

The Mu^callaqah of Imru al-Qays and its Structural Analyses

TENGGU GHANI BIN TENGGU JUSOH

INTRODUCTION

This poem is written by Imru al-Qays bin Hujur al-Kindi, who lived forty years before the prophet Mohammad. And he is also called al-Malik ul-Zillel (the much-erring king), on account of his amorous tendencies. He fell in love with 'Unaizah, the daughter of his uncle Sherhabeel and of these two beloveds there is an erotic section which a poet reflects in the poem.

My aim throughout has been to present *a critical examination of the poem* in a manner which would be *readily accessible* to anyone interested and also to provide the reader with a brief analysis of how the poem develops structurally. My intention is to commit myself in a manner that can be easily avoided when one simply translates a pre-Islamic poem. I consider these two methods of approaching a qasidah to be mutually inclusive, each complementing the other and enabling the reader fully to evaluate the poem in question in a way that a translation does not by paring the odes to the barest essentials the poet's concern and themes emerge with succinct precision.

AL-MU^cALLAQAH

1. قفا نبك من ذكرى حبيب ومنزل بسقط اللوى بين الدخول فحومل

Stop! Let us cry at the remembrance of a beloved and her lodgings at the extremity of winding sand between al-Dakful and Hawmal.

2. فتوضح فالمقراة لم يعف رسمها لما نسجتها من جنوب وشمال

And Tūdiḥ and al-Miqrāḥ; its traces have not been erased by what has streaked it of south wind and the north wind.

3. ترى بعرا الآم في عرصاتها وقيعانها كأنه حب فلفل

You see that the dung of the white antelopes in its court and depressed plains is like the seeds of the pepper.

4. كأنني غداة البين يوم تحملوا لدى سمرات الحى ناقف حنظل

On the morning of the day of separation, when they loaded up, it was as though I were a man who broke colocynth near the acacia tress of the tribe.

5. وقوفا بها صحبي على مطيهم يقولون لا تهلك أسي وتجمل

My friends stopped their riding-beasts beside me and they said to me "Do not destroy yourself with sadness but bear up".

6. وان شفائي عبرة مهراقة فهل عند رسم دارس من معول

My remedy for sadness and pain is an effusion on tears, but is there any place for crying near the disappeared traces?

7. كدأبك من أم الحويرث قبلها وجارتها أم الرباب بمأسل

As was your custom with Umm al-Huwayrith before her and her neighbour Umm al-Rabab near Ma'sal.

8. اذا قامتا تضيوع المسك منها نسيم الصبا جاءت برياً القرنفل

When both of them stood up, the musk diffused from them was like a gentle breeze of the east wind arriving with the sweet smell of cloves.

9. ففاضت دموع العين مني صبابة على النحر حتي بل دمعي محملي

Because of my deep affection my tears flowed from my eyes on to the upper part of my chest, so that they moistened my sword-belt.

10. ألا رب يوم لك منهن صالح ولا سيما يوم بدارة جلجل

Did you not have many good days with them, especially the day near Dārat Juljul?

11. ويوم عقرت للعذارى مطيبي فيا عجا من كورها المتحمل

And the day that I slaughtered my riding-beast for the virgins, oh-how wonderful it was when its saddle was loaded up.

12. فظل العذارى يرتمين بلحمها وشحم كهذاب الدمقس المقتل

The virgins remained throwing its meat and its suet, like the fringes of strongly twisted raw silk, (into the cooking-pots).

13. ويوم دخلت الخدر خدر عنيزة فقالت لك الويلات انك مرجلي

And the day that I entered the howdah of U^cnaizah. She said to me "Woe to you, you will make me walk".

14. تقول وقد مال الغيظ بنا معا عقرت بعيري يا امرأ القيس فانزل
As she was speaking, the camel saddle inclined with us both, "You have slaughtered my camel O Imru' al-Qais, so go down".

15. فقلت لها سيرى وأرخى زمامه ولا تبعديني من جنك المعلق
I said to her "Take off the saddle and loosen its rein, do not distance me from your gathered fruit.

16. فثلك حبلي قد طرقت ومرضع فأهيتها عن ذى تمام محول
I have come by night even to pregnant women or nursing women like you, and have turned her away from her one year old child, the wearer of amulets.

17. اذا ما بكى من خلفها انصرفت له بشق ونحى شقها لم يحول
She half turned from me towards her crying child behind her, meanwhile her lower half still remained with me".

18. ويوما على ظهر الكئيب تعذرت على وآلت حلفة لم تحلل
And the day when, on the back of the sand-dune, she excused herself from me and took an oath to which she made no exception.

19. أفاطم مهلا بعض هذا التدلل وان كنت قد أزمعت صرعى فأجملى
O Fatime, behave gently and leave aside some if this coquetry, if you really want to leave me, do it kindly!

20. أغرك مني أن حبك قاتل وأنك مهما تأمرى القلب يفعل
Have I deceived you by the fact that your love is really killing me and that whatever you command my heart, it performs.

21. وان تك قد ساءتكم مني خليقة فسلى ثيابي من ثيابك تنسل
If my moral character has grieved you, extract gently my clothes from your clothes and let them slip off.

22. وما ذرفت عينك الا لتضرنى بسهميك فى أعشار قلب مقتل
Your eyes did not shed tears except to beat me with your two arrows in my broken heart which has been massacred by you.

23. وبيضة خدر لا يرام خباؤها تمتعت من لهُو بها غير معجل
A white women of an apartment, whose tent was not greatly sought after: I have enjoyably passed a long time with her without hurry to depart.
24. تجاوزت أحراسا اليها ومعشرا على حراسا لو يسرون مقتلي
I have passed by sentries and a body of men hankering after me, if only they could broadcast my death.
25. اذا ما الثريا في السماء تعرضت تعرض أثناء الوشاح المفصل
By that time, the Pleiades appeared in the sky like the appearance of a woman's various ornaments.
26. فجئت وقد نضت لنوم ثيابها لدى الستر الا لبسة المتفضل
I came to her and she had stripped off her clothes for sleep except for a single garment, waiting for my arrival near the curtain.
27. فقالت: يمين الله ما لك حيلة وما ان أرى عنك الغواية تنجلي
She said to me, "I swear by God, what cunning you have! I do not think that you will give up your mistaken ways."
28. خرجت بها أمشي تجر وراءنا على أثرينا ذيل مرط مرحل
I went out with her and she dragged the skirt of her embroidered silk garment over our traces in order to remove them.
29. فلما أجزنا ساحة الحى وانتحى بنا بطن خبت ذى حفاف عقنقل
When we passed along the court-yard of the tribe, we headed for the foot of a long sandy hill.
30. هصرت بفودى رأسها قتايلت على هضم الكشح ربا المخلخل
I pulled the tufts of hair on the temple of her head then she inclined towards me, with thin flanks and fleshy ankles.
31. مهفهفة بيضاء غير مفاضة تراثها مصقولة كالسجنجل
She has a white and slender body, not ample, her breasts are polished like a mirror.
32. كبكر المقانة البيضاء بصفرة غذاها نمير الماء غير المحلل

She was like the first eggs of an ostrich, which has a mixture between white and yellow, fed with salubrious water where no one has alighted.

33. تصد وتبدي عن أسيل وتتي بناظرة من وحش وجرة مطلق

She turns from me and shows her full and smooth face; afraid – her glancing eyes like the wild beasts with young offspring at Wajrah.

34. وجيد كجيد الرثم ليس بفاحش اذا هي نصته و لا بمعطل

Her neck is like the neck of the white antelope, not ugly, when raised, nor unadorned with jewels.

35. وفرع يزین المتن أسود فاحم أثيث كقنو النخلة المتعكل

She has black, luxuriant hair adorning her back like the bunch of dates of a palm tree loaded with clusters.

36. غدائرها مستشزرات الى العلا تفضل العقاص في مثني ومرسل

Her plaits of hair are twisted to the top, the hair-tresses go lost whether the hair is doubled or let loose.

37. وكشح لطيف كالجديل مخصر وساق كأنبوب السقي المذل

She has thin flanks, and is slender in the waist like a twisted rope; her shanks are like the stem of a well-watered palm-tree with evenly set branches.

38. وتضحى فتيه المسك فوق فراشها نوءوم الضحى لم تنتطق عن تفضل

The particles of the musk still spread over her bed, in the morning, when she is a heavy sleeper and she does not put anything over her single garment.

39. وتعطو برخص غير شثن كأنه أساريع ظبي أو مساويك إسحل

She raises her thin fingers which are nor hard, rough and callous but are like the red worms of Zaby or like the tooth-picks of the tamarisk tree.

40. تضيء الظلام بالعشاء كأنها منارة ممسي راهب متبتل

She illuminates the darkness during the night like the light of a monk who at night withdraws to the service of God.

41. الى مثلها يرنو الحليم صباية اذا ما اسبكرت بين درع ومجول

The forbearing man is attracted to the like of her with deep affection, since she is erect and well-proportioned neither a woman nor a girl.

42. تسلت عمايات الرجال عن الصبا وليس فوءادى عن هواك بمنسل

The errors of men are dispelled after their youth but my heart is not one to be consoled of love for you.

43. ألا رب خصم فيك ألوى رددته نصيح على تعذاله غير موءتل

How may crooked quarrellers have advised me and blamed me about you. They spared no pains in doing that, but I have answered them back.

44. وليل كموج البحر أرخى سدوله على بأنواع الهموم لبيتلى

A night like a wave of the ocean let down its curtain upon me with many kinds of anxiety to test me.

45. فقلت له لما تمطى بصلبه وأردف أعجازا وناء بكلكل

I said to him, when he stretched his spine, and mounted the hinder part of the body and raised the breast.

46. ألا أيها الليل الطويل ألا انجلي بصبح وما الاصبح منك بأمثل

O long night, become clear with morning! But the morning is not any better than you.

47. فيالك من ليل كأن نجومه بأمراس كتان الى صم جندل

O you deep night! It is as though your stars were attached carefully with thin flax rope to the hard stone.

48. وقرية أقوام جعلت عصامها على كاهل مني ذلول مرحل

Many a water-skin of tribes have I placed on the withers of a beast that submits to me and is repeatedly saddled.

49. وواد كجوف العير قفر قطعته به الذئب يعوى كالحليع المعيل

I have crossed a valley like the belly of the ass, a barren land where the wolf yelps like the outcasts who is burdened with a large family.

50. فقلت له لما عوى ان شأننا قليل الغني ان كنت لما تمول

I said to him, when he yelped, "Our way is little of wealth, supposing you have never had any wealth.

51. كلانا اذا ما نال شيئا أفاته ومن يحترث حرثي وحرثك يهزل
Both of us, when we obtain a thing, destroy it, and he who tries to cultivate my land and your land, will surely become emaciated.
52. وقد أغتدى والطير في وكناتها بمنجرد قيد الأوابد هيكل
I make my journey in the morning when the birds are still in their nests, on a large, well-bred horses that outstrips the wild beasts.
53. مكر مفر مقبل مدبر معا كجلمود صخر حطه السبل من عل
Useful in both attacking and fleeing, both coming and going, like a large rock which the torrent has driven down from a high place.
54. كميت يزل اللبد عن حال متنه كما زلت الصفواء بالمتنزل
It is a dark-bay colour; the soft hair in the middle of its back is as slippery as the stone that has slipped because of the pouring rain.
55. على الذبل جياش كأن اهترامه اذا جاش فيه حميه غلى مرجل
Despite his leanness, he is lively and his galloping, when the heat boils in him, is like the bubbling of a copper caldron.
56. مسح اذا ما السابجات على الوني أثرن الغبار بالكديد المركل
A galloper when the swimming horses, despite their fatigue, kick up the dust from the pounded earth furrowed with hooves.
57. يزل الغلام الخف عن صهواته ويلوى بأثواب العنيف المثلث
He causes the light youth to slip from his back and casts away the garments of the rough and heavy rider.
58. درير كخذروف الوليد أمره تتابع كفيه بنحيط موصل
Swift like the boy's spinning-top, which is made to spin by his manipulation of a string attached to it with alternate hands.
59. له أبطلا ظبي وساقا نعامة وارحاء سرحان وتقريب تنفل
He has the flanks of an antelope and the legs of an ostrich, the swift run of a lion and the gallop of a fox.
60. ضليع اذا استدبرته سد فرجه بضاف فوق الارض ليس بأعزل
Strong of rib, when you stand behind him he closes the space between his legs with a full and ample tail, hanging a little above the earth.

It does not incline to the one side (from force of habit).

61. كأن على المتنين منه اذا انتحى مداك عروس أوصلاية حنظل

When he leans on one side, the sides of his back are like a bride's mortar or a pestle used for colocynth.

62. كأن دماء الهاديات بنحره عصارة حناء بشيب مرجل

The blood of the leader-camels on his neck is like the juice of Henna in combed white hair.

63. فعن لنا سرب كأن نعاجه عذارى دوار فى ملاء مذيل

A herd of gazalles appeared to us, its ewes like virgins of Duwār wearing long-skirted plaids.

64. فأدبرن كالجزع المفصل بينه بجيد معم فى العشيرة مخول

They turned back like the intercalated necklace on the neck of one of good family.

65. فألحقنا بالهاديات ودونه جواحرها فى صرة لم تزيل

So he caused us to overtake the leader-camels and behind him were the laggards in a group which had not separated.

66. فعادى عداء بين ثور ونعجة دراكا ولم ينضح بماء فيغسل

He hit a bull and a cow in succession on overtaking them, but had not even sweated so as to be wet/drenched.

67. فظل طهارة اللحم من بين منضج صفيف شواء أو قدير معجل

Then the cooks were roasting some of the meat on a spit, cooking it thoroughly and were stewing the rest of it in a quickly boiling pot.

68. ورحنا يكاد الطرف يقصر دونه متي ما ترق العين فيه تسفل

We arrived in the evening, and one's eyesight was almost incapable of appreciating his beauty (i.e. he beggared all description) for when the eye was raised to see him, it fell to the ground (immediately such was his beauty)

69. فبات عليه سرجه ولجامه وبات بعيني قائما غير مرسل

He spent the night saddled and bridled, standing under my gaze and was not let loose.

70. أصاح ترى برقاً أريك وميضه كلمع اليدين في جي مكلل
O my friend! Look at the lightning which I am showing you, –its faint shining is like the flashing of the two hands in a heaped-up cloud-bank.
71. يضيء سناه أو مصابيح راهب أمال السليط بالذبال المقتل
that illuminates its lightning; or like the lamps of a monk who has poured oil on their tightly-twisted wicks.
72. قعدت له وصحبتني بين ضارج وبين العذيب بعدما متأملي
I sat down to watch it with my friends – between Ḍārij and al-ʿudhayb after I had gazed at it long and hard.
73. على قطن بالشيم أيمن صوبه وأيسره على الستار فيذبل
Over Qaṭan as predicted lay the right side – its left over al-Satār and Yadhbul.
74. فأضحى يسح الماء حول كتيفة يكب على الأذقان دوح الكهبل
It began to pour water down around Kutayfah and tossed on their faces the lofty trees of al-Kanahbul.
75. ومر على القنان من نفيانه فأنزل منه العصم من كل منزل
Some of their foliage passed over the al-Qanan so that it caused the white-footed goats to descend from all their haunts there/by every path.
76. وتيأ لم يترك بها جذع نخلة ولا أطما الا مشيدا يجندل
In Tayma' it did not leave even the trunk of a palm tree nor any strong-hold except for one built with mighty stones.
77. كأن ثيرا في عرانبين وبله كبيرأناس في بجاد مزمل
Thabīr at the beginning of heavy rain was like a great one of the people dressed in striped clothes
78. كأن ذرى رأس المجيمر غدوة من السيل والأغشاء فلكة مغزل
In the morning the top of the peak of al-Mujaymir, as a result of the torrent and the refuse was like the whirl of a spindle.
79. وألتي بصحراء الغبيط بعاعه نزول اليماني ذى العياب المحمل

The clouds poured down what it contained on the desert of Ghabīṭ as the Yemeni loaded with leather bags dismounts (from his camel).

80. كأن مكاكى الجواء غدية صبحن سلافا من رحيق مفلفل

As if in the morning the whistling birds of the desert of Jiwā' are given an early draught consisting of the first juice of the grape—a strong, pure, spiced wine.

81. كأن السباع فيه غرقى عشية بأرجائه القصوى أنابيش عنصل

In the evening, the birds of prey are drowned in the furthest parts of the desert of Jiwā' like plucked roots of the wild onion.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSES

- Lines 1–6 : *The Deserted Encampment*
 Lines 1–2 : Situation of encampment: al-Dakhūl, Hawmal, Tūdith and al-Miqrāh.
 Line 3 : The dung of the antelopes
 Line 4 : His grief caused by separation from his beloved
 Line 5–6 : Weeping—countering the sadness by mentioning the companions
 Lines 7–47 : *The Naṣīb*
 Line 7 : His past love-affairs
 Line 8 : Their smell of musk
 Line 9 : His grief at separation
 Line 10 : The affair which was experienced between Imru' al-Qays and °Unayzah at Dārat Juljul.
 Lines 12–13 : The slaughtering of the camel
 Lines 13–17 : The seduction of °Unayzah
 Lines 18–22 : Declaration of his love for °Unayzah on a different occasion.
 Lines 23–25 : Poet's bravery in penetrating his beloved's heavily guarded tent at night,
 Lines 26–29 : They retire to a sand-dune to make love
 Lines 30–42 : The description the beauty of the beloved
 Lines 30–31 : Thin flanks, fleshy ankles, slender body—not ample—The ribs are polished like a mirror.
 Line 32 : The colour of her skin: like the first eggs of an ostrich—mixed between white and yellow.
 Lines 33–34 : Her beautiful face, her full and smooth neck, her glance is like that of an oryx of Wajrah looking after its child.

- Lines 35–36 : The description of her hair.
 Line 37 : The description of the body of his beloved: Thin flanks and a slender waist.
 Line 38 : The smell of musk diffusing over the bed.
 Line 39 : Thin fingers like the red worm in the desert of Zaby.
 Line 40 : She glows at night like the lamp of a monk – so pure is her skin
 Line 41 : The perfection of her physique.
 Line 42 : Poet’s devotion to her, – his cares, and the rebuttal of the reproacher.
 Lines 44–47 : *The night description.*
 A night like a wave of the ocean – The stars in the sky – The many kinds of anxiety he faces.
 Lines 48–51 : Attributed by the commentators to Ta’abbata Sharran – The description of the way of life in the desert. His conversation with the wolf.
 Lines 52–69 : *The hunting section.*
 Line 52 : The morning departure – the birds are in their nests.
 Line 53 : The description of his horse – its swiftness
 Lines 54–55 : A dark-bay colour: its emaciation and readiness to continue.
 Line 56 : Swifter than the ‘swimming’ horses when they raise a cloud of dust by stamping on the hard soil.
 Lines 57–58 : His swiftness caused the light youth to slip – speed like the spinning top.
 Line 59 : Flanks of a buck – the legs of an ostrich. The gallop of the wolf – The canter of a fox.
 Line 60 : His strong ribs – full and ample tail.
 Line 61 : Riding him is like the pounding of the bride’s mortar and the pestle used for colocynth; such on his leanness and the hardness of his flesh and bones.
 Line 62 : “The blood of the leader – camels on his neck is like the juice of Henna is combed white hair”.
 Line 63 : The prey: A herd of gazelles like the virgins of Dawār.
 Line 64 : They scatter and resemble a necklace by so doing.
 Line 65 : The poet’s horse is in the front of the party.
 Line 66 : The running down of a bull and a cow
 Line 67 : The cooking of the meat.
 Line 68 : The poet’s aesthetic appreciation of his horse’s magnificence.
 Line 69 : Man and horse remain ready for action throughout the night.

- Lines 70–81 : *Storm Section.*
 Lines 70–74 : Observing the clouds
 Lines 70–71 : The lightning.
 Lines 72–73 : The place for observing the clouds – Darij and al-°Udhayb.
 Line 73 : The territories the cloud covered: Qatan, al-Satar, Yadhbul.
 Line 74 : The pouring rain, drenching Kutayfah and up-rooting the trees of al-Kanahbul.
 Lines 75–77 : The destruction it causes in the whole region
 Lines 78–81 : The signs left by the storm the next day.
 Line 78 : The speak of al-Mujaymir was like the whirl of a spindle.
 Line 79 : The desert of Ghabī̄ was drenched by the rain which fell as when the Yemeni loaded with leather bags dismounts.
 Lines 80–81 : The sign of fertility – The birds have their morning draught.
 Line 81 : The birds of prey drown in the furthest region of the desert.

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