المعلقات
لجيل الألفية

The Mu‘allaqāt for Millennials
Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes

 مركز الملك عبدالعزيز الثقافي العالمي (إثرا)
Imruʾ al-Qays

The Mi’allaqāt for Millennials

Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes
Introduction
The Mu‘allaqāt Book: Story, Map, and Contribution
Mu‘allaqā of Imru‘ al-Qays
Mu‘allaqā of Ṭarafah ibn al-‘Abd
Mu‘allaqā of Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā
Mu‘allaqā of Labīd ibn Rabī‘ah
Mu‘allaqā of ‘Amr ibn Kuhlūm
Mu‘allaqā of ’Antarah ibn Shaddād
Mu‘allaqā of al-‘Aḥār ibn al-‘Ilīzah
Mu‘allaqā of al-Nābighah al-Dhibyānī
Mu‘allaqā of ‘Abīd ibn al-‘Abras

CONTENTS
The Mu’allaqāt for Millennials

Review:
Hatem Alzahrani
Imru’ al-Qays

Adventures of Youthful Passion
The Mu'allaqah of Imru' al-Qays
Adventures of Youthful Passion

Translated by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych,
assisted by Khalid Stetkevych
According to most literary accounts of his life, such as al-Iṣbahānī’s Kitāb al-Aghānī (Book of Songs), the poet Imru’ al-Qays was the youngest son of Ḥujr ibn al-Ḥārith of the powerful southern Arabian tribal group of Kindah, who had been appointed king of the unruly tribes of the Banū Asad and the Banū Ḥathafān in Najd, in central Arabia. The poet’s mother is said to be Fāṭimah bint Rabi‘ah, the sister of Kulayb Wā’il and the poet Muhādhil ibn Rabi‘ah—the protagonists of the celebrated Jāhilī forty-year war, or feud, Ḥarb al-Basās.

The young Imru’ al-Qays’s devotion to poetry, especially erotic poetry, led to his banishment from his father’s house. His father instructed his servant Rabi‘ah to put his son to death and bring back his eyes as evidence that he had carried out the order.

Taking pity on the boy, Rabi‘ah slew an antelope and brought back its eyes instead. Ḥujr later repented, and his son returned to his father’s house. Banished once again, Imru’ al-Qays took up the life of a profligate, wandering the desert with a band of companions and devoting himself to the hunt, wine, gambling, and the entertainment of singing slave-girls.

Such was his state when the news reached him of the regicide of his father at the hands of the rebellious Banū Asad. Exclaiming, “Wine today, business tomorrow!” (al-yawm al-khamr, ghadān al-‘amr), he continued carousing for a week and then swore off his debauchery: “Wine and women are forbidden to me until I have killed a hundred of the Banū Asad and cut off the forelocks of a hundred more.”

He was the poet of the Banū Ḥathafān and the Banū Asad, and his poetry was highly regarded. He was known for his love of wine, women, and poetry. He was also known for his rending the hair of his own head in mourning for his beloved worthies. He was one of the most important poets of the Jāhilī era.

However, despite his fame as a poet, Imru’ al-Qays was also known for his violence and his role in the forty-year war between the Banū Ḥathafān and the Banū Asad. He was said to have led a band of companions and to have engaged in acts of violence, including the murder of his own father. He was also said to have cut off the forelocks of a hundred of his own people as a way of showing his regret for his past actions.

The poet’s life and poetry were highly influential, and he is considered one of the most important poets of the Jāhilī era. His poetry is characterized by its use of metaphor and imagery, and it is often said to have helped to shape the aesthetic of later Arabic poetry.
The Poem

The master poem of Imru’ al-Qays ibn Huja (d. ca. 550 C.E.) takes pride of place among the Mu’allaqat, the collection of seven, or ten, ‘Suspended Odes’ or ‘Golden Odes’ of the pre-Islamic period—the Jahiliyyah or ‘Age of Ignorance,’ and is widely considered the premier example of the art of the qaṣīdah, the preeminent poetic form of the pre-Islamic tribal warrior aristocracy.

The poet likewise has been considered by scholars throughout the centuries the master poet of the Arabic language. The biography of Imru’ al-Qays, like that of most poets of the pre-Islamic period, straddles legend and history, and both the legendary and historical elements are preserved in many variant versions.

Furthermore, and again like most other pre-Islamic Arab poets, the connection between the poet and the poem cannot be historically verified. Rather, what has come down to us is a rich literary cultural tradition that presents the poem as the work of this tragic, heroic, and in some respects mythic, persona.

 protección 34

هذه القصيدة الأندلسية لأمرئ القيس هي إحدى معظّمات العرب، وهي مجموعة قصائد طوال عدّها الرواية والتشابه عيون الشعر الجاهلي وأفّاض قائله، ولها لقب آخر أيضًا إلى نفاسها، وهو لقب: المّلّهات. (1)

وعظّمات أمرئ القيس هي أول ما تذكر حين تسري هذه الاظّمات، وقد تناولت الرواية والشراّح في رواية أبّات هذه الاظّمات، والاختلاف بينهم ينطوي عدد أبّاتها الذي تراوح ما بين 47 ابّة في رواية الأصمّي، و30 ابّة في رواية أبّ زيد الفرّي من المامّل بن عبد الله، وإن كانت معظم الرواّيات أقرب إلى عدد الأول، كما اختف الرواية والشراّح أيضًا في ترتيب بعض أبّاتها: تقديماً وتأخيراً، وكذلك في صيغة كثير من ألفاظها وتركياها.

وقد اجتهدت في تحقيق هذا النص الشعري، بالرجوع إلى الطبعة المحظّبة لديوان أمرئ القيس برواية الأصمّي، بالموازنة مع الروايات الأخرى الواردة في شروح الديوان وشروح القصائد الطوال لكل من: أبي سعيد السّكّر، وأبّي الأنسارى، وأبّي جعفر الناحاس، وأبّي عبد الله بن السّكّر، والحسبي، ومحمد الحسبي، وجعلت معيار الترجيح يستند إلى رواية الأصمّي في الديوان، ما لم تختلف ما توافق عليه كثير من الشراّح في رواياتهم، ومن الواضح أن نصّ الاظّمات هنا قد جلب حيّة ودائمة وضعت بين الراويات؛ لوصول إلى الرواية الأصحّ لكّ بنت، وتعظّم الاظّمات أمرئ القيس هي أكثر الاظّمات احتفالاً في الروايات، إذ لا يكاد يخلو بينهما من اختلاف بين روايتها، وفي هذا لحّة دالة على فضل العبّاة بها عن سائر الطوال.
III. The Dark Night of the Soul (lines 44-48)

Often termed simply a description of the night (wasf al-layl), Imru’ al-Qays’s renowned night passage depicts the poet’s spiritual desolation and psychological paralysis as a seemingly endless night in which time, or emotional progress, has come to a stand-still, as if the stars were steeds firmly tethered to immovable boulders, as if memory never will come.

44. Many a night like the billowing sea let down its veils over me With all kinds of cares to torment me.

45. Then I said to it when, like a huge camel, it stretched out its spine Then raised its haunches and heaved its ponderous chest

46. “O long night, will you not dispel to reveal the dawn? Though the dawning day will be no better for me!”

47. “O what a night you are! as if each of your stars Were tied to Mount Yadhbul with a tightly twisted rope.

48. “And the Pleiades stand in midcourse motionless, As if suspended by flaxen cords from obdurate rocks.”

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