid mass  
urging each other on, I wheeled on them blamelessly;  
'Antara!' they were calling, and the lances were like  
well-ropes sinking into the breast of my black steed.  
Continuously I charged them with his white-blazoned face  
and his breast, until his body was caparisoned in blood,  
and he twisted round to the spears' impact upon his breast  
and complained to me, sobbing and whimpering;  
had he known the art of conversation, he would have  
protested,

and had he been acquainted with speech, he would have  
spoken to me.

The horses frowning terribly plunged into the crumbling soil,  
long-bodied mare along with short-haired, long-bodied  
stallion,

and oh, my soul was cured, and its faint sickness was healed  
by the horsemen's cry, 'Ha, Antara, on with you!'

Submissive are my riding-camels; wherever I will go  
my heart accompanies me, and I urge it with firm command.  
I greatly feared that death might claim me, before  
war's wheel should turn against the two sons of Damdam,

who blaspheme against my honour, and I have not reviled them,

who threaten to spill my blood, if I do not meet them; and well they may, it being myself that left their father carrion for the wild beasts and all the great vultures.

## SIX

*The Regicide*

‘AMR son of Hind the Stone-cracker, murderer of the poet Tarafa, sat one day drinking with his boon-companions. When the wine was working powerfully on his arrogant and intemperate spirit, it suddenly occurred to him to put to them a strange question.

‘Do you know of any Arab whose mother would put up her nose at the idea of waiting on my mother?’

For ‘Amr, despite his many faults, was fiercely proud of the gentle Christian princess who had given him birth, and whose son he delighted in being called; unnaturally so, for other men, kings above all, preferred always to be known by their fathers’ lineage. It was this very pride, a virtue in more balanced characters, that finally proved his undoing.

‘Yes,’ his courtiers replied. ‘The mother of ‘Amr son of Kulthūm.’

‘Why?’ asked the king, dumbfounded by such an unexpected answer.

‘Because her father was Muhalhil son of Rabī’a, and her uncle was Kulaib son of Wā’il, the mightiest of the Arabs. And because her husband was Kulthūm son of Mālik, the knightliest of the Arabs, and her son is ‘Amr, the chieftain of his people.’

So ‘Amr son of Hind sent a message to ‘Amr son of Kulthūm, inviting him to visit him in his capital and requesting him to bring his mother with him to call on Queen Hind. And ‘Amr son of Kulthūm came to al-Hira out of the peninsula, accompanied by

certain of the Banū Taghlib; Lailā the daughter of al-Muhalhil came also, being attended by women of the same tribe. Then 'Amr son of Hind commanded that his pavilion should be set up between the city and the Euphrates, whither he summoned the notables of his kingdom to meet the Taghlibi noblemen.

'Amr son of Kulthūm came into the presence of 'Amr son of Hind, what time Lailā his mother and Queen Hind entered a tent beside the royal pavilion. (Now Hind the mother of King 'Amr was the paternal aunt of Imr al-Qais the poet, while Lailā the daughter of al-Muhalhil was the niece of Fātima the daughter of Rabi'a, Imr al-Qais's mother; there was that relationship between them.) King 'Amr had ordered his mother to send away the servants as soon as he called for dessert, and to constrain Lailā to wait upon her.

'Amr son of Hind in due time commanded the table to be brought in, and set it up before his guests. When they had eaten well, he shouted for the dessert.

'Lailā, hand me that dish,' Hind demanded in the neighbouring tent on hearing the prearranged cue.

'Let the one that wants it get up and fetch it herself,' Lailā replied tartly.

Hind repeated her request, insisting that Lailā should do as she was bidden. That was more than her independent Bedouin spirit could endure.

'I am insulted,' she shouted. 'Taghlib, help!'

When her son heard her cry the blood mounted into his face. He looked over at King 'Amr, and beheld the wickedness in his eyes. He sprang to his feet in a fury, and looked about him for means to slake his rage. Following the ancient desert custom, all arms had been laid aside before the festivity began, and only one weapon was to be seen in that place of hospitality—the king's own sword, hanging on the wall of the pavilion. He seized it, and with a swift blow struck off the Lakhmid monarch's head.

Thus it came about that a poet avenged the death of a poet, and rid the world of a detested tyrant.

\* \* \*

Al-Muhalhil, Lailā's father, had led the Banū Taghlib in the great War of al-Basūs, that broke out when his brother Kulaib was treacherously slain by a man of Dhuhl, of the cognate tribe of Bakr. He was himself a noted poet, and is particularly remembered for his brutal murder of Bujair son of al-Hārith, sent by his father in a well-meaning attempt to mediate between the warring factions.

'Die for the shoe-latchet of Kulaib!' al-Muhalhil had shouted as he slew him.

'Now al-Hārith was the gentlest of men in his day,' Sir Charles Lyall recounts, 'and when he was told that Bujair had been slain, he said, "A noble victim, if his death has stanchd our wounds and put an end to our war!" "Nay," they said, "Muhalhil slew him but for the shoe's latchet of Kulaib." Then was his wrath kindled, and he said:—

"Bujair then was naught as price for a slain man?

Kulaib's stock will stint not yet of their wrong?

Tie close by my tent an-Na'āmah my war-mare—

years long was War barren, now fruitful her womb.

I was not of those whose wrong wrought it, God knows:  
yet to-day must I be burned in its blaze.

Tie close to my tent an-Na'āmah my war-mare—  
a lord for a latchet—the price is too dear!"

And al-Hārith joined in the fierce feud, which lasted forty years.' It is said that the first Arabian ode ever composed was that uttered by al-Muhalhil to mourn his brother's death.

Such was the man who begat the mother of 'Amr son of Kulthūm. When his wife Hind gave birth, and he saw that the child was a girl and not the boy for whom his fiery soul was craving, he

12 x  
Kulthūm  
Hind

ordered her peremptorily to kill the infant; for in the savage times of the Ignorance it was no uncommon thing for female babies to be exposed, and even to be buried alive—a dreadful practice against which the Prophet was to bring a warning from on high.

When the sun shall be darkened,  
 when the stars shall be thrown down,  
 when the mountains shall be set moving,  
 when the pregnant camels shall be neglected,  
 when the savage beasts shall be mustered,  
 when the seas shall be set boiling,  
 when the souls shall be coupled,  
 when the buried infant shall be asked for what sin she was slain,  
 when the scrolls shall be unrolled,  
 when heaven shall be stripped off,  
 when Hell shall be set blazing,  
 when Paradise shall be brought nigh,  
 then shall a soul know that it has produced.

The unhappy mother called a servant and begged him to hide the child. That night al-Muhalhil dreamed a dream, and in his dream he seemed to hear a voice that chanted:

How many a youth of promise,  
 how many a goodly chieftain,  
 what armoury of glory lurks  
 in Muhalhil's daughter's womb!

'Hind, where is my daughter?' al-Muhalhil cried, starting out of his sleep. 'I killed her,' Hind replied.

'No, by the God of Rabī'a, tell me the truth!' her husband implored.

The mother then told him what she had done with the child, and he commanded that she should be well nurtured on the choicest of foods.

When Lailā—for that was the child's name—was of an age to be given in marriage, Kulthūm son of Mālik, son of 'Attāb the Taghlibite wedded her, a nobleman and chieftain whose unbroken genealogy reached back through Nizār to 'Adnān. He also dreamed a dream, at the time of Lailā's pregnancy, in which he heard a voice saying:

What a son shall be yours, Laila!  
 Impetuous as a roaring lion,  
 sprung of Jusham's fertile loins—  
 no lie is this that I am telling.

The child that Lailā bore was called 'Amr. The infant was just one year old when his mother heard the same mysterious voice. This time the rune ran:

Mother of Amr, I promise you  
 a glorious son of noble stock,  
 braver than a maned lion,  
 strong to smite and strenuous,  
 people's leader at fifteen.

The prophecy was fulfilled exactly; 'Amr son of Kulthūm became chieftain of his tribe when he was only fifteen years old. Like his grandfather al-Muhalhil he proved himself not only a heroic leader of the Banū Taghlib, but also a splendid poet. He had a brother called Murra who was also destined to be a regicide: his victim was al-Mundhir IV, the last but one to occupy the royal palace at al-Hira. He also had a son named 'Abbād who continued the family tradition of assassination. Many generations later the literary impulse in 'Amr's blood manifested itself again in his descendant Kulthūm son of 'Amr called al-'Attābī, for a time panegyrist to Hārūn al-Rashīd.

Tradition credits 'Amr with a fabulously long life; the figure of 150 years is mentioned, suspiciously reminiscent of what is

related concerning Labīd. This report is, however, particularly incredible, for otherwise we should hear of 'Amr surviving into Islam and accepting conversion too; Father Cheikho puts his death at the year 600, and his guess is probably not far from the truth. *The Book of Songs* has preserved for us the last words the poet is supposed to have spoken. Feeling that death had come upon him, he summoned his sons in order to indulge in the Arab's final pleasure, the imparting of death-bed advice.

'My sons, I have reached an age such as none of my forefathers ever attained, and that same death which descended on them must inevitably call on me soon. I swear by God that I have never reviled any man in any way unless I have been similarly reviled, true against true or lies against lies. The insulter always gets insulted back; so abstain from abusing others—that will the better secure you from trouble. Be good neighbours, for that will earn you a good name. Do not oppress the stranger. It sometimes happens that a man alone is better than a thousand, and sometimes it is better to refuse a request than to break a promise. When you are spoken to, keep your ears open, and when you speak, be brief; the babbling tongue utters much nonsense. The bravest man is he who is merciful after battle; the noblest death is to fall fighting. There is no good in the man who does not pause to think when he is angry; neither is there any good in him who, when remonstrated with, does not mend his ways. Some men are such that no good is to be hoped for of them, and no evil feared; such a man's denial is better than his giving, and his churlishness is better than his benevolence. And do not marry within your own tribe; that leads to hideous hatred.'

Another version, however, paints a somewhat less favourable picture of 'Amr's end. Perhaps taking the hint from the opening verses of his *Mu'allaqa*, the unkindler legend relates that King al-Nu'mān III, son of al-Mundhir whom the poet's brother murdered, with a surprising magnanimity—or should we rather

call it Christian forgiveness?—sent 'Amr every year a handsome present. But when the assassin of 'Amr son of Hind was advanced in years, the King of Lakhm forwarded the gift instead to his son al-Aswad. This infuriated the ancient warrior, and he swore that from thenceforward he would touch no food, nor take any drink but wine. This moreover he imbibed neat, not mixed with water after the Arab fashion. His wife tried every means to persuade him to eat, but the only result of her intervention was to increase his resolve; he steadily drank himself to death.

\* \* \*

None of the scholars of antiquity appears to have troubled to collect 'Amr's poetry, or perhaps there was not enough of it to reward the collector's pains; at all events nothing has come down to us to attest their labours. A single manuscript preserved in the Fatih Mosque in Istanbul passes itself off as containing his *Diwān*, together with that of his rival al-Hārith son of Hilliza; but this, to judge by F. Krenkow's edition (in the Beirut journal *al-Mashriq*), looks more like a piecing together of extracts gleaned from the school-books than a serious attempt to establish a recension. The collection amounts to a mere twenty-four fragments, none of any great length, supplemented by three pieces ascribed to the poet's son al-Aswad and a handful of more or less relevant miscellanea; it adds little to the little we already knew.

The fame of 'Amr therefore rests almost exclusively on his *Mu'allaqa*, which is indeed a masterly poem. The eighth-century philologist al-Mufaḍḍal, to whose industry we owe the excellent anthology of ancient poetry called *al-Mufaḍḍaliyāt* (made available in the learned edition of Sir Charles Lyall), lamented the fact that 'Amr composed so little whereas others had composed so much; and he added, 'his one ode is finer than their hundred.' The *Book of Songs* tells us that the Banū Taghlib, his tribe, admired the poem so greatly that 'young and old were for ever reciting it,' which provoked a rhymester of the rival Banū Bakr to exclaim:

The Taghlibites have been made oblivious to every high exploit

by a single ode that Amr son of Kulthum composed;  
they recite it eternally from the moment they are born—  
what sort of men are they, never to tire of a poem?

Contradictory explanations are offered of the circumstances under which the Taghlibite chieftain burst forth so suddenly into such wonderful song. The *Book of Songs* seems to imply that 'Amr composed his *Mu'allāqa* after killing the tyrant of al-Hira, but this scarcely appears credible in view of the contents of the poem; it may be that the report arose through confusing the story of the assassination with the lines:

With what purpose in view, Amr bin Hind,  
should we be underlings to your chosen princelet?  
Threaten us, then, and menace us; but gently!  
When, pray, were we your mother's domestics?

It is also possible that the story of the assassination was itself invented to account for the last outburst. The narrative which follows is that prefixed by al-Tibrizī to his commentary on the ode; it must be remembered, however, that he was writing some five hundred years after the event, and though he quotes as his authority Abū 'Amr al-Shaibānī, that takes us back only to the beginning of the ninth century, for al-Shaibānī died in 821.

The Banū Taghlib ibn Wā'il were among the most powerful peoples in the Ignorance; it is said that if Islam had been a little later in coming the Banū Taghlib would have eaten up all the other Arabs. It is related that certain men of the Banū Taghlib came to Bakr ibn Wā'il and begged them for water, but Bakr drove them away because of the rancour that existed between them. They therefore returned; and seventy of their numbers died of thirst. Then the Banū Taghlib assembled together to

make war on Bakr ibn Wā'il; and Bakr made ready to receive them. But when the two tribes met, each was loth to begin operations against the other; for all feared that the war between them would blaze up anew as it had been in the past. They therefore mutually proposed a truce, and agreed to take as arbiter of their dispute King 'Amr son of Hind.

'I will not make deliverance between you,' 'Amr son of Hind declared, 'until you bring me seventy men of the nobility of Bakr ibn Wā'il. Them I will detain with me in bond, and if it should prove that the Banū Taghlib are in the right, I will hand them over to them; if however their case is not established, then I will set them free.'

Both parties concurred with this condition, and appointed a day when they would meet in the king's presence.

'Whom do you think Taghlib will produce to plead their cause?' the king asked his courtiers.

'Their poet and chieftain, 'Amr son of Kulthūm,' was the reply of all.

'And Bakr ibn Wā'il?'

As to this they differed, some naming one and some another of the nobles of Bakr ibn Wā'il.

'You are all wrong, by God,' the king exclaimed. 'Bakr ibn Wā'il will never make do with anyone but the deaf old man who's for ever tripping up over his skirt, and is too aristocratic to let his leader lift it up and put it over his shoulder.'

Next morning Taghlib arrived, led by 'Amr son of Kulthūm who took his place in the audience-chamber.

Meanwhile al-Ḥārith son of Ḥilliza said to his people, 'I have composed a speech. Whoever delivers it will win the argument and triumph over his adversary.'

So certain persons were taught to recite it; but when these men stood up before the king he was not pleased to let them speak. When al-Ḥārith, who was a leper, learned that no one would be delivering his speech in his place, he said to them:

'By God, I hate the idea of going to the king and having him



speak to me from behind seven veils, and then when I depart from him to have my footprints sprinkled with water. But I don't see anyone to take my place, so I'll endure that for your sakes.'

So he left home and came to the king. When 'Amr son of Kulthūm beheld him, he said to the king:

'What, is this the one who's going to hold forth against me? Why, he can't even harness his own camel!'

The king gave him an answer which reduced him to silence. Then al-Ḥārith recited his ode beginning:

Asmá announced to me she would soon be parting.

He spoke the verses standing behind seven veils. Hind, the king's mother, was listening.

'By God,' she exclaimed when she heard him, 'I've never seen anything like this—a man making such a fine speech, and he standing behind seven veils!'

'Remove one veil,' the king ordered.

So al-Ḥārith drew nearer; and all the time Hind repeated the same remark, and the veils were lifted one after another, until finally the poet found himself with the king in his audience-chamber. Then 'Amr son of Hind gave him to eat out of his own dish, and directed that no water should be sprinkled in his footprints. He cut the forelocks of the seventy men of Bakr who were in his hands, and delivered them over to al-Ḥārith; he also commanded that al-Ḥārith's poem should never be recited without the reciter first making his ablutions. Those forelocks remained in the possession of the Banū Yashkur after al-Ḥārith, for he was a man of Tha'labā ibn Ghanm ibn Banī Mālik ibn Tha'labā.

Then 'Amr son of Kulthūm recited his ode.

\* \* \*

After Sir William Jones had published his transliteration and translation, the *Mu'allāqa* of 'Amr had to wait twenty-seven years to find an editor. In 1819 J. G. L. Kosegarten, who was

later to publish a famous Arabic chrestomathy and to bring out the first edition of the Hudhailī poems, entered upon his distinguished career with:

Amrui ben kelthūm Taglebitae | Moallakam | Abu abd allae  
el hossein ben achmed essūsēni | scholiis illustratam.

It was a careful edition, published at Jena, of 'Amr's ode with al-Zauzanī's commentary. Prefixed was the 'life' of the poet from the *Book of Songs*, in Arabic and Latin. The commentary was also rendered in full into Latin, and a German verse-translation of the *Mu'allāqa* was appended: 'Translationem germanicam adiecimus, quamvis rhythmicam at tamen adstrictam, ut qui eam perlustrarent lectores totius carminis argumentum et dispositionem uno in conspectu viderent.' Cambridge University Library possesses a precious copy of this rare book, the more valuable because it later belonged to Friedrich August Arnold (the author of *Septem Mo'allakāt*) and was heavily annotated by him. But before looking at Kosegarten's rhythms, let us see how Jones rehearses the 'argument' and proses the opening sequence.

### *The Poem of Amru*

The discordant and inconsistent accounts of the commentators, who seem to have collected every tradition that presented itself, have left us very much in the dark on the subject of the two following poems; but the common opinion, which appears to me the most probable, is, that they are, in fact, *political and adverse declamations*, which were delivered by AMRU and HARETH at the head of their respective clans, before AMRU the son of HINDA, king of HIRA in *Mesopotamia*, who had assumed the office of mediator between them after a most obstinate war, and had undertaken to hear a discussion of their several claims to pre-eminence, and to decide their cause with perfect impartiality. In some copies,

indeed, as in those of NAHAS and of ZAUZENI, the two poems are separated: and in that of OBAIDALLA, the poem of HARETH is totally omitted; a remarkable fact, of which I have made some use to a different purpose in the preliminary dissertation. Were I to draw my opinion solely from the structure and general turn of AMRU's composition, I should conceive that the king of HIRA, who, like other tyrants, wished to *make all men just but himself, and to leave all nations free but his own*, had attempted to enslave the powerful tribe of TAGLEB, and to appoint a prefect over them, but that the warlike possessors of the deserts and forests had openly disclaimed his authority, and employed their principal leader and poet to send him defiance, and magnify their own independent spirit.

Some ARABIAN writers assert, what there is abundant reason to believe, that the above-mentioned king was killed by the author of the following poem, who composed it, say they, on that occasion; but the king himself is personally addressed by the poet, and warned against precipitation in deciding the contest; and, where mention is made of *crowned heads left prostrate on the field*, no particular monarch seems to be intended, but the conjunction copulative has the force, as it often has in *Arabick*, of a frequentative participle.

Let us then, where certainty cannot be obtained, be satisfied with high probability, and suppose, with TABREIZI, that the two tribes of BECR and TAGLEB, having exhausted one another in a long war, to which the murder of COLEIB the *Taglebite* had given rise, agreed to terminate their ruinous quarrel, and to make the king of HIRA their umpire; that, on the day appointed, the tribes met before the palace or royal tent; and that AMRU, the son of CELTHUM, prince of the *Taglebites*, either pronounced his poem according to the custom of the *Arabs*, or stated his pretensions in a solemn speech, which he afterwards versified, that it might be more easily remembered by his tribe and their posterity.

The oration or poem, or whatever it may be called, is arrogant beyond all imagination, and contains hardly a colour of argu-

ment: the prince was, most probably, a vain young man, proud of his accomplishments, and elate with success in his wars; but his production could not fail of becoming extremely popular among his countrymen; and his own family, the descendants of JOSHAM the son of BECR, were so infatuated by it, that (as one of their own poets admits) *they could scarce ever desist from repeating it, and thought they had attained the summit of glory without any farther exertions of virtue*. He begins with a strain perfectly *Anacreontick*, the elegiack style of the former poems not being well adapted to his eager exultation and triumph; yet there is some mixture of complaint on the departure of his mistress, whose beauties he delineates with a boldness and energy highly characteristick of unpolished manners: the rest of his work consists of menaces, vaunts, and exaggerated applause of his own tribe for their generosity and prowess, the goodness of their horses, the beauty of their women, the extent of their possessions, and even the number of their ships; which boasts were so well founded, that, according to some authors, if MAHOMED had not been born, the *Taglebites* would have appropriated the dominion of all Arabia, and possibly would have erected a mighty state, both civil and maritime.

This poem is composed in *copious verse*, or metre of the *fourth* species, according to the following form:

'Amatores | puellarum | misellos  
'Ocellorum | nitor multos | fefellit.'

But the compound foot *amore furens* is used at pleasure instead of the first epitrite; as,

'Venusta puell|la, tarda venis | ad hortum,  
'Parata lyra est, | paratus odor | rosarum.'

The 'perfectly *Anacreontick* strain' of the opening is a violent departure from the conventional curtain-raiser, the halt at the deserted encampment so beloved of ancient Arab poets. For this

reason the higher critics, led by Ahlwardt and even tentatively followed by the cautious Blachère, have proposed that the first eight (or nine) couplets of 'Amr's ode are a later accretion, and that the poem originally commenced with the rhymed couplet:

Pause yet before the parting, litter-borne lady,  
and we'll declare you the truth, and you'll declare it.

However, the ancient writers all accepted the bacchanalian prelude as authentic, and it was taken as a model by certain later poets weary of the usual routine; it is a fine piece of composition, and this is how Jones renders it:

- 1 HOLLA!—Awake, sweet damsel, and bring our morning draught in thy capacious goblet; nor suffer the rich wines of ENDEREIN to be longer hoarded:
- 2 Bring the well-tempered wine, that seems to be tintured with saffron; and, when it is diluted with water, overflows the cup.
- 3 This is the liquor, which diverts the anxious lover from his passion; and, as soon as he tastes it, he is perfectly composed:
- 4 Hence thou seest the penurious churl, when the circling bowl passes him, grow regardless of his pelf:
- 5 \* When its potent flames have seized the discreetest of our youths, thou wouldst imagine him to be in a phrensy.
- 6 Thou turnest the goblet from us, O mother of AMRU; for the true course of the goblet is to the right hand:
- 7 He is not the least amiable of thy three companions, O mother of AMRU, to whom thou hast not presented the morning bowl.
- 8 \* How many a cup have I purchased in BALBEC! how many more in DAMASCUS and KASIREIN!
- 9 Surely our allotted hour of fate will overtake us; since we are destined to death, and death to us.

Kosegarten imitates well, though not closely, the lively rhythm of the original:

- 1 Wohlauf! Erwach'! geuss uns in deinen Becher,  
Und spare nicht den Wein von Enderân!
- 2 Gemischten Wein, in dem der Krokos schimmert,  
Wenn unter ihn die warme Fluth sich mengt.
- 3 Er führt Betrübte von dem Gram hinweg,  
Ward er geschlürft, so finden Ruhe sie.
- 4 Den Geizhals selbst siehst du, den gierigen,  
Wenn jener kreift, des Reichthums nicht mehr achten.
- 5 Von uns lenkt ab den Becher Amrus Mutter?  
Da rechts doch soll des Bechers Umlauf gehn?
- 6 Der schlechteste Freund ist, Mutter Amrus, nicht  
Von dreyen der, dem du den Trunk nicht reichst;
- 7 Schon manchen Kelch trank ich zu Balbek aus,  
Und manchen zu Damask und Kasserân.
- 8 Dereinst ereilt uns alle auch der Tod,  
Beschieden uns, die wir beschiedne sind!

It is interesting to compare this with Wolff's rhymes:

- Wohlan, wach auf und reiche uns deinen Becher her,  
Zum Morgentrunk, nicht schone des Enderuners sehr!  
Der wohl gemischt, in welchem Krokos zu schwimmen  
scheint,  
So bald sich heissen Wassers Fluth hat mit ihm vereint.  
Er macht den Herzbeschwerten von seinen Sorgen frei,  
So wie er ihn gekostet, dass er ein Mensch wird neu.  
Du siehst, dass selbst beim Geizgen, wird er herum gereicht,  
Ob ihm die hohe Schätzung von seinen Gütern weicht.  
Du hast von uns gewendet, o Mutter Amrus, traun  
Den Becher, und doch hätt er zur Rechten sollen schau'n.

Und es ist nicht der letzte in deiner Freunde Reihen,  
 O Mutter Amrus, welchem den Trunk nicht wolltest weihen.

Wie manchen Becher hab ich geleert in Balbek drin,  
 Und andere wie viele zu Scham und Kaserin!

Wird ja uns doch erreichen der Tod, der Alles nimmt,  
 Und die dazu Bestimmten, wann er wird sein bestimmt!

Sir Charles Lyall appears not to have made a complete translation of 'Amr's *Mu'allāqa*, though he prints versions of three short extracts in his *Ancient Arabian Poetry*. The next scholar to concern himself with this poem was Max Schlossinger, who afterwards (Jerusalem, 1938) edited a part of al-Balādhurī's *Genealogies*. He published in the 1902 volume of the *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 'Ibn Kaisān's Commentar zur Mo'allāqa des 'Amr ibn Kulthūm nach einer Berliner Handschrift,' the only part of this rare commentary on the *Mu'allāqāt* to appear so far. Ibn Kaisān, whose other claim to immortality, lone survivor of a large output, is a brief treatise on prosody which William Wright edited, was a pupil of both al-Mubarrad and Tha'lab and hence was regarded as belonging to the 'mixed' school of Arabic philology. In his day Ibn Kaisān enjoyed a high reputation; the well-known littérateur Abū Haiyān al-Tauḥīdī, who reports that over his lintel the inscription 'Enter and eat' was to be read, remarks that he had never attended any *salon* (and he visited most) where such brilliant and instructive conversation was to be heard—'At his door were always assembled nigh a hundred beasts belonging to his callers, the leaders of society.' There is a difference of opinion regarding the date of his death, but the best authorities give the year 911. The unique Berlin manuscript of his commentary is unfortunately fragmentary, only the sections on 'Antara and 'Amr being complete. It is noteworthy that Ibn Kaisān's version of the *Mu'allāqa* of 'Amr omits no fewer than eighteen couplets compared with al-Zauzani's recension, among them verses 5, 6 and 7 from the opening scene.

The Blunts found a topical significance in this *Mu'allāqa* and the seventh, which are generally so closely linked together. 'The metre of the two Odes, Ibn Kolthūm's and El Hārith's, is shorter than that of the preceding five, but is not less brilliant. It is, perhaps, better adapted to the argumentative character of the poems and has a certain swing and resonance which is most attractive. The matter of them, being as it is mainly political, appeals indeed less strongly to the modern English reader. But to those well acquainted with contemporary Arabia they possess an extreme interest, as proving how little the Bedouin world has changed either in its political ideas or even its political position during the last fourteen hundred years. There is hardly an idea expressed by either of the pleaders that might not to-day be heard in the mouths of rival tribe-sheykhs who have journeyed to Hāil to lay their disputes before Ibn Rashīd. The only difference at the present day would be that the rival declamations would no longer be in verse.' So they swung into a livelier rhythm and a shorter line in their version:

Ha! The bowl! Fill it high, a fair morning wine-cup!  
 Leave we naught of the lees of Andarīna.  
 Rise, pour forth, be it mixed, let it foam like saffron!  
 tempered thus will we drink it, ay, free-handed.  
 Him who grieves shall it cure, his despites forgotten;  
 nay, but taste it in tears, it shall console thee.  
 He, the hoarder of wealth, with the hard face fear-lined,  
 whilst he tasteth, behold him freely giving.  
 Thou, O mother of Amru, the cup deniest;  
 yet the right is the wine should pass thy right-hand.  
 Not the worst of thy three friends is he thou scornest,  
 he for whom thou hast poured no draught of morning.  
 O the cups that I quaffed in Ba'alabékki!  
 O the bowls of Damascus, Kaisarīna!  
 Sad fate stands at the door, and uninvited  
 takes us marked for his own at the hour predestined.

R. A. Nicholson's comments on this ode are very quotable. "Amr's *Mu'allāqa* is the work of a man who united in himself the ideal qualities of manhood as these were understood by a race which has never failed to value, even too highly, the display of self-reliant action and decisive energy. And if in 'Amr's poem these virtues are displayed with an exaggerated boastfulness which offends our sense of decency and proper reserve, it would be a grave error to conclude that all this sound and fury signifies nothing. The Bedouin poet deems it his bounden duty to glorify to the utmost himself, his family, and his tribe; the Bedouin warrior is never tired of proclaiming his unshakable valour and recounting his brilliant feats of arms: he hurls menaces and vaunts in the same breath, but it does not follow that he is a *Miles Gloriosus*. 'Amr certainly was not: his *Mu'allāqa* leaves a vivid impression of conscious and exultant strength. The first eight verses seem to have been added to the poem at a very early date, for out of them arose the legend that 'Amr drank himself to death with unmixed wine. It is likely that they were included in the original collection of the *Mu'allāqāt*, and they are worth translating for their own sake:

"Up, maiden! Fetch the morning-drink and spare not  
 The wine of Andarín,  
 Clear wine that takes a saffron hue when water  
 Is mingled warm therein.  
 The lover tasting it forgets his passion,  
 His heart is eased of pain;  
 The stingy miser, as he lifts the goblet,  
 Regardeth not his gain.  
 Pass round from left to right! Why let'st thou, maiden,  
 Me and my comrades thirst?  
 Yet am I, whom thou wilt not serve this morning,  
 Of us three not the worst!  
 Many a cup in Baalbac and Damascus  
 And Qāşirín I drained,

Howbeit we, ordained to death, shall one day  
 Meet death, to us ordained."

Francesco Gabrieli has on record his appreciation of the poem. "La *mu'allāqa* di Amr chiude degnamente le serie delle "odi dorate" pagane (è questa una delle ipotetiche interpretazioni dell'oscuro termine di *muallaqāt*) con una eloquente esaltazione della sua tribú, facendo precedere al vero e proprio motivo del *fakhr*, secondo il procedimento consueto, una serie di coloriti quadri bacchici e amorosi. La plastica forza delle immagini, e la lingua relativamente semplice, ne han fatto uno dei saggi piú popolari dell'arte della Giahiliyya.

Dèstati o donna con la tua coppa, e porgici la mattutina  
 bevanda, e non risparmiare i vini di Andarùn:  
 il vino infuso come di zafferano, quando vi si mescola tepida  
 l'acqua.  
 Distoglie esso l'affitto dalla sua cura, quando lo gusta, sí, da  
 raddolcirsi.  
 Vedi l'avarò spilorcio, se gli è fatto passar d'accanto,  
 disprezzare il suo denaro per procurarselo.  
 O Umm Amr, hai deviata da noi la coppa, mentre il suo  
 corso doveva volgere a destra.  
 Non è il meno valente dei tre, o Umm Amr, l'amico tuo cui  
 non porgi da bere.  
 Piú d'una coppa ho tracannato in Baalbak, e un'altra in  
 Damasco e Qasirùn. . . .'

## MU'ALLAQA OF 'AMR

Ha, girl! Up with your bowl! give us our dawn-draught  
 and do not spare the wines of El-Andarína,  
 the brightly sparkling, as if saffron were in them  
 whenever the mulled water is mingled with them,  
 that swing the hotly desirous from his passion  
 when he has tasted them to gentle mellowness;  
 you see the skinflint miser, when the cup's passed him,  
 suddenly holds his prized property in derision.  
 O Umm Amr, you've withheld the beaker from us—  
 from right to right it should have been running—  
 and yet your friend, whom you deny the dawn-draught,  
 O Umm Amr, is not the worst of the trio,  
 and of a surety the Fates will overtake us  
 predestined for us, as we for them are predestined.

Pause yet before the parting, litter-borne lady,  
 and we'll declare you the truth, and you'll declare it  
 touching a day of malice, with thrusts and hackings,  
 whereby the hearts of your cousins were gladdened.  
 Pause, and we'll ask you whether you caused this rupture  
 the wretch being so near, or to betray the trusty.

She shows you, when you enter privily with her  
 and she's secure from the eyes of the hateful foemen,  
 arms of a long-necked she-camel, white and youthful  
 fresh from the spring-pastures of sand and stone-land,  
 a soft breast like a casket of ivory  
 chastely guarded from adventurous fingers,  
 the flanks of a lithe, long, tender body,  
 buttocks oppressed by their ponderous cargo.

I called to mind my youth, and was filled with yearning  
 when I beheld her camels urged on at evening;

Yamáma hove in sight, and towered above us  
 like swords lifted in the hands of the unsheathers,  
 and no she-camel that's lost its foal, and quavers  
 the cry of longing, ever grieved as I grieved,  
 nor any grey-haired mother, whose evil fortune  
 left her, of nine sons, not one unburied.  
 Truly today and tomorrow and after tomorrow  
 are pledglings of a destiny you know naught of.

Father of Hind, don't be so hasty with us;  
 give us a breather, and we'll tell the truth to you,  
 how we take the banners white into battle  
 and bring them back crimson, well-saturated;  
 we'll tell you of the days long and glorious  
 we rebelled against the king, and would not serve him.  
 And many's the tribal champion, crowned with  
 the crown of rule, protecting those who flee to him,  
 we have left our horses standing over,  
 their reins on their necks, one foot on tiptoe;  
 the dogs of the tribe whined because of us  
 and we lopped the thorn-bristles of our neighbours.  
 When we move our war-mill against a people  
 at the encounter they become as grist to it;  
 its cushion reaches to east of Nejd, and  
 the grain it grinds on is all Kudá'a;  
 truly hatred upon hatred is spreading  
 against you, disclosing our hidden sickness.  
 Ma'add knows, we are inheritors of glory  
 which we defend with our spears, till all behold it;  
 when the tent-poles of the tribe are fallen  
 upon the furniture, we defend our neighbours;  
 of old we repel their enemies from them  
 and bear for them what they load upon us.  
 When the ranks stand far from us, we thrust with  
 lances, and strike with swords when they are upon us,

with tawny lances of Khatt, very supple  
and slender, or shining, uplifted sword-blades;  
with these we split the heads of the warriors  
and slit through their necks like scythed grasses—  
you might fancy the heroes' skulls, riding them,  
were camel's-loads flung down on the pebbles.  
We hack their heads off without compassion  
and they don't know how to defend themselves from us;  
it is as though our swords, flailing between us,  
were bladders buffeted by playing children;  
it is as though our and their accoutrements  
were dyed or smeared over with purple pigment.

Whenever a tribe is impotent to thrust forward  
because of the fear of what well might happen  
we plant a veritable Mount Rahwa, razor-sharp,  
for a defence, and ourselves march foremost  
with youths who deem death in battle a glory  
and with greybeards long tested in warfare  
a match for the whole of men, all together,  
wagering their sons against our sons.

Upon the day that we tremble for our children  
girding our loins we surge early to onslaught,  
but on the day we do not tremble for them  
we sit about in knots in our tribe-assemblies,  
led by chiefs of the Banu Jusham bin Bakr  
with whom we trample on plain and rugged upland.

With what purpose in view, Amr bin Hind,  
do you give heed to our traducers, and despise us?  
With what purpose in view, Amr bin Hind,  
should we be underlings to your chosen princelet?  
Threaten us then, and menace us; but gently!  
When, pray, were we your mother's domestics?  
Be sure, that before your time our lances  
baffled our enemies' efforts to soften them;

when the spear-vice bit into them, they resisted  
and drove it back like a stubborn, shoving camel,  
a stubborn camel; bend them, and with a creaking  
they strike back at the straightener's neck and forehead.  
Have you been told, regarding Jusham bin Bakr,  
that they ever failed in the ancients' great engagements?  
We are heirs to the glory of Alkama bin Saif:

he mastered for us the castles of glory.

I am heir to Muhalhil and his better,  
Zuhair, a fine treasure indeed to treasure,  
heir to Attáb, and Kulthúm, the whole of them,  
by whom we attained the heirdom of the noblest,  
heir to Dhul Bura, of whom you've heard tell,  
our defence, through whom we defend the shelterers,  
and, before him, Kulaib the Striver was one of us:  
so what glory is there we are not possessed of?

When we tie with a rope our train-camel of battle  
or we break the bond, or the neck of the beast tethered to her.  
We shall be found the firmest men in duty  
and the truest of men to the oath once taken.

We on the morn the fire in Khazáz was kindled  
gave succour beyond every other succourer;  
we are they who kept to Dhu Urátá  
while the huge, milk-rich camels chewed dry fodder.

We are the just rulers over obedience,  
we are the just chastisers of rebellion;  
we promptly abandon that which disgusts us,  
we lay hold eagerly of what pleases us.

We kept the right wing in the great encounter  
and on the left wing stood our blood-brothers;  
they loosed a fierce assault on their nearest foemen,  
we loosed a fierce assault on our nearest foemen;  
they returned with much booty and many captives,  
we returned leading the kings in fetters.

So beware, you Banu Bakr, beware now:

have you not yet the true knowledge of us?  
 Do you not know how the squadrons thrusted  
 and shot their bolts, ours and yours together?  
 We were caparisoned in helmets, and Yemeni jerkins,  
 we were accoutred with swords straight and bending,  
 our bodies were hung with glittering mail-coats  
 having visible puckers above the sword-belt  
 that being unbuckled from the warrior  
 reveals his skin rusted from the long wearing,  
 mail-coats that ripple like a pool of water  
 when the furrowing wind strikes its smooth surface.  
 Short-haired are our steeds on the morn of terror,  
 known to us, our weanlings, won from the enemy;  
 them we inherited from the truest of fathers,  
 them we shall bequeath dying to our sons.  
 All the tribes of Ma'add have known right well  
 when tents were built in their valley-bottoms  
 that in every scant year we are the protectors,  
 we the bountiful givers to them that beg of us,  
 we the defenders of those near to us  
 whenever the white swords leave their scabbards,  
we the benefactors when we are able,  
we the destroyers when we are set upon,  
we the drinkers of the purest water  
 that others perforce drink sullied and muddy.

Ho! Carry from us to the Banu Et-Tammáh  
 and the Du'mi: 'How have you found us?  
 You came and alighted as guests among us  
 and we promptly received you, lest you reproach us;  
hospitably we received you, and that promptly—  
 just before dawn, with a stone well-pounded!'

Upon our tracks follow fair, noble ladies  
 that we take care shall not leave us, nor be insulted,

litter-borne ladies of Banu Jusham bin Bakr  
 who mingle, with good looks, high birth and obedience.  
 They have taken a covenant with their husbands  
 that, when they should meet with signal horsemen,  
they will plunder mail-coats and shining sabres  
 and captives fettered together in irons.  
 When they fare forth, they walk sedately  
 swinging their gait like swaying tipplers.  
 They provender our horses, saying, 'You are not  
 our husbands, if you do not protect us.'  
If we defend them not, may we survive not  
nor live on for any thing after them!  
 Nothing protects women like a smiting  
 that sends the forearms flying like play-chucks.

Ours is the world, and all who dwell upon it,  
 and when we assault, we assault with power.  
 When kings deal with their peoples unjustly  
 we refuse to allow injustice among us.  
 We are called oppressors; we never oppressed yet,  
 but shortly we shall be starting oppression!  
 When any boy of ours reaches his weaning  
 the tyrants fall down before him prostrating.  
 We have filled the land till it's too strait for us,  
 and we are filling the sea's back with our vessels.  
 So let no man act foolishly against us,  
 or we shall exceed the folly of the foolhardiest.



## SEVEN

*The Leper*

WHEN Wyndham Knatchbull, second son of Sir Edward Knatchbull, 8th Baronet, was studying Arabic at Stuttgart it struck him that of the seven poems making up the *Mu'allaqāt* six had already been published in critical editions; only the seventh, that of al-Hārith son of Hilliza, remained uncared for. It seems that he was unaware of, or perhaps decided to ignore, the unpretentious little pamphlet which Alex Boldyrew had printed at his own expense in 1808; at all events he makes no mention of it, and in fact the texts of 'Antara and al-Hārith which it contains are no serious contribution to scholarship. Knatchbull therefore resolved to make good the omission and to prepare al-Hārith's *Mu'allaqa* for the learned world; he was encouraged in his design by C. F. Schnurrer, Chancellor of Tübingen, whose *Bibliotheca Arabica*, published in 1811, was such an invaluable aid to Arabic researchers in its day and is still of some bibliographical importance. Returning to his fellowship of All Souls', which he had held since 1809, he persuaded Oxford to publish in 1819 his version of *Kalīla and Dimna*, and in 1820:

Harethi Moallakah | cum scholiis Zouzenii | e codice manuscripto arabice edidit, vertit et illustravit | Wyndham Knatchbull, S.T.B. | Coll. Omn. Anim. Soc.

The book was dedicated 'Viro egregio Roberto Peel, Majestati Regiae a Secretioribus Consiliis, et ab Academia Oxoniensi ad

Senatum Britannicum Delegatorum alteri.' It lacked two years yet for Peel to accept the office of Home Secretary and to inaugurate his police reforms. It was three years later that Knatchbull, by then a Doctor of Divinity, was elected Laudian Professor of Arabic, a post he held until 1840 in plurality with several country livings; he died in 1868, not having published another word.

Knatchbull's honest endeavour did not satisfy the critical eye of Johann Vullers, long afterwards to immortalise himself with his edition of Firdausī. An ambitious young scholar of Bonn, a pupil of the illustrious Georg Freytag whose four-volume *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum* and two-volume *Hamasaē Carmina* are among the classics of Arabic learning, Vullers determined, as many another rising savant has done, to build his reputation upon what he regarded as another man's failure; he addressed himself to the task of preparing a new edition of al-Hārith's ode. Knatchbull had relied mainly upon Oxford manuscripts; his demolisher resorted to Paris. To give his dissertation ampler bulk, he attached to the *Mu'allaqa* with al-Zauzani's commentary two poems of the famous Syrian sceptic and vegetarian Abu 'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī, culled from an unedited codex in St. Petersburg, for the valuable collections of Tsarist Russia were far more accessible to Western scholars, even so long ago, than they are today under the vigilance of Soviet conservators. Vullers's *primum opus*, dedicated to Freytag, was published at Bonn in 1827.

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The author of the last of the *Mu'allaqāt* is the most obscure of all those honoured by inclusion in the collection. His poems were never edited in antiquity, and the Fatih manuscript which Krenkow published amounts to only ten fragments. His genealogy, which secures him a claim to noble blood, is recited at length in the *Book of Songs*: al-Hārith son of Hilliza, son of Makrūh, son of Yazīd, son of 'Abd Allāh, son of Mālik, son of 'Abd, son of Sa'd, son of Jusham, son of 'Aṣim, son of Dhubyān, son of Kināna, son of Yashkur, son of Bakr, son of Wā'il, son of Qāsiṭ, son of Hinb,

son of Afṣā, son of Du'mī, son of Jadīla, son of Asad, son of Rabī'a, son of Nizār. He is said to have been a leper, to have long passed his century before composing his great ode, and to have attained the all-too-familiar age of 150. The philologist al-Aṣma'ī detected a fault of prosody in his *Mu'allāqa*, but Ibn Qutaiba excused him on the ground that the poem was delivered extempore, as if it were a speech, 'and so this does not impair it.'

Abū 'Amr al-Shaibānī went further, marvelling at so great virtuosity: 'If he had taken a whole year to compose it nobody could have blamed him, seeing that he contrived to mention so many of the martial occasions famous in old Arabia, using some as an open denunciation of the Banū Taghlib and some as an oblique reference to 'Amr son of Hind.' The defect observed is what is termed *iqwā'*, in which the rhyme-pattern is broken by the intrusion of a wrong vowel. But, after all, the verse adduced is considered by many authorities to be spurious, and so the poet may well have been innocent of the offence charged against him. The more captious al-Marzubānī accuses al-Hārith—but he found some cause to score off every poet—of committing *ikhḷāl*, or 'the omission of words necessary to complete the meaning.' His evidence is drawn not from the *Mu'allāqa* but from a gay little fragment which really deserved a less heavy-handed treatment:

Good luck to you! You'll not be hurt  
by folly, as long as you have luck.  
O life is better in the shadow of  
folly, than he who lives by toil.

'He meant to say,' the prosy critic comments, 'that life was better in the shadow of folly than life by toil in the shadow of reason; but he left out a great deal. And even if he had put it that way, the verse would still have had another defect, because it is apparent that what he really meant to say was that a luxurious life in the shadow of folly was better than an arduous life in the shadow of reason. So he omitted a great deal.'

The accounts of the 'story behind the *Mu'allāqa*' are, as has already been remarked, somewhat confusing. The version ascribed by al-Tibrizī to Abū 'Amr al-Shaibānī has been quoted in the preceding chapter; here follows the narrative credited to the same authority by the compiler of the *Books of Songs*, and what makes the matter still more bewildering is that this alternative version is actually reproduced by al-Tibrizī himself in another context.

When 'Amr son of Hind, who was a mighty and powerful king, called together Bakr and Taghlib and made peace between them he took from both tribes hostages, one hundred youths from each tribe, so as to restrain them from one another. These hostages were to accompany him on all his journeys, and to take part in his military expeditions. Now on one of their journeys a simoom smote them and all the Taghlibites perished, whereas the Bakrites escaped. Then said Taghlib to Bakr:

'Give us the blood-wits of our sons! That is an obligation for you.'

But Bakr ibn Wā'il refused. So Taghlib gathered before 'Amr son of Kulthūm and informed him of what had transpired.

'Who do you think Bakr will look to today to act on their behalf?' 'Amr son of Kulthūm asked them.

'Who else but a son of Tha'laba,' they replied.

'By God, I think,' 'Amr declared, 'the situation will produce a red-faced, bald-headed, deaf-eared dodderer of the Banū Yashkur.'

In due course Bakr arrived under the leadership of al-Nu'mān son of Harim, one of the Banū Tha'laba ibn Ghanm ibn Yashkur, while Taghlib was headed by 'Amr son of Kulthūm. When the two parties assembled in the king's presence, 'Amr son of Kulthūm remarked to al-Nu'mān son of Harim:

'Well, deaf-ear, so the sons of Tha'laba have brought you to fight for them. How they must despise you!'

'Yes, and every other man the sky overshadows,' al-Nu'mān retorted.

'Pooh, if I gave you a slap they wouldn't budge to avenge you,' Amr taunted.

'By God, if you so much as stir a finger against me,' al-Nu'mān threatened.

At this Amr son of Hind grew very angry, for he preferred the Banū Taghlib to Bakr.

'Girl!' he called to one of his servants. 'Give him a jawing with your woman's tongue!'

'You give that to your favourite, king!' al-Nu'mān burst out.

'Why, Nu'mān, would you like to have me for your father?' the king exclaimed.

'No, but I'd love you to be my mother.'

That infuriated Amr son of Hind to such a degree that he would have killed al-Nu'mān. But al-Ḥārith son of Ḥilliza immediately sprang to his feet and improvised his ode, leaning heavily on his bow. The string cut into his palm, but they say that he was so angry that he had no consciousness of the fact until he had finished.

According to Ibn al-Kalbī, al-Ḥārith recited his poem before Amr son of Hind for all that he was spotted with leprosy. (Al-Tibrīzī adds that Amr son of Hind had a horror of such things, and could not bear to look upon anyone with any disfigurement.) The king's notice was drawn to al-Ḥārith's condition and he ordered that a curtain should be interposed between himself and the poet. But when al-Ḥārith began to speak he was filled with admiration at his eloquence.

'Let him come nearer,' he kept on saying. 'Let him come nearer.'

Finally he commanded the curtain to be torn down and made al-Ḥārith sit close to him, he admired him so much.

The author of the *Book of Songs* adds that al-Aṣma'ī gave much the same account of the incident as al-Shaibānī, except for certain details. The number of hostages taken by King Amr from each tribe was eighty, not a hundred. The place where he made

truce between them was Dhu 'l-Majāz. The Taghlibite youths were actually with him on a military campaign and were killed in the course of that. He goes on to say that when al-Ḥārith son of Ḥilliza extemporised his ode Amr son of Kulthūm was also present, and that he extemporised his poem in reply. (It is to be noticed that in this account, attributed to al-Aṣma'ī, Amr's ode is quoted as beginning at the ninth—or eighth—verse, without the bacchanalian opening.) Other scholars, however, deny this, says al-İşbahānī, and say that this was not the reason for Amr composing his *Mu'allāqa*.

On the other hand, Ibn al-Kalbī is reported as citing his father, the well-known historiographer Hishām al-Kalbī who died in 819 or 821, for the information that it was not Amr son of Hind at all who made peace between Bakr and Taghlib, but his father al-Mundhir III son of Mā' al-Samā' who died in 554. The condition which he laid down was that each tribe should be held to answer for the blood of every man whose body was found within its borders; if any corpse was discovered lying between the two territories, exact measurements were to be made and the tribe whose frontiers were nearer the scene of the crime would be deemed the guilty party. Qais son of Sharāḥīl, son of Murra, son of Humām was put in charge of the investigation; he was in fact a partisan of the Banū Taghlib. Then al-Mundhir took from both tribes their leading notables and sent them to Mecca, requiring each to keep the peace and not to harbour any dark designs of private vengeance. There they remained 'as long as God willed.' Al-Mundhir had taken hostages from both parties, saying that if anyone broke the armistice terms he would exact reprisals from his side's hostages. Later al-Mundhir's son al-Nu'mān sent a squadron of the Banū Taghlib into the Ṭaiy mountains 'on a certain business of his.' They alighted at al-Ṭarafa in the territory of the Banū Shaibān and Taim al-Lāt, and then announced that they had driven them from the water and compelled them into the desert, where the people died of thirst. When news of this came to the Banū Taghlib they were very angry; they approached

'Amr son of Hind demanding that he should take vengeance on Bakr, to which the offending clans belonged.

'You have acted treacherously and broken the compact,' they declared. 'You have violated your sacred oath and shed blood.'

'You are the ones who have done that,' Bakr retorted. 'You have uttered falsehood and published calumny abroad. You have rent the veil with your lying charges against us. We gave them water when they came down to the wells, and we put them on the right road when they lost their way. Is it our fault if they afterwards panicked and missed their route?'

Ibn al-Kalbī quoted as proof of the accuracy of his father's report the verse from al-Hārith's *Mu'allāqa*:

not suddenly and unexpectedly they fell upon you,  
but the mirage and morn-light lifted up their concourse.

It is clear that the difficulties which the ancient commentators found in establishing a satisfactory background to al-Hārith's poem arose out of the multiplicity of references to obscure names and forgotten incidents with which it abounds. That very merit which moved al-Shaibānī to admiration proved a headache to his colleagues; for no Arab exegete liked to admit himself beaten by any allusion, however remote, preferring to offer several alternative explanations if need be rather than none at all. The face-saving formula 'and God knows best' could always be appended to sum up the discussion.

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Some modern scholars have found al-Hārith's poem to be inferior to the rest of the Seven Odes. 'Its inclusion among the *Mu'allāqāt*,' observes R. A. Nicholson, 'is probably due, as Nöldeke suggested, to the fact that Hammād, himself a client of Bakr, wished to flatter his patrons by selecting a counterpart to the *Mu'allāqa* of 'Amr b. Kulthūm, which immortalised their great rivals, the Banū Taghlib.' The editors of the *Encyclopaedia*

*of Islam* thought so little of the Bakrite poet that they denied him entry to their learned pages. The Blunts, who never concealed their admiration for an ancient poet when they felt it justified, expressed themselves lukewarmly on this occasion. 'His Ode is from first to last a piece of special pleading on a political subject, and for this reason will be found the least generally interesting of the seven. It is almost unadorned with those wild natural descriptions of beast and bird and tree, which make the chief charm of the others, nor is there much of originality or passion in its opening love-verses. They are introduced clearly as a matter of convention, and were in all probability borrowed in old age for the occasion from the poetry of his younger time.' These verdicts reflect the taste of a generation reared in the romantic tradition of the nineteenth century; we shall see that Sir William Jones, who lived in a more classical age, conceived a somewhat higher regard for the poem despite his general weakness for the sentimental and the picturesque. But, as has been noticed elsewhere in these pages, Jones was passing through a political crisis at the time of writing and found in al-Hārith's diatribe fuel for his liberalistic fire.

No scholar since Vullers has made a special study of the seventh *Mu'allāqa*, and many of its enigmas will probably remain unsolved to the end of time. It is not an easy piece to translate, for its elusiveness of reference is often matched to obscurity of language. Before comparing the different versions, let us call in Sir William Jones to guide us through the labyrinth of its construction.

### *The Poem of Hareth*

When AMRU had finished his extravagant panegyrick on the tribe of TAGLEB, and had received the loud applause of his own party, HARETH arose: and pronounced the following poem, or speech in verse, without any meditation, but which, as others assert with greater appearance of probability, he had prepared and gotten by heart.

Although, if we believe ASMAI, the poet was considerably above a hundred years old at this time, yet he is said to have poured forth his couplets with such boiling ardour, that, without perceiving it, he cut his hand with the string of his bow, on which, after the manner of the Arabian orators, he leaned, while he was speaking.

Whatever was his age, the wisdom and art of his composition are finely contrasted with the youthful imprudence of his adversary, who must have exasperated the king, instead of conciliating his good will, and seems even to have menaced the very man, from whom he was asking a favourable judgement. HARETH, on the contrary, begins with complimenting the queen, whose name was ASOMA, and who heard him behind the tapistry: he appears also to have introduced another of his favourites, HINDA, merely because that was the name of the king's mother; and he celebrates the monarch himself as a model of justice, valour, and magnanimity. The description of his camel, which he interweaves according to custom, is very short; and, he opens the defence of his tribe with coolness and moderation; but as he proceeds, his indignation seems to be kindled, and the rest of his harangue consists of sharp expostulations, and bitter sarcasms, not without much sound reasoning, and a number of allusions to facts, which cannot but be imperfectly known to us, though they must have been fresh in the memory of his hearers. The general scope of his argument is, that no blame was justly imputable to the sons of BECR for the many calamities which the TAGLEBITES had endured, and which had been principally occasioned by their own supineness and indiscretion. This oration, or poem, or whatever it may be denominated, had its full effect on the mind of the royal umpire, who decided the cause in favour of the BECRITES, and lost his life for a decision apparently just. He must have remarked the fiery spirit of the poet AMRU from the style of his eloquence, as CAESAR first discovered the impetuous vehemence of BRUTUS's temper from his speech, delivered at Nice, in favour of king Deiotarus; but neither the Arabian nor the Roman tyrant were sufficiently on their guard against men, whom they had irritated even to fury.

This poem is composed in *light* verse, or metre of the *eleventh* class, consisting of epitrites, ionick feet, and paeons, variously intermixed, as in this form:

'Amarylli, | dulci lyrâ | modulare  
'Molle carmen | sub arbore | fusa sacrâ.'

Sometimes a molossus ends the distich, as,

'Dulce carmen | sub arbore | fusa sacrâ  
'Modulare, | dum sylvulae | respondent.'

The close of a couplet in this measure has often the cadence of a Latin or Greek hexameter: thus, v. 20:

*Tis-hâli khâilin khilâla dhâca rogâo.*

That is, literally,

*Hinnitûs modulantur equi, fremitûsque cameli.*

As material for our comparison we have chosen a 'noble passage' (the phrase is Sir Charles Lyall's) in which al-Hârith compares his tribe's glory to a soaring mountain. Jones translated:

- 23 Yet we continued advancing ourselves in defiance of their hate, with laudable self-sufficiency and exalted reputation.  
24 Before this day the eyes of nations have been dazzled by our glory, and have been moved by envious indignation and obstinate resentment.  
25 Fortune seemed to raise for us a dark rock, with a pointed summit, dispelling the clouds,  
26 Thick and firm, secured from calamity, not to be weakened by any disaster however grievous and violent.

Knatchbull's Latin makes this into:

- 23 Attamen perstitimus contra simultatem, extuleruntque nos arces et gloria gibbosa;

- 24 Dudum perstrinxerunt illae oculos hominum quibus inest  
ira et aversatio;  
25 Ut sit ac si tempus erexerit pro nobis montem nigrum ex quo  
discutiuntur nubes,  
26 Inaccessum accidentibus quem non frangent fortunae casus  
ineffabiles.

Vullers's Latin provides an interesting contrast:

- 23 Semper eramus, licet odio nos prosequerentur homines,  
arcibus nostris et gloria invicta elati;  
24 Quae iam ante hunc diem obcaecarunt oculos hominum ira et  
invidia plenos.  
25 Quasi infortunium, quum nos affligeret, offendisset verticem  
montis nigri, a quo dissipantur nubes;  
26 Vultu severo repellens calamitates, non frangitur infortunio  
gravissimo.

Wolff offers the following:

Nein, wir blieben, trotz aller Feindesangriffe  
Feste Schlösser, die Ehre uns unbeflecket.

Und das hat schon vordem verblindet die Augen  
Jener, welche von Zorn und Neid angefüllt sind.

Und das Unglück, das uns zustiess, ist, wie wenn es  
Einen schwarzen Berggipfel hätte getroffen,

Der die Wolken mit ernstem Blicke verscheuchet,  
Und den kein Stoss, so hart er sei, kann erschüttern.

Lyall did not translate the whole poem, but gives a tantalisingly attractive version of this passage:

And we have stood, spite of their hate, and high towers  
and firm-based glory lift us aloft;

Before to-day has it blinded the eyes  
of men in which were wrath and denial:  
As though the Fates beating against us met  
a black mountain, cleaving the topmost clouds,  
Strong and mighty above the changes of things,  
which no shock of the Days can soften or shake.

The Blunts, who claim to have 'carefully reproduced' the metre of the original, come out characteristically:

High above them we live. Hate may not harm us,  
fenced in towers of renown, our unstained bright honour.  
Long hath anger assailed us, rage, denial;  
long hath evil prevailed in the eyes of evil.  
Nathless, let them assault. As well may Fortune  
hurl its spear at the rocks, at the cloud-robed mountains.  
Frowneth wide of it Fear. Fate shall not shake it.  
Time's worst hand of distress shall disturb it never.

Nicholson in his extract uses a prosodic form similar to that which he employed in his experiment with 'Amr:

Maugre their hate we stand, by firm-based might  
Exalted and by ancestry—  
Might which ere now hath dazzled men's eyes: thence scorn  
To yield and haughty spirit have we.  
On us the Days beat as on mountain dark  
That soars in cloudless majesty,  
Compact against the hard calamitous shocks  
And buffetings of Destiny.

## MU'ALLAQA OF AL-ĤĀRITH

Asmá announced to us she would soon be parting—  
 many's the tarrier whose tarrying grows wearisome—  
 after she dwelt with us in the rough lands of Shammá,  
 then her nearest habitation, El-Khalsá,  
 then El-Muhaiyát, Es-Sifáh, and the heights of  
 Dhul Fiták, and Ádhib, and El-Wafá,  
 the meadows of El-Katá, the valleys of Esh-  
 Shurbub, Esh-Shu'batán, and El-Ablá.

I see no more her I dwelt with there, and today I  
weep crazily, and what profit is in weeping?  
 Before your very eyes Hind kindled at evening  
 the fire, that the highland raised up flickering;  
 she kindled it between El-Akeek and Shakhmán  
 with aloes-wood, shining as clear as daylight,  
 and you beheld her fire from a far distance  
 at Khazáz—how remote its warmth was from you!

But ofttimes I take, to aid me against sorrow  
 when swift escape speeds away the tarrier,  
 a hasty she-camel, nimble as an ostrich, mother of  
 young ostriches, a long-legged desert-dweller  
 that in the afternoon has heard a faint sound  
 as night draws near, the huntsmen startling her.  
 Then you will see behind her, where she steps and  
 tramples, a fine dust like a scatter of sand-specks,  
 and sole-prints, and behind them sole-prints  
 falling, that the desert forthwith obliterates.  
 With her I divert myself through the hot noontides  
 when every careworn man is a blind, tomb-tethered camel.

Tidings have come to us regarding the Arákim  
 and a grave matter that concerns and troubles us,

namely that our brothers the Arákim are going too  
 far against us, using intemperate language,  
 confounding those of us who are blameless with the  
 guilty, so that innocence advantages not the innocent.  
 They asserted that all who have smitten the wild ass  
 are clients of ours, and ourselves their protectors;  
 they concerted their plans by night, and when morning  
 dawned, they filled the morning with a great clamour,  
 some calling and some answering, commingled with  
 a neighing of horses and a grumbling of camels.  
 Say, you big-mouthed embroiderer, you who gabble  
 about us to Amr, think you your lies are immortal?  
 Don't imagine your smear's going to stick to us;  
 this isn't the first time enemies have maligned us,  
 but for all their hatred we've still survived,  
 uplifted by high birth, and power well-grounded  
 that long before today blinded the eyes of the  
 people, being compounded of pride and stubbornness.  
Fate, battering us, might be stoning a black  
 towering mountain, its summit the clouds unshrouding,  
 ruggedly firm against fortune's artillery,  
 unweakened by destiny's inexorable hammering.

Whatever be the issue you intend, commit it  
 to us, and the tribe-councils shall deal with it.  
 If you dig up all the land between Milha and  
 Es-Sákib, there you'll find the dead—and the living;  
 or if you investigate, that people go to great pains about,  
 investigations disclose alike health and healing;  
 or if you are silent about us, we shall be as a man who  
 closes an eye when there are motes in his eyelid;  
 or if you refuse what you are asked about, who is it  
 you have been told has the superiority over us?  
 Don't you know of those days when men were raided  
 and plundered, and every tribe was howling?

When we strained on our camels from the palm-trees of El-Bahrain, till El-Hisá brought them to their goal, then we swerved against Tameem, and by the truce-months had in our midst the daughters of Murr as handmaids; and the man of might stayed no more in the smooth lands and flight was of no advantage to the feeble; neither mountain-head nor boulder-strewn stone-tract proved salvation to the terror-struck fugitive. So we were rulers of the people, until came El-Mundhir bin Má es-Samá into his kingdom; he was the master, he the witness of the day of El-Hiyárain, that true and terrible testing, a king, the most doughty of mortals, the equal of his stature not being found among them.

So have done with your stupid aggressiveness, or if you will blind yourselves, that's a sore sickness; and recollect the oath at Dhul Majáz, and wherefore the pledges and the sureties were then proffered in fear of injustice and aggression; caprice can never annul what's inscribed on the parchments. Know well that we and you, touching the terms we agreed to on the day of oath-taking, are equal. If certain raiders of Kinda plundered you, rests their crime on our shoulders? Must we pay the penalty? Are we to be charged for Haneefa's misdoings or for the exploits of those Muhárib beggars, or the offences of the Bani Ateek? Whoever broke the truce, we are innocent of their warring. Are we to be charged for El-Ibád, as fardels are slung on the middle of the well-laden camel? Are we to be charged for Kudá'a, or is there no mark against us for the wrongs they committed? Are we to be charged for Iyád, as was said once to Tasm, 'Your tribe-brother is the greatest rebel?'

No men of ours are those, the sword-hacked, neither Kais, nor Jandal, nor yet El-Haddá.

False intervention! Injustice! It's just like antelopes slaughtered in the stead of folded sheep. Eighty men of Tameem, brandishing in their hands lances, whose points were imminent doom, left not the Bani Rizáh in the stone-waste of Nitá' with so much breath as to curse them with; they quit them there hacked to pieces, returning with such booty as drowned the drivers' voices. Then they came seeking to get their own again, but neither black camel nor white returned to them; then they turned back from them, their backbones shattered and with no water to cool their raging thirst.

Then thereafter a band of horsemen rode against you with El-Ghallák, no compassion or quarter in them; every Taghlibite they slew, unavenged his blood spilled and oblivion swept over him when he departed.

Are the words 'Are we shepherds to Hind's son?' comparable

to the load laid on our folk when El-Mundhir attacked? When he pitched in El-Alát the tent of Maisoon then El-Ausá was the nearest of their habitations, and the poor and destitute of every tribe gathered about him, fluttering like a flight of eagles, and he led them, provisioned with dates and water: Allah's command prevails, bringing the wretched to wretchedness.

When in sudden conceit you wished to meet them and an insolent desire drove them against you, not suddenly and unexpectedly they fell upon you, but the mirage and morn-light lifted up their concourse.

Say, you who in your hatred carry tales about us to Amr, shall there ever be an end to them?



Amr has qualities and feelings towards us,  
 every one of them undoubtedly a blessing.  
 A just monarch he, the most perfect walking;  
 the virtues he possesses excel all praise;  
 of the stock of Iram, one for champions to boast of  
 and even their enemies concede the evidence;  
 a king who thrice has had token of our  
 good service, and each time the proof was decisive.  
 Our sign was seen eastwards of Esh-Shakeeka  
 when they all came, every tribe with its banner,  
 about Kais, clad in armour, with a Karazi  
 chieftain to lead them, a white rock of eminence,  
 and a band of noble-born warriors, checked only  
 by the fierce thrust that pierces through to the white bone.  
 Then we smote with such a brow-blow that the gore gushed  
like water spurting from a hole in a water-skin,  
 and we drove them against the boulders of Thahlán  
 helter-skelter, their thigh-veins spouting bloodily,  
 and we dealt with them as Allah alone knows—  
 their doom being sealed, their blood unavenged streamed.  
 Then we fought Hujr, I mean Umm Katán's son,  
 with his Persian squadron in their dark-green armour,  
 a lion in the encounter, tawny, soft-footed,  
 but a spring-shower in the hideous drought-year;  
 we repulsed them with lance-lunges, like buckets  
 plunged into the watery depths of a stone-cased well.  
 Thirdly, we loosed Imrul Kais from his fetters  
 after his long years of dungeon and misery  
 and constrained the Lord of Ghassán to compensate him  
 for El-Mundhir, perforce, when the blood was immeasurable,  
 and we ransomed them with nine high princes  
 of noble line, their booty being most precious.  
 And with El-Jaun, Jaun of the House of Bani l-  
 Aus, was a swerving band, swooping like a crook-billed  
 eagle;

we did not flinch under the dust-cloud, when they  
 turned  
 their backs, and the fire of battle blazed hottest.

It was we who begot Amr, Umm Unás's son,  
 in near kinship, after the marriage-gift came to us;  
 such a kinship brings out loyalty in a people,  
 a boundless vista of unending benevolence.

## EPILOGUE

### *True or False?*

MY first surprising observation is to tell you that I became doubtful of the value of pre-Islamic literature and persisted in that doubt, or rather that doubt persisted in me. So I began to investigate and think, to read and reflect; all this brought me in the end to something which, if not certainty, was at all events very near certainty. The conclusion I reached was that the general mass of what we call pre-Islamic literature had nothing whatever to do with the pre-Islamic period, but was just simply fabricated after the coming of Islam. It is therefore Islamic, and represents the life, the inclinations, the desires of Muslims, rather than the life of the pre-Islamic Arabs. I now have hardly any doubt at all that what has survived of genuine pre-Islamic literature is very little indeed, representative of nothing and indicative of nothing; no reliance is to be placed in it for the purpose of elucidating the genuine literary picture of the pre-Islamic age. I appreciate the serious consequences of this viewpoint, but for all that I do not hesitate to record and disseminate it. I do not flinch from declaring to you and to others who may read my book, that what you read as being the poetry of Imr al-Qais or Tarafa or Ibn Kulthūm or 'Antara is not the work of those men at all; it is merely the fabrication of "transmitters," or the forgery of Bedouins, or the manufacture of grammarians, or the pretence of story-tellers, or the invention of commentators and traditionists and theologians.'

The above paragraph occurs on page 63 of *Fi 'l-adab al-jāhili* ('On Pre-Islamic Literature'), a sensational book first published

in 1927; the author was Dr. Taha Husain, the brilliant and outspoken Egyptian scholar who rose to be Minister of Education in ex-King Farouk's last government. Born in 1891 of a poor peasant family and blind since early childhood, by extraordinary courage allied to no small measure of genius he advanced rapidly to establish himself as the leading educationist of his generation, and one of the outstanding and most controversial figures in the literary history of Islam. (His autobiography may be read in English in the translations of E. H. Paxton (*An Egyptian Childhood*, 1932) and H. Wayment (*The Stream of Days*, 1949).) In 1925 he published a book entitled *Fi 'l-shi'r al-jāhili* ('On Pre-Islamic Poetry') in which he first committed to print his revolutionary views on the nature of the poetry which had been generally accepted in the Arab world as having issued in the Arabian desert before the rise of Islam. The volume provoked a violent storm of protest, and its author felt obliged to withdraw it from the market; in *Fi 'l-adab al-jāhili*, which appeared two years later, he maintained the full rigour of his original argument but omitted certain passages which had outraged conservative Muslim sentiment. This partial recantation was far from satisfying his critics, however; in a flood of articles, pamphlets and weighty volumes they strove long to refute his proofs and to re-establish the authenticity of the poetry which had for many centuries been the chief pride of Arabs everywhere.

Yet the thesis advanced by Dr. Taha Husain was by no means a novelty so far as Europe was concerned. In the same year 1925, as it happened, Professor D. S. Margoliouth of Oxford had published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* a monograph entitled 'The Origins of Arabic Poetry' in which he expressed identical views supported by largely identical reasons. But he recognised that he was not the first to cast serious doubts on the genuineness of 'pre-Islamic' literature; in his first footnote he stated: 'The subject of this paper was treated by Ahlwardt in a monograph called *Bemerkungen über die Aechtheit der alten arabischen Gedichte*, Greifswald, 1872, and by Sir C. Lyall in the

Preface to vol. ii of his *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*. The former is not very confident, and calls attention to some of the matters which have been discussed rather more fully below; Sir C. Lyall deals chiefly with the character of the transmitters, which he rates rather more highly than the present writer.' While Dr. Ṭaha Ḥusain argued at much greater length and in closer detail than Professor Margoliouth, the case for the prosecution was put more succinctly by the English scholar, and in a form more convenient to summarise.

(1) The existence of something called poetry before Islam is proved by certain passages in the Koran which refer to poets. Thus, in Sura XXVI 224-5 we read:

Shall I tell you on whom the Satans come down?  
They come down on every guilty impostor.  
They give ear, but most of them are liars.  
And the poets—the perverse follow them;  
hast thou not seen how they wander in every valley  
and how they say that which they do not?

Muḥammad's opponents appear to have accused him of being a poet, as evidenced by Sura XXXVII 35:

Even so We do with the sinners; for when it was said to them,  
'There is no god but God,' they were ever waxing proud,  
saying, 'What, shall we forsake our gods for a poet  
possessed?'

In Sura LXIX 39-43 the Prophet is made to rebut this charge:

No! I swear by that you see  
and by that you do not see,  
it is the speech of a noble Messenger.  
It is not the speech of a poet  
(little do you believe)  
nor the speech of a soothsayer  
(little do you remember).  
A sending down from the Lord of all Being.

'If by poetry the same be meant as in later literature,' Professor Margoliouth remarks, 'we are confronted by a slight puzzle: Mohammed, who was not acquainted with the art, was aware that his revelations were not in verse; whereas the Meccans, who presumably knew poetry when they heard or saw it, thought they were. We should have expected the converse.'

(2) 'In the very considerable mass of pre-Islamic inscriptions which we possess in a variety of dialects there is nothing whatever in verse; a fact which is especially noteworthy in the case of the funereal inscriptions, since most literary nations introduce verse into compositions of this sort. Thus Latin literature commences with the epitaphs of the Scipios which are in Saturnian metre.'

(3) So perhaps what the Koran refers to as a 'poet' is in reality a kind of fortune-teller, not a poet in the later and accepted meaning of the term. The martial type of poetry known as 'pre-Islamic' would, if genuine, hardly have deserved 'the contemptuous language used by the Qur'an'; and is the picture of the old poets, as presented in their compositions, that of men who 'say that which they do not'?

(4) The poetry alleged to be pre-Islamic is all composed in Koraisite Arabic, that of the Koran, and not, as might have been expected, in the various and distinct dialects of other parts of Arabia.

(5) The great quantity of the poetry under discussion is in itself a ground for suspicion. 'Since these odes from their nature imply acquaintance with the alphabet, and frequently allude to writing, the pre-Islamic Arabs who used the dialect of the Qur'an must have been a highly literary community; ancient Greece can scarcely exhibit so many votaries of the Muses.'

(6) How would this literature, if genuine, have been preserved? Either orally or in writing. If by the former method, then the fanatical opposition to poetry exhibited by Muḥammad and his early followers would have eliminated the profession of poetry-reciting; there would also be political interest to blot out the

memory of tribal feuds celebrated in this poetry, since Islam strove to create a united community. If in writing, this would imply the existence of books in pre-Islamic Arabia; yet as against this we have the evidence of Koran LXVIII 37:

Or have you a Book wherein you study? Surely  
therein you shall have whatever you choose!

Koran LXVIII 47 makes the same point:

Or is the Unseen in their keeping, and so  
they are writing it down?

'Only two communities, the Jews and Christians, had revealed books; the pagans had nothing of the kind. This is a matter on which it is difficult to suppose that the Qur'an could be mistaken; a missionary to the Hindus might condemn their books as valueless and pernicious; he could not well deny their existence. And if the pre-Islamic poetry was written, the pagans had plenty of books (and, indeed, "inspired" books).'

(7) 'The process of literary development is normally, perhaps invariably, from the irregular to the regular. Latin literature begins with what Horace calls *horridus ille numerus Saturnius*.' By analogy it can be argued that Arabic poetry developed its regular prosodic forms out of the irregular rhymed rhythms of the Koran. 'The existence of the Qur'an, containing the rudiments of rhymed prose and of metre, would account for the development of both when the theory and practice of music had been introduced; and the projection of the art into pre-Islamic antiquity would not be unthinkable. The dialect of the Qur'an had become a court-language, and with the establishment of a court the profession of court-poet arose.'

(8) Old Arab writers themselves give many instances of the forgeries perpetrated by the 'transmitters' of 'pre-Islamic' poetry like Ḥammād and Khalaf al-Aḥmar. 'It is asserted by Yāqūt, on the authority of al-Naḥḥās (*ob.* A.H. 331), that the seven Mu'allaqāt were collected by this Ḥammād; one could wish their

discovery had been made by some one more respectable.' Nor was the standing of professional scholars of the ninth century much higher; Ibn al-A'rābī thought neither al-Aḥma'ī nor Abū 'Ubaidah was any good at all; they probably returned the compliment and certainly took the same view of each other.'

(9) The material rewards offered for the production of 'ancient' poetry would be an irresistible temptation to unscrupulous reciters. 'It must be added that good encouragement was given by Caliphs and others to forgers.' However, 'that in spite of temptations some of the antiquaries may have been scrupulous, and even critical, can be admitted; they did not themselves fabricate, and admitted into their collections what they believed to be genuine monuments of antiquity. But this brings us back to the question of their sources. The mission of Mohammed was a tremendous event in Arabia; it involved a breach with the past to which history furnishes few analogies. From all parts of the peninsula men left their homes to establish themselves in regions whereof few of them had even heard; and within the peninsula the rise of Islam was accompanied and followed by civil wars. The attitude of Islam towards the old paganism was not one even of contemptuous toleration, but one of the fiercest hostility; it offered no compromise of any sort with it. If the poets were the spokesmen of paganism, who were the persons who preserved in their memories and transmitted to others those compositions which belonged to a dispensation which Islam terminated?'

(10) Internal evidence goes against the poems being genuine. 'The poets of most nations have no doubt at all about their religion, and the Arabs of the inscriptions are equally candid on this subject; most of the inscriptions mention one or more deities and matters connected with their worship.' Yet no trace of polytheism can be found in the poetry. Even supposing that Cheikho was right in classifying most of the pre-Islamic poets as Christians, it is remarkable that we discover no marks of Christianity in their productions. 'Though the pre-Islamic poets very frequently swear, it is almost invariably by Allah; this oath

indeed pervades their divans. . . . Indeed, the only religion with which these pre-Islamic poets can be credited is the Mohammedan.' Phrases out of the Muslim scriptures actually occur in their verses. 'The poet 'Antarah of 'Abs, whose diwan occupies 284 pages, evidently knew the revelations of the Qur'an and the technicalities of Islam before the appearance of Mohammed. . . . Hence there is no reason for doubting that he was a good Moslem, except that his life was passed before Islam had appeared. This pre-Islamic bard perhaps parades his Mohammedanism somewhat excessively; but many others give glimpses of theirs.'

(11) A second argument derived from internal evidence is linguistic. 'All these poems are in the dialect of the Qur'an, though here and there a word or form may be employed which is said to belong to some particular tribe or region. If we suppose the imposition of Islam on the tribes of Arabia to have unified their language, because it provided them with a classic of indisputable correctness in the Qur'an, analogies occur; the Roman conquest did the same for Italy, Gaul and Spain. But it is difficult to imagine that before Islam provided this unifying element there was a common language, different from those of the inscriptions, spread over the whole peninsula. The individual tribes, or at least the groups of tribes, would have had easily recognizable differences of grammar and vocabulary.' It might be reasoned that the Lakhmid kings (who, as we have seen, patronised many of the old poets according to Arab accounts) might have established a court language; 'but the evidence for this apart from the "early poems" seems wanting; vast deserts separate these regions. The Moslems who produce poems from all parts of the peninsula in the same dialect seem to be acting consistently with their practice of making many or most of these poets worshippers of Allah and of no other god; they project into past times the phenomena with which they are themselves familiar. Something like this seems to be the case with the geography of these poems; 'Amr b. Kulthūm, the author of a Mu'allaqah, states that he has drunk wine in Baalbek, Damascus and Qāširīn; that

which he solicits is of Andarin. The last two places are said to be in the neighbourhood of Aleppo. Doubtless in the 150 years which this person is supposed to have lived he had time for extensive travels; but acquaintance with these places as well as with the provinces and tribes of Arabia such as this ode displays reminds the reader of the time when the Moslem empire included Syria and Arabia rather than of the time when the Arabs were in the condition depicted in the Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite; about A.D. 500.'

(12) Finally, 'a third line of evidence is to be found in the *content* of the odes. If they regularly commence with erotic passages because the Qur'an says poets philander in every valley; if they proceed to describe their wanderings and their mounts because the Qur'an says poets are followed by those who go astray, which certainly implies that they go astray themselves; and if they proceed to dilate on their achievements, often immoral in character, because the Qur'an says they say what they do not do; we can at least trace to the source this monotony, which led some critics to declare that all that mattered in poems was the language, since they all repeat the same ideas. But, if this stereotyped form is earlier than the Qur'an, it must go back to certain acknowledged models, and the search after these leads us, as has been seen, back to Adam. It is true that the odes show remarkable acquaintance with the anatomy of the horse and camel, and perhaps with the habits of other animals; but these, as we know, were studied by grammarians as well as by poets. That some Bedouin poet may have started an ode with a lament over the ruined dwelling of his beloved, or with an account of her wraith, and may have proceeded to describe his live stock, is quite possible, but we can name with precision no classic whose work formed the basis of education and whose example had to be followed by all aspirants to the poetic art. If there had been such a classic or classics, the polemic of the Qur'an must have taken account of such, because they would have been the authoritative source of current ideas. Their guidance might be stigmatized as

bad; but it could not well be denied that the people had books which they studied.'

These are the main lines of argument employed by Professor Margoliouth in his attempted demolition of the ancient Arabic poetry. Before proceeding further in the examination of his case, let him sum up in his own words. 'If then the ostensibly pre-Islamic poetry is suspect on both external and internal grounds, we are brought back to the question of the commencement of Arabic versification; is it of high antiquity, though the monuments which we possess are for the most part post-Islamic? Or is it altogether post-Islamic, being a development of the styles found in the Qur'an? This question appears to be of great difficulty. . . . The reason lies in the bewildering character of the evidence that is before us. We are on safe ground when we are dealing with inscriptions; and the Qur'an can be trusted for the condition of the Arabs to whom it was communicated in the Prophet's time. But for the history of Arabic verse we have to go to other authorities, who for the most part treat of times and conditions of which they themselves had no experience, and whose training had caused them to assume much that necessarily misled them. In judging their statements we can carry scepticism too far, but we also may be too credulous.'

The motivation of such wholesale forgery of 'pre-Islamic' poetry must obviously engage the attention of the conscientious investigator, and that to a superlative degree; and Professor Margoliouth's thesis is strangely defective in this respect. To complete this side of the argument it is convenient and instructive to epitomise what Dr. Taha Husain had in mind when he spoke of 'the fabrication of "transmitters," or the forgery of Bedouins, or the manufacture of grammarians, or the pretence of story-tellers, or the invention of commentators and traditionists and theologians.' This part of the polemic is set forth at length in pages 117-181 of his book; it may be summarised under six headings.

(A) Political motive: the rivalry between the Koraish—the

tribe to which the Prophet belonged—on the one hand and the Prophet's supporters from other tribes on the other, spread to all parts of the Muslim world following the expansion of Islam and the consequent struggle for power within the empire. All parties to the quarrel were interested to quote evidence from the remote past to reinforce their claim to supremacy, and ancient tribal poetry proved a powerful weapon. ①

(B) Religious motive: confronted by the resistance and active opposition of peoples belonging to other faiths, the early Muslims were eager to prove that the coming of the Prophet and the truth of his mission had been foreshadowed or foreseen by men of prudence and vision in the century before Islam, and also that Islam's claim to be the original true religion, corrupted in all other creeds, was founded on historical fact. ②

(C) Exegetical motive: the language of the Koran presented many puzzles to the Faithful after the Prophet's death removed from their midst the best qualified illuminator of its obscurities. Those anxious to solve such riddles found it helpful to explain anomalies of grammar and lexicographical rarities by citing parallels from the ancient poets; the ambition to be recognised as eminent authorities would tempt them to invent verses rather than admit defeat. ③

(D) Professional motive: the art of story-telling was ancient and highly esteemed among the Arabs, and the competition for a good and lucrative hearing would encourage its practitioners to introduce copious quotations from 'old' poetry into their narratives. ④

(E) Patriotic motive: face to face with vanquished peoples who boasted of their ancient culture and ridiculed the ignorance and boorishness of their conquerors, the Arabs sought to bolster up their prestige by showing that they also had great literary achievements to look back upon dating from the days before they emerged from their desert homeland. ⑤

(F) Resistance motive: the conquered peoples, especially the Persians, in their enthusiasm to score off their Arab overlords

delighted to compose poetry in the conquerors' language, and would then pretend to the gullible that it was genuinely old. When foreign subjects were admitted to the status of clientship to one or another noble Arab clan, they became at least as keen as the born Arabs to find 'evidence' proving the ancient glory of their adopting tribe.

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It can be conceded readily enough that the foregoing arguments make up an impressive case against the authenticity of the pre-Islamic poetry; it is only when the reasons advanced are examined one by one that their combined weight comes to appear less than at first encounter. To enumerate the points in rebuttal or mitigation made on the Arab side by such writers as Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, Muḥammad Luṭfī Jum'a, Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Rāfi'ī, Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Ghamrāwī and Muḥammad al-Khidrī, and on the European side by E. Bräunlich, T. Andrae, G. von Grunebaum, F. Gabrieli and R. Blachère would expand this brief epilogue into the dimensions of a full-length dissertation. For the present purpose it must suffice to expose the flaws in a few of Professor Margoliouth's paradoxes, and then to consider what, in our existing state of knowledge, may be accepted as most likely to be genuine in this poetry, with special reference to the *Mu'allaqāt*.

The sophistry—I hesitate to say dishonesty—of certain of Professor Margoliouth's arguments is only too apparent, quite unworthy of a man who was undoubtedly one of the greatest erudites of his generation. He must have been very well aware, for instance, that the reference (point 6) to a 'book' in Koran LXVIII 37 and to 'writing' in Koran LXVIII 47 has nothing whatever to do with poetry, genuine or spurious; it has everything to do with the common Koranic usage of calling the Holy Scriptures, notably those of the Jews and the Christians, the 'book' of the community concerned. The intention behind these passages is to stress the claim made repeatedly elsewhere that Muḥammad

was sent as a Prophet using the Arabic language—the first (and last) of the Prophets to employ that medium. Almost equally specious are the conclusions he draws from Sura xxvi 224-5 (points 1, 3, 12). To translate the word *yahimūna* as 'philander' and from this to deduce a connexion with the erotic prelude of the typical ode is a shocking misapplication of scholarship; Freytag's interpretation of the verb, based on the excellent authority of al-Jauharī (d. 1002), is admirably clear: 'vagatus, palatus fuit, prae amore aliave causa, furibundi instar.' Misleading also to a similar degree is the rendering of *al-ghāwīna* by 'those who go astray,' from which the poetic convention of describing a long journey and the beast on which it was made is derived; the Koranic use of this verb always implies, to quote Lane's meticulous phraseology, '*erring; deviating from the right way or course, or from that which is right*'—in short, the meaning is not literal but metaphorical; it is a spiritual 'deviation' that is intended.

The linguistic argument (points 2, 4, 11) looks plausible enough, but its force diminishes on probing. I leave it to those better qualified to assess the validity of the sweeping assertion that 'most literary nations introduce verse into funeral inscriptions'; even if it be loosely true that 'Latin literature commences with the epitaphs of the Scipios which are in Saturnian metre,' could Professor Margoliouth have pointed to any metrical Greek epitaphs more ancient than Homer? Moreover, it needs to be remarked that throughout the Islamic period Arabic epitaphs have been composed almost exclusively in plain prose. This, however, is only one part, and a relatively unimportant part of the ingenious syllogism; what of the remark that 'all these poems are in the dialect of the Qur'an'? What of the statement that the Koran was composed in the dialect of Koraish?

To be sure the old Arab theorists, who recognised the existence of distinct dialects of Arabic, propounded the view that 'correct' Arabic, the Arabic of revelation, derived from the speech common about Mecca. 'The data collected by them,' remarks Professor

Blachère, 'joined to a very respectable religious feeling, led them to reason syllogistically: the Koran represents to perfection the linguistic norm of the Arabs;—now the Koran was revealed to Muḥammad, sprung of the tribe of Koraish, or Mecca;—therefore the Koran was revealed in the speech of Mecca;—therefore the linguistic norm of the Arabs is the dialect of this tribe.' Even so, certain early writers were aware of the presence in the text of the Koran of words from other dialects; thus Abū 'Ubaid al-Harawī (d. 838) composed a treatise *On Tribal Words in the Koran* which has been printed. The investigations of modern scholars have amply borne out this view. The 'Koraishite' theory was already attacked by K. Vollers in 1894, when he published the first of a series of well-documented papers, culminating in his classic *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien* (Strassburg, 1906) in which he argued that the Arabic of the Koran as we now have it was 'a grammarians' fabrication.' The true text was to be sought in the variant readings, especially those of a non-canonical character (for orthodoxy admits seven varieties); the so-called Vulgate represented an attempt to harmonise the language of the Scriptures with that of the ancient poets.

'This thesis,' Professor Blachère comments, 'which in its time unloosed a storm of protest in Muslim circles, appears to have imposed itself in Germany, where Brockelmann and Schaade adopt it more or less completely.' Elsewhere, however, Vollers's theory has been abandoned as too extreme; C. Rabin, for instance, in his erudite monograph *Ancient West-Arabian* (London, 1951), declares, 'I accept the Othmanic text as a true presentation of the language Mohammed used, but believe that his literary diction contained some elements of the spoken idiom of his milieu, which happens to be a specimen of an otherwise lost language.' In short, the view commonly accepted today is that there existed in ancient Arabia, side by side with the numerous spoken dialects, a literary (or, in Blachère's terminology, 'literal') Arabic employed as a sort of *lingua franca* in intertribal communications, of a more dignified order than colloquial speech; this *koine* was the idiom used alike

by the poets and the Prophet. This conjecture does not overlook the occurrence, both in the Koran and in the ancient poetry, of dialect words and forms; what it does seek to establish—and there it goes far to solving an otherwise insoluble problem—is the currency in ancient Arabia of a form of elevated self-expression such as is universally found in all civilised languages today. Above all, this conjecture admits the possibility, even the probability, that in the course of transmission and transcription the original texts of the poems underwent some transformation in order to bring them into accord with a theoretical view of 'correct Arabic' by then popular among grammarians, themselves influenced by the theological dogma that the language of the Koran was God's language and therefore beyond discussion the only norm. 'On est très surpris,' is Blachère's laconic note, 'que Margoliouth, *Origins*, 440 sqq., et T. Husayn, *Adab*, 96 sq., n'aient pas songé à cette explication.'

Professor Margoliouth makes very merry with the picture of the forgers 'making many or most of these poets worshippers of Allah and of no other god' (point 11). The dilemma of the occurrence in the ancient poetry of so many references to Allah used to be resolved by supposing that this name had been substituted by the transmitters, all good Muslims, for an original al-Lāt; but 'there is however no reasonable doubt,' C. J. Lyall wrote long ago in his *Ancient Arabian Poetry*, 'that the name of Allah, the Supreme God, was well known to the Arabs of the Ignorance,' and further researches have tended to confirm this. Is it, moreover, likely that poets seeking to command a wide hearing would deliberately alienate the sympathies of the greater part of their hoped-for audience by swearing in the name of purely local idols? And while it may indeed be conceded that certain lines in the 'old' poetry come too near to describing Muslim ceremonial to be believed, it is sheer recklessness to argue on the basis of these occasional importations that 'the only religion with which these pre-Islamic poets can be credited is the Mohammedan' (point 10). Scarcely less hazardous is the statement that the transmitters



'project into past times the phenomena with which they are familiar' and to support this assertion by citing the *Mu'allāqa* of 'Amr ibn Kulthūm in which he 'states that he has drunk wine in Baalbek, Damascus and Qāṣirīn' (point 11); the verse in question was rejected as spurious by al-Tibrīzī, and even if it is genuine (which I doubt) it need not represent anything more concrete than poetic exaggeration. As for the fact that 'that which he solicits is of Andarin,' are we obliged to conclude that Keats had travelled in Greece because he craved for

a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene?'

'If the poets were the spokesmen of paganism,' Professor Margoliouth argues (point 9), 'who were the persons who preserved in their memories and transmitted to others those compositions which belonged to a dispensation which Islam terminated?' The presumption behind this question is that the disapproval of poets and poetry expressed in the Koran (point 1) would have prevented the handing-on of the oral tradition long enough for all memory of it to be blotted out. But it is notorious that Islam sat lightly, and still sits lightly, on the Bedouins of Arabia; by the time the enthusiastic believers had been pressed into military service and scattered over the conquered provinces, particularly by the time the imperial capital shifted first to Damascus and then to Baghdad, the heirs to the 'Ignorance' remaining in the desert were left very much to their own devices. It requires no great imaginative effort to picture them reverting happily to their ancient customs, paying lip-service to the new faith but finding solace and pride as of old in the recollection of the great poets and the momentous occasions for which they composed their famous odes.

'The opening century of Islam was not favourable to literature,' writes Professor Nicholson. 'At first conquest, expansion, and organisation, then civil strife absorbed the nation's energies; then, under the Umayyads, the old pagan spirit asserted itself once

more.' The impulse to compose poetry, which had never been wholly checked—for 'the poets whom the Prophet condemned were his most dangerous opponents: he hated them not as poets but as propagators and defenders of false ideals, and because they ridiculed his teaching, while on the contrary he honoured and rewarded those who employed their talents in the right way'—when this impulse resurged, the new generation of poets were glad to recover from the desert the models created by their distinguished predecessors. 'The taste for poetry, far from being confined to literary circles, was diffused throughout the whole nation, and was cultivated even amidst the fatigues and dangers of war.' Let us take a single instance, but one surely very telling: 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a, whose 'poetry was so seductive that it was regarded by devout Moslems as "the greatest crime ever committed against God," and so charming withal that 'Abdu'llāh b. 'Abbās, the Prophet's cousin and a famous authority on the Koran and the Traditions, could not refrain from getting by heart some erotic verses which 'Umar recited to him,' was actually born in or about 643, only eleven years after Muḥammad's death, in Mecca, and grew up among men who had lived long under the old dispensation. Unless Professor Margoliouth would have us believe that he, or men like him, were the inventors of Arabic poetry—and if they were, was it not equally miraculous that such 'primitives' should immediately produce such finished work?—unless that miracle be granted, to whom else could the new poets turn for instruction if not to the living repositories of the old masterpieces, which, on the evidence before us, they faithfully imitated?

On this line of reasoning the problem of immediate transmission proves a figment of the destructive critics' fertile fancy. And if the poetry they transmitted fails to reflect the posited polytheism of the 'Ignorance,' is that after all so difficult to understand? Even the foolhardiest Bedouin would scarcely be so rash as to go on repeating verses that contained mention of false gods; it was on every count in their best interest to transmit that part of

the national heritage which accorded most with the prescriptions of Islam. But if oaths by al-Lāt and al-'Uzza and Manāt were studiously bowdlerised, the martial spirit of the desert survived too strongly for the fame of ancient feuds, and the stirring poems they occasioned, to be wholly obscured. The wonder is, not that the poetry called pre-Islamic should appear tinged with the beliefs and outlook of the new faith, but that it should reflect so much that is contrary to Muslim teaching and the imperative demands of Muslim solidarity.

If this poetry was all, or mostly, forged, why, one may now ask, is so much of it difficult to understand, and why does it abound in references to persons and events that exercised all the ingenuity of the commentators to explain? Are we to suppose that the forgers aimed not only to entertain but also to mystify their hearers? Moreover, are we to take so poor a view of the intelligence of the Caliphs, let alone the hard-bitten scholars, as to imagine that they would be readily deceived by impudent impostors, and part with substantial rewards to encourage them in their deceit? If it is desired to see the kind of verses which story-tellers manufactured to put in the mouths of famous poets, it is not necessary to go farther afield than the pages of the *Romance of Antar*; no great discrimination is required to distinguish between such effusions and poetry like the *Mu'allaqāt*. It betokens a certain immodesty in a twentieth-century scholar, whose Arabic was acquired exclusively from books, to set himself up as a critic of ancient Bedouin poetry superior to al-Aṣma'i and al-Manṣūr. On this subject, let us leave the last word with Professor Blachère: 'L'essentiel est de savoir si tel fragment ou tel poème considéré ne contredit pas l'idée que nous sommes admis à nous faire de la poésie archaïque en général. L'apocryphe d'un ḤAMMĀD ou d'un ḤALAF, bien loin alors de nous gêner, nous devient un précieux auxiliaire. Rapprochés des œuvres composées en la seconde moitié du I<sup>er</sup>/VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, comme celles de JARĪR ou l'AL-FARAZDAQ, les pastiches nous paraissent de fidèles produits de la tradition poétique avant l'Islam. Qu'ils accentuent certaines tendances,

qu'ils marquent une prédilection pour quelques thèmes et quelques clichés, nous n'en doutons pas. Mais dans l'ensemble, ils ne faussent ni l'allure de leurs modèles, ni les sentiments que célèbrent les vieux poètes. Les savants iraqiens ne s'y sont pas trompés, eux qui se reconnaissaient impuissants à dénoncer les forgeries d'un ḤAMMĀD ou d'un ḤALAF. Après un millénaire, serait-il sage à nous d'avoir plus d'exigences?'

\* \* \*

Let us now return to our point of departure, the Seven Odes with which we have been primarily concerned. 'La place accordée par les érudits musulmans au petit recueil des *Mu'allaqāt* a contribué grandement à troubler l'optique de la critique occidentale.' So Professor Blachère writes, contrary to the concert of European and Arab opinion. His verdict is mainly influenced by the consideration that 'in spite of their celebrity, these poems do not present themselves as the most faithful vestiges of the ancient poetry'; he is also much troubled by the problem of their authenticity. These objections have considerable force and demand careful investigation; but is there not perhaps a third factor which has operated to cloud the vision, not so much of professional Arabists as of the general public? For it cannot be pretended that the *Mu'allaqāt* have as yet captured the passionate interest of the man in the street; even the Blunts failed signally in their ambition to make of them another Omar Khayyām. Professor Nicholson may well be called into the witness-box at this point: 'It must be confessed that no rendering of the *Mu'allaqāt* can furnish European readers with a just idea of the originals, a literal version least of all. They contain much that only a full commentary can make intelligible, much that to modern taste is absolutely incongruous with the poetic style. Their finest pictures of Bedouin life and manners often appear uncouth or grotesque, because without an intimate knowledge of the land and people it is impossible for us to see what the poet intended to convey, or to appreciate the truth and beauty of its expression; while the artificial framework,

the narrow range of subject as well as treatment, and the frank realism of the whole strike us at once.'

Are the *Mu'allaqāt* great poetry, as the Arabs would have us believe? If so, are they translatable in such a manner as to compel recognition of their greatness; or do they contain intrinsic difficulties defying adequate translation, so that they cannot ever command the attention readily accorded to Homer, Vergil, Dante? On the other hand, are they so flawed, in general composition or in particular detail, as to merit relegation to the status of the venerable but curious rather than beautiful? Was Gibbon far out in his opinion that Jones's notes, if preserved, would have been 'far more interesting than the obscure and obsolete text'?

The translation of poetry is famously fraught with all manner of obstinate problems, so that some critics have seriously and reasonably maintained that the attempt is not worth the effort; disaster is inevitable. Allowing for this extreme pessimism, which would inhibit all work of the kind undertaken and illustrated in this volume, it has nevertheless to be recognised that certain poems have been brilliantly translated, and that certain versions give lasting pleasure and satisfaction and have even proved themselves to possess the creative quality of original compositions. The *Mu'allaqāt* present the familiar difficulties common to all poetry; but they also confront the hopeful translator with obstacles of a very special kind. R. A. Nicholson has spoken of 'the artificial framework, the narrow range of subject as well as the treatment;' I have tried in my *Moorish Poetry* to describe how 'in Arabic poetry the business of the creative craftsman was to invent patterns of thought and sound within the framework of his revered tradition,' and to explain why 'poetry became an arabesque of words and meanings.' Those remarks were meant to apply to a somewhat later period in Arabic literature, yet they are not wholly amiss even in relation to the earliest phase. We have seen how one of our seven authors borrowed phrases from another; the common stock of themes is easily detected, their

enumeration soon accomplished. As an instance of the conservatism of the Arab mind, it is interesting to read 'Amr son of Kulthūm's description of

mail-coats that ripple like a pool of water  
when the furrowing wind strikes its smooth surface

and to find the Andalusian al-Isrā'īlī nearly seven centuries later inverting and elaborating the same image in his picture of trees and waves:

Elms in the meadow springing,  
Silken pennants swinging  
On tawny lances;  
The river dances. . . .

Ripple of mail rises  
To war; no surprise is  
The elms stand steady,  
Line of combat ready.

Wave on wave surging,  
To the ramparts verging;  
The bent elms prattle  
And cry, 'To battle!'

But such image-play is *cafiare* to the general; it needs an Arab taste and a deep acquaintance with Arab poetic conventions to appreciate the exotic flavour of that kind of preciousness. Even more remote from popular taste is the sort of exercise indulged in by the Spanish theologian Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), though it attests the vogue enjoyed by the *Mu'allaqāt* in his distant land and after such a lapse of time. For he tells us in his *Ring of the Dove*: 'I extemporised a poem as a sort of joke, inserting after each couplet of my original composition a couplet taken from the beginning stanzas of the *Suspended Ode* of Ṭarafa ibn al-'Abd, which I had studied with commentary at the feet of Abū Sa'īd al-Fatā al-Ja'fari, transmitting from Abū Bakr al-Muqri', from Abū

Ja'far al-Nahhās (God have mercy on their souls!), in the Cathedral Mosque of Cordova.

I called to mind the love I bore  
 For her, my heart's adored of yore,  
 That seems like Khaula's traces now  
 Wind-swept on Thahmad's rocky brow.

My memory of that firm bond  
 She pledged with me (and I so fond)  
 Still lasts as clear as the blue band  
 Tattooed upon an Arab's hand.

And there I paused, not knowing true  
 If she would come to me anew,  
 Yet not despairing, and I wept  
 Until the morn, nor ever slept.

Then long my kinsfolk chided me  
 And made reproach abundantly;  
 'Nay, perish not of grief,' they cried,  
 'But be with courage fortified.'

The divers moods and rages of  
 The fickle lady whom I love  
 Are like the wrecks of schooners spread  
 Along Dad's rocky torrent-bed.

Those alternations of repulse  
 And union, which my heart convulse,  
 Are as a ship some helmsman veers  
 To catch the wind, then forward steers.

First she was pleased a little while,  
 Then turned away in anger vile;  
 So children playing in the sands  
 Divide the parcels with their hands.

Her lips were smiling graciously,  
 But in her heart she raged at me—  
 A double necklace, fashioned with  
 Gay pearls, and sombre chrysolith.'

To some extent the quality of the poetic imagination can be reflected in the dark glass of an alien idiom. But it is when we come to look at the mechanics of the Bedouin ode that we realise most clearly the essential inadequacy of translation. Brief mention has been made in the prologue of the monorhyme, that compulsion laid upon the poet to fashion sixty or more couplets with the same combination of terminal consonant and vowel. I do not recall any discussion of the aesthetic and emotional effect produced by this extraordinary restriction; yet it is very basic to the intelligent appreciation of Arabic poetry, and the realisation of its vital function intensifies the translator's awareness of his foredoomed failure to do justice to his original. No one who has been present at a recital of Arabic odes—on such an occasion as I myself witnessed, the symposium held in the Cairo Opera House to mourn the passing of Aḥmad Shauqī—can ever forget the palpitating excitement of waiting line after line for the poet to produce the exactly right word with the right rhyme to round off his rhetorical period. And when the finished poem is studied again in the quiet of meditation, there comes the even greater thrill of discovering, if the poet is a master, how he built up each couplet from the very first syllable so that the rhyme-word at its end was not merely appropriate but inevitable. How can that pleasurable sensation, perhaps the acutest delight imparted by fine Arabic poetry, ever be communicated through a translation?

Extraordinary precision of language is an outstanding characteristic of this ancient literature. The desert poets, gifted with very keen powers of observation, strove strenuously to match their visual detection of minute differences with an equally sensitive choice of words. The vocabulary at their disposal was extremely

large, and rich in near-synonyms, perhaps a result of the fusion of many dialects; a single verb or adjective frequently bore a complication of meaning, so that its equivalent in a foreign idiom is apt to be a phrase and sometimes a rather lengthy phrase. It follows that whereas the original Arabic, when wielded by a virtuoso, is remarkable for a pregnant brevity, any translation is bound by comparison to appear flaccid and diffuse. This striking attribute of Arab rhetoric was taken by a thirteenth-century poet of Andalusia, Ibn al-Khabbāza, as a happy simile when he mourned a king who died young.

Your life was of the order true  
Of Arab eloquence;  
The tale was brief, the words were few,  
The meaning was immense.

Again the question arises, how is such concentration of style to be matched in a language lacking the vocabulary required for successful imitation?

The *Mu'allaqāt* exhibit these two Arab virtues—dramatic intensity and epigrammatic terseness—to a degree approaching perfection. When it is said of them that they are obscure, it needs to be added that their obscurity is not so much of language (for the words, though often rare, are never imprecise) nor of imagery (the themes being clearly defined and accurately portrayed), but of personal and historical reference. That handicap cannot be overcome now; the commentators' guesses may be reported, but both translator and reader must accept the fact that many puzzles will remain unsolved. When, however, so distinguished a scholar as R. A. Nicholson finds in these poems 'much that to modern taste is absolutely incongruous with the poetic style,' his judgment should not be accepted as valid for all time. Much has happened in Western poetics during the last half-century, and concepts and expressions which Victorian criticism ruled out as inappropriate have long since been welcomed back into the repertory of the adventurous poet. Today we are not so likely to be offended by

the full-blooded frankness and uninhibited catholicity of the desert composer.

The old misunderstanding does not end there. The same writer remarked that 'their finest pictures of Bedouin life and manners often appear uncouth or grotesque'; the Blunts described this poetry as 'the most delightful wild flower of literature the Eastern world can show'; Sir William Jones set the fashion, sedulously cultivated ever since, of referring to the *Mu'allaqāt* as 'wild productions.' These comments seem to me to betray a fundamental error of appreciation. Because we possess little or nothing of Arabic poetry more ancient than the Seven Odes, it has been commonly assumed that these poems represent the beginnings of a literature and that their composers must therefore be thought of as primitives; the epithet bestowed on them by later Arab writers, *Jāhili* poets, has contributed much to causing this confusion. For my own part I find many signs in the *Mu'allaqāt* of an already well-advanced literary tradition; occasionally they even show slight symptoms of decadence. The lives these men led were no doubt wild and uncouth by modern standards; but their outlook and their forms of self-expression were far from uncivilised. The term *Jāhiliya* is unfortunately often translated 'Age of Ignorance,' and the poets of the *Jāhiliya* have therefore come to be pictured as boorish illiterates. This is a sorry travesty of the truth.

What, then, is the real meaning of *Jāhiliya*? It is true that the verb *jahila* has the signification 'to be ignorant'; but I. Goldziher pointed out long ago in his famous *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle, 1888-90) that this is a secondary connotation; the primary sense is the opposite of *haluma*, 'to be clement, forbearing.' The term has thus an ethical, even a theological value; T. H. Weir's definition is that it is 'the name given to the state of things which obtained in Arabia before the promulgation of Islam, or in a narrower sense the period when there was no prophet, between Jesus and Muḥammad.' The word actually occurs four times in the Koran; these contexts are worth examining, for they throw

much light on its ancient, perhaps its original usage. Sura III 148 runs:

Then He sent down upon you, after grief,  
security—a slumber overcoming a party  
of you; and a party themselves had grieved,  
thinking of God thoughts that were not true  
such as *the pagans* thought, saying, ‘Have we  
any part whatever in the affair?’ Say:  
‘The affair belongs to God entirely.’

The reference is to a threatened relapse into infidelity on the part of some of Muḥammad’s followers after the battle of Uhud; their lack of faith is branded as being like the unbelief of the *Jāhiliya*. In Sura v 55 we read:

Is it the judgment of *pagandom* then  
that they are seeking? Yet who is fairer  
in judgment than God, for a people  
having sure faith?

The contrast is again between unbelief and faith in God’s revelation. What of Sura xxxiii 33?

Remain in your houses; and display not  
your finery, as did *the pagans* of old.

Here the wives of the Prophet are being enjoined to behave with becoming modesty and decorum; the new dispensation has come, requiring women as well as men to ‘obey God and His Messenger.’ Finally, in Sura XLVIII 26 we have the statement:

When the unbelievers set in their hearts  
fierceness, the fierceness of *pagandom*,  
then God sent down His Shechina upon  
His Messenger and the believers, and  
fastened to them the word of godfearing  
to which they have better right and are  
worthy of; and God has knowledge  
of everything.

The word rendered by ‘fierceness’ is *ḥamiya*, that vehement arrogance which moved the unbelievers to persecute and seek to exterminate all the Muslims rather than acknowledge the truth of the Prophet’s message. It was precisely *ḥamiya* that had prolonged the wars of al-Basūs and Dāḥis for so many disastrous years, and had inspired countless bloody feuds in the *Jāhiliya*; this was the destructive parochialism which Muḥammad strove to replace with Muslim solidarity.

None of these passages suggests that *Jāhiliya* meant to Muḥammad and his contemporaries what we understand by ‘ignorance,’ unless indeed ‘ignorance’ is given a spiritual significance. The Prophet himself was generally supposed to be illiterate; no one would accuse him on that account of being ignorant. We have come of late years to realise more and more that ‘illiteracy’ can exist side by side with a quite advanced and mature ‘culture’; because the old Bedouin poets were apparently unable to read and write, they were not for that reason uncouth or uncultivated men. Even less were they innocent children, gathering ‘wild flowers of literature’ in the dewy dawn of civilisation.

It is time to sum up, or the discussion may continue overlong. On the question of authenticity, it seems that the weight of evidence is heavily in favour of the Seven Odes being genuine products of the age to which Arab tradition has assigned them. But this is not to say that the form in which we have received them is their original form. In any case there exist too many variants as between the different channels of reception for the modern scholar to be confident that he can reconstitute the poems as their authors composed them; it is certainly possible that the authors themselves recited their productions differently at different times, and in the course of oral transmission substantial additions and subtractions, apart from much verbal confusion, may well have taken place. Nevertheless as they stand, they give a powerful impression of having been the work of seven distinct poets, each with his own individual style and personality.

As for their greatness, the conclusion to which we have sought

to point is that the *Mu'allaqāt* are supremely fine poems judged by Arab standards, within the definition of what the Arabs recognised as constituting fine poetry. They represent the climax of an artistic impulse whose origins are beyond our elucidation; they remained throughout the history of Arabic literature prime models of excellence, and their meticulous study exercised a dominating and fruitful influence on the development of all subsequent writing. Coming so early in the literature of this people, they are free of many of the faults which vitiated too much later work; they manifest a confidence, an originality and a certain unselfconsciousness characteristic of all great art, and notably absent in the euphuistic imitations of the Arab Middle Ages. Translation robs them of the greater part of their artistic and emotive force; yet what remains over is by no means negligible, provided the translator abandons all attempts to press them into a prefabricated mould of committed prosody and stylised diction. Let the authors of the Seven Odes speak unassumingly but boldly by the mouths of their dragomans, who shall be men honest in scholarship, no pedants but with no extravagant literary pretensions, and they cannot fail to delight and move to wonder even fifteen hundred years after they first gave utterance, even in a language so very remote from that which they were fortunate to have as their own.

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