

Mu'allaqat Imru'ul Qays [1]

إعداد: الدكتور ابراهيم المميز

- 1

1- Let's halt! And on th' abode of loved ones weep
Where 'tween "Dukhool" and "Hawmal" sands pile deep.

- 2

2- "Towdah" and "al-Miqrat" e'er there will lay
Sands "Kibla" winds pile; "Meccan" blow away.¹

- 3

3- There, oryx droppings are life's only trace
As if they're pepper seeds in open space

- 4

4- They'd gone. Alone I felt that I will lead
The life of pickers of bitter-apple seed²

- 5

5- My mounted friends call out, in cheer, to me
"Die not of grief! Well armed with patience be".

- 6

6- At ruins, I'm relieved when falls my tear

¹ The locations "Towdah" and "al-Miqrat" are subjected to conflicting winds. "Kibla" winds bury the two locations in sand which "Meccan" winds blow away again, revealing traces of the deserted dwellings; distressing, says the poet, for him to observe. It would have been more comforting, he implies, if all traces of these habitations were obliterated, saving him the distress of viewing the ruins and the memories they still hold.

² "Bitter-apple" or "handhal" is a poisonously bitter desert apple-like growth whose seed is picked out by professional pickers for medicinal and incense use. Slicing bitter-apple causes - like onions - tear-flow. He, like the pickers, will suffer an endless flow of tears. The bitterness of handhal reflects his own bitterness at the departure of loved ones. The seed, he hopes, would provide medicine for his ailment and incense for his sorrows.

For none are there my sorrows for to cheer.³

-7

7- Your love for her who here in yore did dwell
Lacked luck; as when in former love you fell⁴

-8

8- When belles arise, their musk so sweet and true
like carnations o'er which morn breezes blew.

-9

9- My streaming tears the pangs of love had felt
Their streams bedrenched me full, e'en my sword-belt.

-10

10- O for a day as that I once had spent
When maids to "Juljul" for an outing went.

-11

11- That day I slew my mount for th'virgins' sake
They each some things of mine back home did take⁵

-12

12- Each claimed the mount was slain for her alone
It's white o'er flesh like silks that on them shone⁶

-13

13- I slipped in "Unaiza's" hawdah. She cried:
"you'll harm my mount and make me walk 'longside'"⁷

³ He could shed a tear in privacy without the embarrassment of consoling company.

⁴ The verse identifies the loved one as "Umm al-Huwayrith". "The former love" is "Umm al-Rabab" - both, apparently, married women.

⁵ Having sacrificed his mount to feed them, and having no mount to return home on, each of the girls offered to carry some of his belongings home with her, as a gesture of gratitude and to keep as a memento.

⁶ The verse identifies "silks" as "twisted silk braid".

-14

14- Her howdah, with my weight, tilted aside.
“Imru’ul Qays! Get you down quick” she cried.

-15

15- “Let go the reins” said I “Be calm and still
Let me of your kisses have what I will”

-16

16- Pregnant, nursing mothers I’ve loved, through tact.
And did, through wiles, from their own babes, distract.

-17

17- When, from behind, wailed loud her tiny tot
She nursed it, yet forgot to love me not.

-18

18- Over a dune, me she once resisted.
In vowing loudest oaths, she persisted.

-19

19- “Do from you coyness, Fatima, desist⁸
or leave me, and on being coy, insist”.

-20

20- You’ve turned vain, now that by you’re love I’m slain.

⁷ “ al-Firazdaq” narrating of his grandfather, reported that Imru’ul Qays loved his cousin ‘Unaiza. He asked for her hand but her family declined, due to his reputation as a womanizing libertine. A group of girls, including ‘Unaiza, went on a day’s outing to “Juljul” springs. Having dismissed their servants, they were bathing in the spring when Imru’ul Qays came upon them. He collected their clothes, refusing to hand them over till each girl emerged from the spring to collect her clothes herself. The last one to do so was ‘Unaiza”. Later that day the girls complained of hunger. Imru’ul Qays killed his mount to feed them grilled meat. Late in the evening he mounted with ‘Unaiza on her camel, and delivered her safely home. This line of verse describes how he got in her howdah. “Mohammad Abu al-Fadhl Ibrahim- “Diwan Imru’ul Qays” Cairo (1958 ed.) p. 10.

⁸ Fatima: the name of the nursing mother. ‘Unaiza’s proper name was also Fatima; ‘Unaiza-kid- was nickname.

Command my heart. Servant it shall remain.	
	-21
21- If you I offended, then do depart You I'll obey; though it may break my heart. ⁹	
	-22
22- You weep well, not to comfort your sorrows But at my broken heart, to shoot arrows.	
	-23
23- She was an egg; unbroken, white, unsoiled. In howdah's nest. I broke and it enjoyed.	
	-24
24- To visit her, her guards in stealth I braved If me they'd caught, they'd gladly me have slayed.	
	-25
25- To her I went, when night o'er stars unfurled As dark nightgown is broidered and impearled	
	-26
26- Behind a curtain, lightly clad, in wait She stood as I came at an hour so late.	
	-27
27- "By God" said she "your scandal comes so late. No means have I your passions to abate".	
	-28

⁹ The verse here refers to clothes to mean the heart. The verse implies that if I have offended you, then take my clothes (my heart) from your clothes(your heart), you'll find the removal to be easy, for you, but it will cause me great pain and a traumatic heart break.

- 28- With her I walked, and she, without delay
With her gown's train, our footprints wiped away
-29
- 29- The still compound, at last, was far behind.
Quiet we stood, in pleasure to unwind.
-30
- 30- To me I drew her temples, then she swayed
With ankles fine, full thighs, slim waist - she laid.
-31
- 31- Her waist and belly; smooth they were and tight.
Her chest a glittering mirror abright.
-32
- 32- In depths of seas, lie yell'wish-white pearls.
In love's fluids, my pearl from clam unfurls.
-33
- 33- When shying off, she turns the softest cheek.
Like hind with fawn, her welc'ming eyes are meek.
-34
- 34- Her slender neck: no jewels does it wear
Is oryx-like; its beauty white and bare.
-35
- 35- Her back is cov'red with coal-black hair well-dressed
Her plaits, like palmy shoots, are wound and pressed.
-36
- 36- Her locks, her plaits; with care they all are dressed.
Straight down some flow, some on her crown do rest.

- 37
- 37- That waist! Those legs as if by craft well made
Luscious as reeds in laden palms cool shade.
- 38
- 38- She rises late from bed scented with musk
Pampered, well-served is she, from dawn to dusk.
- 39
- 39- She picks with fingers, slender long and soft,
Like straitsome shoots on 'As-hal'' trees aloft.¹⁰
- 40
- 40- In darkest nights, aglow's her face with light
A praying monk's lit lantern, burning bright
- 41
- 41- To her wise hearts gallantly have behaved .
Her clothes are those 'tween that of child and maid.
- 42
- 42- Gallants' attentions fore'er do not last.
My love for her, in spite of time, stands fast.
- 43
- 43- My bitter foes my love have so reviled.
Yet I persist, spite whom my love defiled.
- 44
- 44- Like heavy waves, long nights 'pon me descend.
Am weighed with cares yet longer nights extend.
- 45

¹⁰ "Ashal": a species of tree known for its dead-straight shoots that grow higher up the tree.

- 45- I, to the darkness of the night complained.
The carefree find it brief; the care-worn, strained.
- 46
- 46- O longest night! I so await your morn,
Yet from my cares I'll not by morn be shorn.
- 47
- 47- O night! Your stars have darkness long endured.
As if to hardest rocks they've been secured.
- 48
- 48- Gen'rous am I, who bears of time its worst.
My camels' water-skins for those who thirst.
- 49
- 49- I've crossed arid valleys where starved wolves prowl
Like gamblers' famished young, with hunger howl.
- :
- 50
- 50- To howling wolf I said: "we're of one kind
We seek but what is sought we never find".
- 51
- 51- Each looks for what he in hunger devours
Wretches are lean whose living is like ours¹¹
- 52
- 52- I rise before the birds in nests awake
To mount a steed who all can overtake.
- 53

¹¹ I have based the translation of this line on that of R.A. Nicholson "Literary History of the Arabs" (New Delhi e. 1994) p. 107.

53- To charge, and wheel, the steed at once will try.
So like a boulder cast by floods from high.

-54

54- Who's on its slipp'ry back, it over throws
A polished stone on which rain overflows.

-55

55- Though lean, its working pow'r e'er is at toil.
It's neighs so like a cauldron brought to boil.

-56

56- Onward it speeds, when swiftest steeds do tire
They, heavy-hoofed, bedusted they retire

-57

57- Unweighty boys for long can't on it stay.
At speed, its' rider's clothes are blown away.

-58

58- Like "stone-and-string" that boys o'er head entwirl¹²,
My steed, it's stone-hard frame fast forward hurls.

-59

59- With waist of deer; ostrich pace; wolfish core,
And fox-cub's hind legs o'er leaping the fore.

-60

60- It's ribs and flanks well-curved; its rear will shew
How ground-length tail its' hind legs shields from view.

-61

¹² Stone-and-string (Khudhroof) is a flat circular stone pierced in the middle and a length of string tied to it through the hole. Young boys twirl it above their head for sport.

61- It's withers are like grind-stones, hard and sound
Where bride's incense and bitter-seed are ground.¹³

-62

62- It's neck is smeared with blood of hunted prey.
So like "Henna" that over grey hairs lay¹⁴.

-63

63- A herd whose ewes far ahead appeared¹⁵.
So like virgins unsunned; by sin unsmeared.

-64

64- They're like Yemeni beads, well-born boys wear.
Their necks and cheeks are black; their bodies fair.

-65

65- The herd's vanguard my steed did soon o'er take.
The slow were left their slow way on to make¹⁶.

-66

66- A ram and an ewe were felled in chase.
Sweatless the steed was through the hectic race.

-67

67- The copious hunt the cooks set to prepare,
Some boiled, some on hot stones, roasted the fare.

-68

68- In perfect form was this my splendid steed.
Upon its perfection, eyes greed'ly feed.

¹³ Bitter-seed: seed of the bitter-apple (handhal), see above.

¹⁴ Henna: a dark-red hair dye.

¹⁵ Herd: refers to a herd of oryx. The female oryx lead the herd.

¹⁶ The swift steed soon overtakes the swiftest of the herd, leaving the slower ones behind.

- 69
- 69- It, saddled and bridled, I e'er keep,
And ne'er to pasture let it happ'ly leap.
- 70
- 70- Look up, my friend, I'll show you lightning's streaks,
So like the wildly waving arms of freaks.
- 71
- 71- It's flash lights all, like monk's lantern; well built,
As oil rushes to soak its wick at tilt.
- 72
- 72- 'Tween "Dharj" and "Uthayb" t'watch the clouds sat we
Amazed was I how far my eyes could see.
- 73
- 73- Cloud-topp'd mount "Qatan" was there on our right,
To left, cloud-topp'd "Sitar" and "Yethbel", in sight.
- 74
- 74- Torrential rain over "Kutaifa" poured,
Uprooting trees that once up high had soared.
- 75
- 75- "Qinan's" high mount was struck by that deluge,
It's frightened elk hurried for safe refuge.
- 76
- 76- "Taymaa`s" date palms were swiftly over thrown
The floods swept all but mansions built of stone.
- 77
- 77- "Thebeer's" high mount was braced for that onslaught,

As the cloaked lord, storm shelter once had sought.

-78

78- The loaded floods around “Mujaymir” swirled,
And spun as swiftly as a spindle twirled.¹⁷

-79

79- “Ghabeet” desert was then with colour laid,
Like Yem’ni wares merchants in full displayed.

-80

80- “Mikaak” birds’ song throughout the valley rang.
‘s if peppered wine had drunk, they happ’ly sang.

-81

81- The beasts that were in floods beswept and drowned,
Like flooded crops, in mud were deeply bound.

[2]

“At Umm Jundub, on me, my friends, do call”

Imru’ul Qays had married a woman of the Tayy tribe called ‘Umm Jundub. One ‘Alqama b. ‘Abda al–Temimi came while Imru’ul Qays was sitting in a tent with Umm Jundub behind him. The two men exchanged verses, each claiming to be more of a poet than the other. They each recited a poem, with Umm Jundub as a referee. Imru’ul Qays recited:

-1

1- At Umm Jundub, on me, my friends do call,
To meet such wants that do my heart befall.

-2

¹⁷ The flood-waters were heavily loaded with debris.

- 2- Should you, with me, awhile in verse debate
That would with Umm Jundub my worth elate.
-3
- 3- When e'er, to her, I come, I am besot.
Perfumed she is, though perfume she wears not.
-4
- 4- Paragon 'mongst her peers: for she's not plain,
No plainnesses, observe, her fine form stain.
-5
- 5- In truth, how are her 'ffections to be won?
Would she retain them for the absent one?
-6
- 6- Keep she th' affections that us both have shrived,
Or has she on the rogues' falsehoods thrived?
-7
- 7- Absent yourself awhile from her, you'll find
Her not; for well you know her mind and kind.
-8
- 8- Her favours short:- your surging passions wane
Her favours full:- your passions surge again
-9
- 9- Look there, my friend, and see the howdahs sway
Through trails that by "Sha^cab ^cab" water lay.
-10
- 10- In howdahs, belles in colours rich and soft,
Like yellow-red fruit palms hold up aloft.
-11

- 11- The eye be bless't that sees them all dispersed
As those who stoned "Muhasab" idol, and cursed.¹⁸
- 12
- 12- Some howdahs to some verdant palm groves head
Some cross o'er mount "Kebkab"; so bleak, so dead,¹⁹
- 13
- 13- A stream of tears at their departure flows
Like stone-banked channel water, swiftly goes²⁰.
- 14
- 14- Vicious is th' triumph of the proud, but weak.
Vicious the triumph over you they seek.
- 15
- 15- The experienced, of what is true, would tell,
who can, from knowledge of truth's ways, foretell.
- 16
- 16- White she-camels, small waisted, tall and lean,
So like wild-ass, at vig'rous canter keen.
- 17
- 17- Wild-ass, at darkness, braying loud and long
Like drunken singer, drunk with drunken song.
- 18
- 18- Full-fed, the wild-ass bull at water's brink.
It's mouth with grazing drips while at its drink.

¹⁸ Al- "Muhasab" (The stoned one) is the idol of Satan at the Pilgrimage site at "Mina". Stoning the Devil is still one of the Pilgrimage rites at Mecca . He is saying that the howdah caravan disperses in all directions, as the ritual stone-throwers do after that ceremony is over.

¹⁹ Mount Kebkab, is bleak and bare, lies behind Mount Arafat; the pilgrimage mountain near Mecca.

²⁰ Channelled water was kept still during the night, and released into palm groves at daybreak.

- 19
- 19- The ass feeds well at valley's verdant bend.
Where armies clash, on pasture 't can depend²¹
- 20
- 20- I might arise when birds are still at nest
And grove-water no longer is at rest
- 21
- 21- The steed's gallop keeps cant'ring beasts at bay.
with gallop, lean and hard it will e'er stay.
- 22
- 22- Ov'rcomes fatigue, its back so sleek and lean
Hard- fixed as desert tree in distance seen.
- 23
- 23- It's fore-legs, like wild-ass, vigour defy.
It's mettle clean as clothes hung out to dry
- 24
- 24- As ostrich, legged; as oryx, waisted lean;
Wild- ass saddle; straight, high, and keen.
- 25
- 25- It walks on hoofs, stone-hard, yellowish-grey
Like stones that did, long-whiles, in still ponds stay
- 26
- 26- It's frame well-wrought, is welded firmly fast
As dunes by wet- heat; high as howdah's mast.

²¹ Armies, victorious or defeated, clash at the bend of the valley, thus herdsman avoid grazing their animals there; leaving lush pasture for the wild-ass.

- 27
- 27- Clear eyes! Like woman mirroring her face,
To see if veil exactly fits in place.
- 28
- 28- It's sharp ear-points show grand pedigree clear
As startled deer when 'pending danger hear.
- 29
- 29- Round head; high neck with fine harness betopped
is like palm tree with lower branches lopped.
- 30
- 30- Of th'tail's rich weight one could forever tell.
As heavy dates hang by "Sumayha's" well.²²
- 31
- 31- At gallop, when strong wind accosts its flank
Gives sound like wind ablow through "Ath'ab's" bank²³
- 32
- 32- It tears at foliage with brutal intent
as if by mad spirits, to feed, was sent.
- 33
- 33- A second-rider on its back-end twirls,
As howdah's climbing mast-pole sways and swirls.²⁴
- 34

²² Sumayha's well: a well at a location at Medina (then called Yethrib) known for its profuse water. Medina dates, even today are known for their large size and high quality.

²³ 'Ath'ab: a species of tree amplifying the sound of wind blowing through it. Such trees rising on a bank amplify the sound of wind even more effectively.

²⁴ Howdah's mast-pole: howdahs. womens tent-like housing placed on camels, is supported – like tents– by a central pole, which sways and swirls with the animal's movements.

- 34- A day, is aft'r pure-white oryx in chase,
An'ther, it runs with wild-ass foal in race
-35
- 35- Oryx ewes 'neath bowers graze away,
Like virgins dressed in white, in softness sway.
-36
- 36- We called to one an'ther the hunt to start.
"They're fled!" my friends called back "After them!Depart!"
-37
- 37- With much ado our lad did mount the steed
Whose hard, curved back did driv'n pow'r wield.
-38
- 38- It drives ahead like lashing evening rain
to o'er take the ewes across the dusty plain.
-39
- 39- When spurred; inflamed. When lashed, gallops away.
Rebuked; goes mad with charges of delay.
-40
- 40- With ease the steed draws round the herd a ring
Like "stone- and- string" children in circles swing.²⁵
-41
- 41- It's pounding hoofs drives out from sub-terrain
rats that mistake them for hard-pounding rain.
-42

²⁵ "Stone- and- string": (Khudroof a children's toy. A flat circular pebble, or smaller stone is tied to twine through a hole in its middle, and swung round.(vide supra n.12).

42- Driv'n out, the scurrying rats, in abject fear
that their holes be flooded by th'rain they hear.

-43

43- The bulls and cows the steed does so enfold,
Of bulls both big and small, both young and old.²⁶

-44

44- O'er dunes some bulls entwist in deathly dance,
enpained when struck by th'hard, well-pointed lance

-45

45- Struck down; stumbling, upon their brows some fall,
While some ward off with horn as sharp as awl.

-46

46- We asked fine youths when kills were fin'ly made,
a tent to make from ropes and clothes; for shade.

-47

47- Make-shift it was, from cloaks and harness made.
It's poles "Rudayna" spears with "Qaadhab's" blade.²⁷

-48

48- It ropes were camel harness, to uphold
its roof of fine garments that Yemen sold.

-49

49- Into our tent we crept and lay, leaning
'pon our well-made, well-striped "Hirite" saddling.²⁸

²⁶ Bulls and cows refer to males and females in the herd of oryx.

²⁷ "Rudayna" high-quality spears made by one 'Qaadhab' of the Beni Qashir, husband of one Rudayna. His spears were named after her.

²⁸ Hira- The town in southern 'Al-Iraq famed then for its quality saddling.

- 50
- 50- As if th'oryx eyes round our tent and gear
were beads; jet-black, milk-white, unholed, full clear.
- 51
- 51- On horses manes we wiped our hands, well-greased,
rising from our half-roasted oryx feast.
- 52
- 52- We left, 's if from "Ju'atha" way we dragged
th' oryx we had o'er saddles and embagged.²⁹
- 53
- 53- My burdened mount, that on the "Rabl" had grazed
Sweats free and is by its own sweat dismayed³⁰
- 54
- 54- Ne'er cursed, this steed to friends is very dear.
More than parental love for it they bear.
- 55
- 55- A day to hunt fine-breast'd, hued birds is sent.
Another, after black-eyed oryx went.
- 56
- 56- As if prey's blood that lay thick 'pon its neck
was Hennas that graying, white hair bedeck³¹
- 57

²⁹ Ju'atha: a market town in Bahrain famed for its merchandize. They have left, laden with oryx as if they had returned from Ju'athas' markets, laden with purchases.

³⁰ Rabl: desert grass growing on moist air rather than rain at winter, giving the horse added vigour.

³¹ Henna: a dark reddish-brown hair dye still used today; it is also used to decorate hands and feet on ceremonial occasions, such as feasts, marriages etc.

57- When viewed from rear, nothing of th'steed is seen
Save its ground-length tail's blackest glowing sheen.

[3]

Will there a king after al-Harith be

-1

1- We seem to head towards th 'Unknowns' dark brink.
While we beguile our nights with food and drink.

-2

2- We're weaker than sparrows; than worms and flies.
As bold as wolves; to hunt are swift to rise.

-3

3- To all fine manners I intend t'aspire.
Through manners fine, what I seek most, acquire.

-4

4- So blame me less, by 'xperience I've been taught.
Birth-pride I've shunned, for fatal 'tis if sought.³²

-5

5- My roots entwined with roots in earthen deeps.
And looming death my youthful prime bereaps.³³

³² Here he is addressing a woman, asking her to blame him less for being a fun-loving libertine; for experience had taught him all he needs to know. Birth-Pride, Pride in ancestry, is useless to him. The conventional wisdom of the time held that, if one is inexperienced, one should emulate the ways of one's illustrious ancestors. Imru'ul Qays refutes this, saying that his ancestors are dead, and so will he be, so there's no point, indeed it is fatal for him, to take pride as a source of inspiration and experience.

³³ "earthen deeps" refers to Adam; that his roots go down deep to Adam, and he need'nt take pride in his own direct ancestry. Pride in ancestry is essentially a privilege of youth which looming death will rob him of soon.

- 6
- 6- Death will my frame, of breath of life, deprive.
To send me down to dust, death will e'er strive.
- 7
- 7- Have I not wearied mounts with long, hard rides;
'n urge, through shimm'ring mirage, their plodding strides.
- 8
- 8- And rode with hosts that all before devour,
And broke to spoils in glory's greatest hour.
- 9
- 9- I've roamed the world; so hard, so far, so wide.
Wearied, sans gain, at home yearned to abide
- 10
- 10- No king like king "Harith bin 'Amr" e'er comes,
Nor good after "The Hujr of Many Domes".³⁴
- 11
- 11- Shall I, of Turns of Time, soft times expect?
To strike the mighty, Time ne'er did neglect.
- 12
- 12- I know, that I, before much time goes by,
By sharpest fangs and claws, I'll mangled lie.
- 13
- 13- As "Hujr" my sire, and grandsire, were slain,
Those at "Kilab", in mem'ry will remain.³⁵

³⁴ Harith bin 'Amr, his grand father; Hujr, his father.

“O Hind, do not an owl, a weakling, wed.”

Pleading with his daughter Hind not to marry an incompetent weakling.

- 1

- 1- O Hind, do not an owl, a weakling, wed.
His hair, child's fuzz; his skin sickly white'n 'red.³⁶

- 2

- 2- A charm he wears around his stiffened wrist.
On catching hares he ever does insist³⁷

- 3

- 3- To tie hare feet to his crook'd stiff'nd hand,
he thinks that would 'gainst death and danger stand.

- 4

- 4- For I'm not giv'n to chat; to idly sit.
Nor am a blith'ring fool sans sense and wit³⁸

- 5

- 5- From weakness, and stiff joints, I suffer not.
To lead, and not be led, e'er is my lot.

: - 6

- 6- “I have enough youth him to give” she cries.
“And shoulder-long hair t'give before he dies”.

³⁵ He addresses his father Hujr, and his grandfather 'al-Harith as “sizes” as both were kings. “Kilab” is the location where his uncle Shurahbil also fell.

³⁶ In contrast to western lore which holds up the owl as a symbol of sagacity and wisdom, the Arabs call a useless, brainless weakling; an owl.

³⁷ Hare feet were used as charms to allay ailments, and ward off hostile or envious eyes.

³⁸ He stresses the seriousness of his advice; that it is not idle, mindless chatter. It also implies that she can rely on his strength rather than wed a fool and weakling.

- 7- Coal-black hair down neck'n' shoulders 'ndeed she had,
that had with brightest gleam her shoulders clad.

[5]

“Morning breeze called”

Describing rain

-1

- 1- On “Waridat”, “Qalib”, “Lala” rain fell,
Thenn “Ayhab”; whilst “Simak” stars did in brightness dwell³⁹

: -2

- 2- It passed over ‘Unaiza, and from there
to “Dhat ‘al-Niqa‘a”, then veered elsewhere⁴⁰

-3

- 3- When it over “Tumaiyyah” heights hanged low,
morn breezes called, and made its’ downpours flow.⁴¹

[6]

“Whats’ good is tied to horses manes”⁴²

-1

³⁹ “Waridat”, “Qalib”, “Lala” are locations. The verse mentions “Ayhab” as a plateau. Two bright “Simak” stars were known: ‘al-Simak al-Kamih (The Spearing Simak) and ‘al-Simak al-‘Aazal (the learned simak). The rain here is describe as “Mulith”- lasting several days. The verse highlights, amazingly, the simak stars shining brightly while rain fell for days on several locations.

⁴⁰ In Imru’ul Qays’s rain poetry, locations under rainfall are meticulously identified, the reason being that such locations having been especially blessed with rain, their reputation would thus rise for being providentially chosen. ‘Unaiza, is the well known tribe which still prospers in modern times. “Dhat al Niqa‘a” means “The place of many marshes”.

⁴¹ “Tumaiyyah”: a mountain over which the rain clouds passed.

⁴² Mohammad al-Fadhl Ibrahim incorporates these verses with the poem that follows. He mentions that hearsay attribute it to Ibrahim b. Bashir ‘al-Ansari. I have followed Dar Sadir’s edition which gives the following fragment as being separate from the poem that follows

1- The good that rising'n' setting suns bequeathed.
To horses manes is closely bound and weaved.⁴³

-2

2- It's pow'r 'pon foes distant, not near, descends.
And it, more hardship 'pon wretched, foes sends.⁴⁴

[7]

“A widespread raid would soon I see”

-1

1- A widespread raid would soon I see, while borne
on 'a steed lean– cheeched, her body hair well– shorn.⁴⁵

-2

2- Her owner, rising t' place in mouth the bit,
's if climbing camels neck, tree– high, to sit.

-3

3- At her approach, onlookers would behold
Her highest outline 'n high relief and bold.

-4

4- Hawk-like, upright, she stands; her gallop swift.
Her flesh hard-wrought; her belly lean in lift.

-5

5- The fore-legs swim; the hind– legs hard at kick
The eyes bespark; the back sloping and slick.

⁴³ An equestrian exuberant exultation: Nothing comes from horses except good.

⁴⁴ “It” in these lines refers to horse-power.

⁴⁵ A hirsute horse was considered unprepared, and unsuitable. Hair collects sweat which, when cool after the animal is resting, may affect its health adversely. A horse was also more alert and vigorous if its body hair was razed. The horse here is a mare, and is referred to in the feminine pronoun. The term “steed” refers to a fine horse in general, irrespective of gender.

- 6
- 6- The sweat flows free, the need for spur she lacks.⁴⁶
Her bowels sound, her hue th'blackest of blacks
- 7
- 7- To water galloping with all her might,
as an eagle who of a wolf caught sight.⁴⁷
- 8
- 8- Th'Eagle espied the wolf from peaks up high,
those highest peaks that lesser ones o'erlie.
- 9
- 9- With wings indrawn, upon him down she dived,
with tail-winds her towards her target t'guide.
- 10
- 10- Power 'pon foes distant, not near, descends.⁴⁸
And it more hardship' pon foes wretched, sends
- 11
- 11- As bucket full, whose fast'ning fell,
Whose rope had snapped, falls straightly down a well.
- 12
- 12- None's like the Eagle in her air-bourne assault.⁴⁹
Nor grounded wolf such dire assault had sought.
- 13

⁴⁶ She never needs to be spurred on. She is naturally swift.

⁴⁷ These lines exemplify the molecular nature of Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry. The poem from now on moves away from describing a fiery steed to a predatory eagle pouncing on a wolf.

⁴⁸ These lines are repeated here from the previous poem "What's good is tied to horses manes".

⁴⁹ The verse refers to the Eagle, as "white-fronted", with a white spot on its head, in the feminine gender.

13- As fast as wind were both; and lightnings' flash.
That neither could be quicker more in dash.

-14

14- She caught him, and her claws through him took hold.
Yet und'r her broke he free. His side was holed.

-15

15- Between the rocks t'protect himself he went.
While both their energies, and rain, were spent.⁵⁰

-16

16- So hard she clawed at ground, in ire she cried.
Her tongue and beak bedust'd; of prey deprived.

-17

17- By less than a finger he was missed by death.
Was snatched alive from death by none than stealth.

-18

18- Inside his hole he watched her close and clear.
And watch'd for life, for life is ever dear.

[8]

O Neighbour!

On his way back from Constantinople, and passing Ankyra, Imru'ul Qays was dying. At the slopes of Mount 'Aseeb, he saw the grave of a woman, apparently of royal birth, and recited:

-1

1- Neighbour! My shrine to yours will rise so near,

⁵⁰ The verse uses the term "Sha'abeeb" (bursts of rain) in the sense that their energies, the eagles, and the wolf, had petered out, as rain had ceased.

Close by I'll stay, s'long as "Aseeb" stands here.

-2

- 2- Neighbour! We both o'er here full strangers are
And strangers to strangers are rel'tives dear.⁵¹

-3

- 3- Rel'tives we'll be, if you feel close to me
If not, a stranger e'er will a stranger be.

-4

- 4- Neighbour! What's passed will ne'er again appear.
And what by Time be brought, though far, is near.

-5

- 5- A stranger's not one whose home 's far away.
But one who's dead, and deep in dust must lay.

[9]

O Miserable heart

-1

- 1- What mis'ry struck the heart, as from today.
When loves' mem'ries to't came, with care, to fray.

-2

- 2- Sulaima said "I see today you're sad
to see a head with grey hair now is clad".

-3

- 3- Once raven hair did now to greyness fade,

⁵¹ See Introduction (II)- "Imru'ul Qays and the Emperor Justinian I- The last years" p. 10.

Like garment fine that's thread barenow and frayed.

-4

- 4- A height, where eagles dwell upon its crest
I climbed, my soul with deepest awe impressed.

-5

- 5- Intent to see the valley, bright and gay
and watch who go, and pastures far away.

-6

- 6- With riders down below I hitched my hike.
Their dusty, shaggy hair was forest-like.

-7

- 7- We soon our mounts to brisky canter raised
Past camelmens whose herds quietly grazed.

[10]

"I came 'pon homes where 'Bakarat' hills stand"

-1

- 1- I came 'pon homes where "Bakarat" hills stand,
Then 'Arima'; 'n "Ayrat" –of stone and sand⁵²

-2

- 2- Then "Ghawl", "Hilleet", 'n "Min'aj" were on my way
To 'Aqil", then to where well-marked "Jubb" lay.⁵³

-3

⁵² The "Bakarat" hills lie on the Mecca road. "Arima" is a hill of the Beni 'Amir in Nejd. "Ayrat" is an unidentified location. The verse mentions 'Ayrat" as "Burqat 'al 'Ayrat"- Burqat being stony sandlands.

⁵³ "Ghawl"; "Hilleet", "Min'aj" and " 'Aqil" are unidentified locations. Only "Jubb" is identified as being well marked. The verse mentions "Jubb al – Imarat" – Jubb of the road – marks.

- 3- My cloak to shade my head, I sat with fears
to count pebbles; unstopp'd poured down my tears
-4
- 4- Help me in my sustained and gnawing care
that fastens hard, laying the care-worn bare.
-5
- 5- Mem'ries of care, as long as longest night.
As long as days when care had peaked its height.
-6
- 6- As if my co-rider, scabb'rd; pillow
Were on wild-ass gall'ping t'wat'ry hollow.⁵⁴
-7
- 7- It brayed loud, like male inflamed with lust
kicks at young females to do what he must.⁵⁵
-8
- 8- Vicious bigamist, lusty, unrestrained
Scurr'lous, foul-mouthed, bad-tempered and untamed.⁵⁶
-9
- 9- They graze th' "Buhma", of verdant, softest stuff,
and can the very coldest water, quaff.⁵⁷
-10
- 10- He waters them where few other beasts go near.

⁵⁴ Describing the hectic speed and vigour of his camel. His baggage, including scabbard, pillow, etc... signify the added weight his mount takes in its stride.

⁵⁵ His mount has the brimming energy of a male camel when courting young females.

⁵⁶ He likens his over-energetic camel to a vicious bigamist who vigourously and unabashedly abuses his four wives.

⁵⁷ He praises the health and hardihood of his camels, both male and female. They feed on dark-green succulent "Buhma" and can drink the coldest of water, which less hardy camels cannot drink.

Being of “‘Amr-of-the-hunting-hut”, in fear.⁵⁸

-11

11- Beneath their hard hoofs, pebbles t’ dust are done
Hoofs short yet heavy, th’ hair around them gone.⁵⁹

-12

12- As if their tails high parts, in thickness bold,
were braided, plaited belts that scabbards hold.

-13

13- To drive a camel, hard as death-bed’s wood,
o’er scenic roads, like coloured cloaks; I would.⁶⁰

-14

14- I left her-once healthy-weakened and spent.
Yet she plods on, on weary legs and bent.⁶¹

-15

15- A whetted sword, as white as kerchief’s white
At necks and legs is blunt’d by strikes of night.⁶²

[11]

“the carefree sleep, the careworn sleepless stay”.

Threatening the Beni Assad, his father’s slayers

⁵⁸ “‘Amr-of-the-hunting-hut”: a famous hunter, identified as ‘Amr of the Beni Th‘al, of the Tayy tribe. Hunters put together a tiny hut at watering place to hide in while stalking game, especially wild-ass. So deadly a shot was ‘Amr that wild-ass were afraid of approaching watering places. Such fear spread even to domesticated animals such as camels.

⁵⁹ Refers to hard- worn wild- ass hoofs, their pasterns are hairless.

⁶⁰ Death-bed: Among Christians was a stretcher-like bed made of hardest wood for durability and maximum usage, on which the dead were laid out prior to burial. The road is likened to a coloured cloak in its scenic diversity.

⁶¹ The she-camel, once stout and healthy, had been exhausted by arduous long-distance journeys, and yet plods bravely on.

⁶² White as kerchief: long white kerchiefs were twisted and used to chastise young erring children.

- 1
- 1- Your nights at “Ithmid” slowly drag their way⁶³
The carefree sleep; you, careworn , sleepless stay.
- 2
- 2- The night slept well; his sleep was wreaked with pain.
As sickly eyes in painful sleep had lain.⁶⁴
- 3
- 3- And that was due to news to me that came
Of what he, Abul Aswad, did declaim.⁶⁵
- 4
- 4- I wish other news through my ears had bored.
Since cut of tongue cuts deep as cut of sword.
- 5
- 5- For what I’d say for ever more will stay.
And time e’er will recite what I shall say.
- 6
- 6- Whose blood, for whose, do you desire be shed.
The blood of ‘Amr” for “Murthid” who’s now dead?⁶⁶
- 7
- 7- Th’ailment interr, and it we’ll not exhume.
Raise war; and we’ll sit not in fear of doom.

⁶³ “Ithmid”: a location.

⁶⁴ The verse specifies the eye-sickness as “Ramad”- Trachoma.

⁶⁵ ‘Abul ‘Aswad was one of the Beni Kinana, the clan Imru’ul Qays raided, mistaking them for his fathers’ slayers. ‘Abul ‘Aswad lampooned him, effectively it seems, so as to cost him sleepless nights.

⁶⁶ ‘Amr was a relative. Murthid was one of the Beni Assad. The blood feud goes on..

- 8
- 8- Kill one of us, many of you we'll kill.
Should you spare blood of ours, spare yours we will.
- 9
- 9- We had, and still have thrusting champions brave.
For glory 'n honour, thanks they ever gave.
- 10
- 10- Who domes did build; and whats' empty did fill.
And home fires stoked to blaze when low and still.
- 11
- 11- For war I prepared a steed of pounce and pace.
When reigned halts quick; when spurred is quick to race
- 12
- 12- Her fore legs swim, she bolts in vig'rous craze.
Her hoof-beat: crackling bonfires ablaze.
- 13
- 13- Chain mail! Whose weave is close, and firm in style
When folded, 'comes as sharp as sharpest file.
- 14
- 14- It's lengthy sleeves leaves one in cover bound.
As flash floods sweep o'er solid level ground.
- 15
- 15- A lance! Goes straight as well-made, well-rope should
Rope made from smooth and firm date-palm pulpwood.
- 16
- 16- A fluted sword that cuts to deepest ends.

When hits the bone, it fractures not nor bends.

[12]

"if only I in my own land would die"

Recited at his death. Having received Justinian's poisoned cloak, Imru'ul Qays bathed, anointed himself, and wore it. His skin broke into sores which he tried to cure till he reached Ankyra. His health deteriorated rapidly and he was close to death when he recited these lines.⁶⁷

-1

1- Do tell the sons of "Hujr bin 'Amr", and tell
the lonesome folk in lonely land who dwell.

-2

2- That I as mortal mere have lived and gone
And was created not from iron or stone.

-3

3- If only I, in my own land would die.
I'd say that death was right, immortal not am I.⁶⁸

-4

4- But will perish, estranged in alien land.
So far from yours, so very far, I stand.

-5

5- Each day, I, caesar's realm t'endure must learn.
With pleas to death to hasten death's return.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Here, I have used Mohammad 'al-Fadhl Ibrahim's version of this poem. (p.213).

⁶⁸ He yearns to die in bed among his own people, not as a stranger wandering in foreign lands in quest of immortal fame. The way he is dying now is not the death that is his birthright- to die at home.

⁶⁹ His days are living death; he pleads with death to return to him from the living death he has to endure.

-6

6- In Roman land, no kith nor kin are there.
No curer there to cure, comfort, or care.

-7

7- I'd plead with death t'let me in "Asays" die.
Or take me on to "Zirwad" there to lie.⁷⁰

-8

8- On young she-camels, like necklaces, are their reins
Who have no time to graze on for their pains.⁷¹

[13]

"Remember Hind and her cronies

Recalling his daughter Hind when he was at Justinian's court.

-1

1- In recalling what will nev'r again return.
You've let a grieving heart with mem'ries burn.

-2

2- For I did Hind and cronies 'f hers recall.
And times when, you t'her whims, yourself let fall.

-3

3- Days about her state you wond'ring fell:
T'obey th'vile, against the wise rebel.

-4

4- In morrow's hunt, beasts she pursues in chase.
T'fellows serves drink, and does shy girls embrace.⁷²

⁷⁰ "Asays " and "Zirwad" are locations he prefers to die in.

⁷¹ he dreams of young she-camels that would bear him away so swiftly as not to have time to graze.

- 5
- 5- Amazed at her gossip and love of fun
You wonder if her you had better shun.
- 6
- 6- For there are times when dire events do let
the studious their correct brav'ry, forget.
- 7
- 7- So tough and forbidding in th'past was I.
Untamed, unreigned; my 'ntentions hard and high.
- 8
- 8- As Caesar's boon fellow, I did reside
in hon'r; and giv'n dispatch pacers to ride⁷³
- 9
- 9- If jostling, crowding lions 'round me I find
on th'way; I speed and leave them far behind.
- 10
- 10- I may wish; I, my wishes may fulfil.
My nights may yet with grateful grace lie still.
- 11
- 11- For war, warlike armour I yet may wear.
And mount warlike steeds fearsome fray to dare.
- 12
- 12- Behold lightning, my friend, past fall of night.
Lighting all as fire-lighters set fuel alight.

⁷² The verse mentions the girls as "Khareed"- attractive, house bound slave girls who shy away from leaving the house.

⁷³ The verse mentions "bareed", swift horses that can gallop long distances non-stop and were used by dispatch riders carrying urgent messages.

- 13
- 13- It's flashing light, when streaking up on high,
lights up clouds upon heavier clouds that lie.
- 14
- 14- As clouds from mount "Kawkab" so low were bound
It seemed that they were bound to soon touch ground.
- 15
- 15- Becalmed clouds called out to the wind for aid.
It blew, and, stoppers pulled, the wat'ry load was laid.
- 16
- 16- The two mounts'f "Tayy"; may th'rain clouds water well.
And those palm orchards 'n which we choose to dwell.⁷⁴
- 17
- 17- For champions' thrusts to you I'll recommend.
When lively thrusting champions so intend.
- 18
- 18- Praised be the knights midst swirling clouds of dust
clanging steel 'pon steel in heat of thrust.
- 19
- 19- Praised be mountain strongholds t'those in fear
of hot pursuit, when hot pursuit is near.
- 20
- 20- Gen'rous to guests in winter's cold are they.
When wat'ring ducts are froz'n at break of day.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ The two mounts of Tayy are identified as "Mount Aja, and mount Selma.

⁷⁵ Watering ducts: from which animals drink.

[14]

O for Zabdan

A fragment.

-1

- 1- O for “Zabdan”, leveled to hardest ground⁷⁶
That once was built with hardest stone hard bound.

-2

- 2- Folk there absorb not their own speech and sound
In secret talk, you’d think the sound rebounds⁷⁷

[15]

My Camels: (A fragment)

In praise of Qays and Shamr, sons of Zuhair, a son of Salaman b.
Th^cal.

-1

- 1- My Camels, God be Praised, are well in weight.
That’s seen when they struggle up on a height.

-2

- 2- With “Zuhair’s” sons, herds they grazed; weight they gained.
Until their hides with weight were sorely strained.

[16]

Turn upon Sa^cad.

-1

- 1- I drove th’reddish she-camels; them I assailed.
For on them rides he who from th’best lines hailed⁷⁸

⁷⁶ “Zobdan” probably once a fort, now laid waste.

⁷⁷ The atmosphere is intensely secretive and conspiratorial. People can’t even hear themselves talk. Sounds echo across then rebound to the source. He is imagining the days when zobdan was populated.

-2

- 2- To “Sa^cad bin ‘al-Dhabab” be on your way.
To Sa^cad! Reach Sa^cad you must, so pace away.

-3

- 3- The safest refuge “Sa^cad” gave those in fear.
His hands free with largess that he held dear.

-4

- 4- His line a branch from “‘Ayad’s” House descends.
T’noble “Nabeet” and “Burd” his blood line tends.⁷⁹

[17]

“from me much verse I ward away”

-1

- 1- From me much verse I ward, with vig’r, away
As a brave boy keeps a locust swarm at bay

-2

- 2- Wearied; the swarm growing so dense and deep.
The choicest ones he felled, he chose to keep.

-3

- 3- So I, coral among verses I laid aside.

⁷⁸ Reddish-brown camels were considered superior. He assails them with rebuke for their tardiness at night, reminding them of the rider’s brilliant lineage, and that they should show more respect for their rider and hasten their paces.

⁷⁹ ‘Ayad, one of the most ancient of Arab tribal Patriarchs. “Nabeet” and “Burd” descend from The House of ‘Ayad.

And those jewels I find `mongst them, I prized.

[18]

“My longings for you rise”

Recited when heading for Constantinople to appeal to the Emperor Justinian for support against his foes, the Beni Assad:

-1

1- My Longing for you rise, after idling low.
Sulayma's now at “Ar ‘ar;” after “Qaww”.

-2

2- Kinanite is she; her love my bos'm swells,
Betimes at “Y^camur”, and “Ghassan”, she dwells⁸⁰

-3

3- I watched in pain as howdah delivers
them to banks of “Taymar's” num' rous rivers.

-4

4- So high, well-lad'n were their howdahs, and fair.
Like “Dom” trees, or, tar-keeled ships rich with ware⁸¹

-5

5- Like well-watered date palms rise as high
as “Yamin's” ships; that past “Mushaqqar” lie⁸²

⁸⁰ Kinanite: She hails from Beni Kinana, a cousin-clan of the Poet. “Y^camur” and “Ghassan” are a Yemeni location, and a tribe, respectively. He implies that she moves about and dwells in remote lands, thereby inflaming his longings for her.

⁸¹ Dom trees: a species of tree rising to great heights, flourishing in ‘Al-Yemen.

- 6
- 6- Tall palms; with dates and lush foliage unkeched.
Tall howdahs; with yellow-red wool bedecked.
- 7
- 7- “Rabdaa`” their palms from “Yamin” with sword protect.
Lest they its mell`wing fruit from far detect.⁸³
- 8
- 8- Proud were “Rabdaa`” of their produce mellow;
That hangs, in red enclustered, and yellow.
- 9
- 9- “Gilan” to prune and water th`palms, were hired.
Viewing the palms` perfection, eyes grow tired.⁸⁴
- 10
- 10- Howdahs, `mbellished, through white mirage they sway
Like marble icons down the “Sajoom” way.⁸⁵
- 11
- 11- Women, brought up in lavish love and care.
In wealth and grace; finely-wrought jewels, wear.
- 12
- 12- With choicest musk they are so well perfumed.
Their wafting scent, across a distance, bloom’d.

⁸² Ibn Yamin was a famous shipmaster in Bahrain, whose tall ships plied the seas. The verse mentions “Safa” and “Mushaqqar”; two mansions in Yamama, famed for their tall date palms.

⁸³ The “Rabdaa`” are identified as an Ethiopic clan famed for their lush palm orchards. The “Yamin” a clan of shipmasters and date growers. “They” in the second line refers to the Yamin clan.

⁸⁴ “Gilan” refers to workmen from the Gilan province of Persia, hired by the Persian emperor Xerxes to prune and water the palm groves in the vicinity of Bahrain.

⁸⁵ He compares howdahs swaying through whitish mirage to icons topping white marble idols in “Sajoom” valley, known for its marble. These wayside icons were intended for travelers to offer prayers to. The whiteness of the icons, marble pedestals is akin to the mirage’s whitish shimmer.

- 13
- 13- Their fine perfume was in fine ingredients fixed.
Of “Ban”, “Alwi”; of “Rend” , “Lubna”- well-mixed.⁸⁶
- 14
- 14- Mortgaged their hearts and left their hearts unpaid .
Sulayma broke what I’ve in mortgage laid⁸⁷.
- 15
- 15- Before, as vis`ting friend, to her I went
in stealth; well-guarded was her honoured tent.
- 16
- 16- Her, I surprised, but my courage expired.
As wine-addict fears wine he so desired.
- 17
- 17- Languid and lax, like drunkard she appeared.
She strained to stand upright, yet swayed and veered.
- 18
- 18- Asmaa`! should you my love for oth`r exchange,
I shall, also, to other conquests range.
- 19
- 19- “Khamla” and “Awjar”, having left behind,
mem`ries of their good folk e`er bore in mind.⁸⁸
- 20

⁸⁶ “Ban” and “Rend” species of tree emitting fragrance. “Alwi”, a brand of incense, considered the finest. “Lubna”: a species of tree whose milky sap was used in perfume-making. The verse also includes “Kibaa”, a brand of incense.

⁸⁷ The fine women in howdahs had chosen ones to love, mortgaging out their hearts to those they had favoured. He had mortgaged his heart to Sulayma, who broke away from him, taking away with her his mortgaged heart.

⁸⁸ “Khamla” and “Awjar”- locations in Syria.

- 20- And when “Hawran” at last I left behind⁸⁹,
none like “Asmaa`s” loveliness could I find.
-21
- 21- And when “Hamat” and “Shayzar” I had crossed
all hopes of seeing th’beloved again, were lost
-22
- 22- Our way forward we in haste had trod.
Those straggling, should their own way onward, plod.
-23
- 23- Forget I not, `spite travels hardest toil,
round howdahs that velvet cushions encoil.
-24
- 24- The tall, well-laden howdahs, richly green.
Like trees that are at wat`ry valleys seen.⁹⁰
-25
- 25- Forget howdahs! And do yourself console.
With swift camels that `cross hot desert roll.
-26
- 26- High ground and rocks it can with ease go `cross.
Mirage enshrouds it with a whitish gloss.
-27
- 27- Great power moves its withers, stout and wide.
As if a scratching cat t`its flank was tied⁹¹.

⁸⁹ “Hawran”- the same modern “Hawran” province in Syria.

⁹⁰ The verse mentions “Bisha”, “Ghameer” and “Ghudoor” as well-watered locations. The trees there are of the “Athel” species, tall and verdant, growing profusely in the watery sites. The green howdahs are likened to “Athel” trees.

- 28
- 28- From its hard pads, sharp pebbles fly away
at its taut flanks, but don't its firm hide fray.
- 29
- 29- The shooting pebbles in all directions hiss.
As left-handed misaimed shots, widely miss.
- 30
- 30- The pebble-fall rings loudly from afar.
As copper coins, debased, fall at "Abqar"⁹².
- 31
- 31- 'Pon it mounts one whose peers earth never bore.
To vows enfaithed, to patience true e'er more.⁹³
- 32
- 32- He, from "Na'it's" fort thousands down have brought.
"Beni Assad" high'r ground had better sought.⁹⁴
- 33
- 33- Beni Assad he'd raid from "Himyar"'s land
But Roman pact will much more honour stand.⁹⁵
- 34

⁹¹ Cats were completely unknown to desert Camels who would have been terrified if such a creature was tied to its flanks, and thus would run on with crazed and terrified speed.

⁹² "Abqar": a location in Yemen notorious for its debased coinage, heavy in copper content. The loud fall of pebbles flying off from the swift camel's hard pads is likened to the loud coppery sound of debased coinage falling on hard ground.

⁹³ "One" refers to himself. He recounts what he considers his prime virtues to be.

⁹⁴ "Na'it"'s fort: A fort in Hamadan, in Persia. His bringing down thousands from this mountain fort to lower ground is obscure. He is challenging his enemies, the Beni Assad, to leave hard, level ground and entrench themselves higher up in mountain fastness. He, refers to himself.

⁹⁵ He is exculpating himself from not raiding the Beni Assad from his ancestral lands of Himyar, in the Yemen where he could have rallied his people there to his aid. He says that his appeal to the Roman Caesar, (Justinian) for aid against his foes will stand him in much more honour, and would be far more effective.

34- My friend, seeing the road that lay ahead
led to Caesar, hot tears of dread did shed⁹⁶.

-35

35- Said I “weep not. To win a realm we’ll try
Or be forgiven should we fail and die.

-36

36- I’m sure to win a kingdom, `n royal fame
through hard travel’s that would th’strongest lions lame.

-37

37- O’er th’longest, hardest, deep-pocked way
that makes a “Nabt” camel in protest bray.⁹⁷

-38

38- Mounting tail-less dispatch steeds through the night,
So like Berber horses, sleekish and light.⁹⁸

-39

39- As lean as rain-drenched tree-wolf racing dank⁹⁹.
You’d see the water dripping down its flank.

-40

40- You spur its flank, and rein it; t’will turn gay.
It’ll swagger on, and with its bit will play.

-41

⁹⁶ The friend is ‘Amr bin Qumayy’a ‘al-Yashkuri. The poet had passed through the Beni Yashkur clan on his way to Constantinople. He chose ‘Amr, a fellow poet, as his traveling companion, but did not tell him of his destination. The ‘road’ here is that connecting the Syrian port city of Tarsus to Byzantium. ‘Amr wept in bewildered anguish when he realized where they were heading.

⁹⁷ Nabt: The toughest, most enduring of camels.

⁹⁸ Tail-less Berber horses were used by dispatch riders to deliver mail.

⁹⁹ Tree-wolves, living amongst trees, were considered to be most cunning and vicious.

41- Say “comfort us”, when th`way grows hard; it`ll neigh.
Supple its veins`n joints, short its tail doth lay.

-42

42- Baalbeck, its folk, denied me; were untrue.
And “Ibn Juraij” at Hims’s vill`ges, too.¹⁰⁰

-43

43- I see that showers distant lands may drench.
No rain would love for “Afraz’s”`s daught`r quench.¹⁰¹

-44

44- Should air-blown specks on her light gown alight.
her delightful soft-smooth skin so would slight.

-45

45- Woe to nights with “Umm Hashim” nowhere near.
Nor with “Bisbasa”, “Yashkur’s” daughter dear.

-46

46- I see “Umm `Amr,” her tears with grief aflow
for `Amr; yet once with patience was aglow.¹⁰²

-47

47- For fifteen nights we crossed o`er wetland sands.
Across what Caesar built t`defend his lands.

-48

48- If th`companion I thought of suit`ble kind

¹⁰⁰ Baalbeck: a town in Syria (now in the Lebanon) between Damascus and Hims (Emessa). Ibn Juraij, a former friend of the poet, residing in a village near Hims, had also denied him.

¹⁰¹ `Afraz’s daughter: A woman whom Imru’ul Qays had loved.

¹⁰² “Umm `Amr”: mother of `Amr b. Qumaia, Imru’ul Qays’s travelling companion. The mother, once so patient, had broken into tears at her son’s accompanying the poet to Constantinople.

unsuit'ble turns, I must another find.

-49

49- E'er when a sincere friend in one I see.
Fickle and treach'rous he turns out to be.

-50

50- Well before "Qarmal"'s raid well-born were we.
Inher'ting th'great glory'f our ancestral tree.

-51

51- My horsemen did not through cowardice fail
But had recalled "Barba`ees" and "Maysar's" vale¹⁰³

-52

52- O for that good war-day which I did face.
That at "Tadhif" hill, oer "Tartar", took place.¹⁰⁴

-53

53- No day was like the one at "Qatharan" we won,
't was as if oryx horns we were upon.¹⁰⁵

-54

54- We drink till steeds to our drunken eyes look
like lambs. Black manes for fair we drunk'ly took.

-55

¹⁰³ "Qarmal", a king of Yemen, haid raided Imru'ul Qays's tribe in their original Yemen homelands and defeated them. The poet here extenuates this defeat by saying that his folk were not defeated through weakness or cowardice, but yearned for their emmigrating kinsmen, and had disengaged from Qarmals' host to catch up with their kith and kin who had settled in two valleys "Barba`ees". And "Maysar".

¹⁰⁴ He is nostalgically recalling battles he had won to make up for his tribes earlier defeat by "Qarmal".

¹⁰⁵ This victory at "Qatharan" was all the more splendid, since, after initial caution and hesitation, the day, at the very last moment, tilted in their favour, as if they were balanced on oryx horns.

- 55- Am I to walk, midst direst dangers, doomed?
Have “Qays bin Shammars` homes e`en closer loomed?¹⁰⁶
- 56
- 56- See you, my friend, at night, a flashing light?
That lights, from high, the land of Himyar bright?
- 57
- 57- So near to sev`ral oth`r places, it bathes
“bin Shammar`s” palms with glorious light ablaze.¹⁰⁷
- 58
- 58- And “^cAmr b. Darmaa”, of fluted sword, who walks
as sure-foot`d lion in fearsome steps bestalks.
- 59
- 59- If I, one day, injustice gross should fear.
The trail to “Bulta”, at “Zaymor”, is near.¹⁰⁸
- 60
- 60- From its sheer peaks perching birds down do slip.
And thick o`er topping mists in drizzles drip.¹⁰⁹

[19]

My heart is not on patience set

- 1

¹⁰⁶ He wonders if he will ever reach the dwellings of one “Qays bin Shammar”, an unidentified person he is seeking for unknown reasons.

¹⁰⁷ The “Sev`ral oth`r places” are identified in this line as “Qassis”, “Tuha”, “Mistah”, and “Jaww”. Bin Shammar here is the aforementioned “Qays bin Shammar”, who probably offered the poet lavish hospitality for which he is here grateful.

¹⁰⁸ A mountain trail leads to “Balta” the house of ^cAmr b. Darmaa on “Zaymar”, a mountain in the Tayy tribal home lands.

¹⁰⁹ Describing the mountain of Zaymar,

- 1- By life! My heart is not on patience set.
No peace it holds, but is e'er set to fret.
-2
- 2- For time is but ages and endless night.
And ne'er on steady course proceeds aright.
-3
- 3- Those nights! The "Talh" trees! At "Muhajjar's Tayy".
More pleasant than those spent down "Uqur's" way.¹¹⁰
-4
- 4- With "Fartana" and "Hirr" morn-cups I gained.
Who else but "Hirr" my youth away had drained?¹¹¹
-5
- 5- If you should taste her mouth you straight would say
tis aged wine that merchants brought your way.
-6
- 6- Loving, as ewes for their young do care
Pretty, as pictures displayed at "Hakir" fair.¹¹²
-7
- 7- When passing by, musk from them wafts away.
Like incense born by breeze at morn of day.¹¹³
-8
- 8- As if wine merchants perfumed wines had sent.
Their wafting jars from "Khas" to "Yusur" went.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Muhajjar: a location in the Tayy tribal homelands. Uqur: an unidentified location.

¹¹¹ "Fartana and Hirr" were two women he had known. Morning drinking with "Hirr" had aged him prematurely.

¹¹² "Furtana" and "Hirr" are as tender, loving and caring as oryx ewes to their young at "Tibala"; a location where oryx congregate in large numbers.

¹¹³ "Them" refers to both "Hirr" and "Fartana".

- 9
- 9- A cup, half-filled with clear water pure.
In it the potent perfumed drink they pour.
- 10
- 10- Rain water from wide boulders downward flows.
And into cold-clean mountain streamlets goes.
- 11
- 11- What harmed me most with Himyar, and its kings
was th'harm that pride, and drink, and boasting, brings.
- 12
- 12- Them I offended, with my long, wagging tongue.
I wish I had it drawn, quartered, and hung.
- 13
- 13- In truth, ne'er have the "Sa^cad their friends betrayed.
Nor weak in battle were, nor were dismayed."¹¹⁵
- 14
- 14- Of camels they own some ten and three-score.
Their wealth in horse and foal counts even more.
- 15
- 15- To us they're dearer than those weaklings meek.
Who with their sheep, up peaks, protection seek.
- 16
- 16- Fine boon companions and soci'ble, "Sa^cad" make.
Their roasts plenty; their wine flows free to take.

¹¹⁴ "Khass" and "Yusur" two locations in Syria known for making and selling of perfumed Syrian wines.

¹¹⁵ The "Sa^cad" are the Beni Sa'ad, the Poet's allies.

-17

- 17- In truth let Sa'ad, whether he stay or stir.
A foul-breathed horse to him we do prefer.¹¹⁶

-18

- 18- And yet, fine traits, from him may soon be known;
traits that father, uncle, and Hujr have shown.¹¹⁷

-19

- 19- Such traits as forbearance, loy'ly, order.
All clearly seen when drunk or when sober.

[20]

“the archer from Beni Thu'al”

As Imru'ul Qays was on his way to al-Samaw'al, the Jewish poet, he came across the carcass of an oryx recently shot, and his companions dismounted to claim it. Two hunters of the Beni Thu'al appeared and asked who they were. Imru'ul Qays's party replied that they were related to them by blood. As the hunters were neighbours of 'al-Samaw'al, they all rode together and headed for the Jewish poet. Imru'ul Qays recited:

- 1- Beni Thu'al hunter, stalking his pray.
In his hunters' hide-out well-hid he lay.

-2

- 2- Straight-backed, he aims and draws his “Nashmite” bow

¹¹⁶ Whereas the previous Sa'ad refers to the Beni Sa'ad clan, the poet's friends and supporters, the Sa'ad here is his nephew. Imru'ul Qays's father, Hujr, had married Sa'ad's mother, but divorced her. Dhabab, the poet's brother then married her. Sa'ad was born to Dhabab, and was thus the poet's nephew, who is lampooned here for his foul-breath. The verse here compares him with a horse overfed on barley which gives him bad breath.

¹¹⁷ “father” refers to Sa'ad's father, Dhabab. “Uncle” refers to the poet himself as Sa'ad's uncle. Hujr, the poet's father, is Sa'ad's grandfather. The verse also mentions “Yazeed”, who could not be identified.

- Unbending o'er bow-string to free th'arrow.¹¹⁸
- 3
- 3- Heading for th'drink, oryx towards him race.
His bow in alignment to brow and face.
- 4
- 4- At its shoulders, lets off a shot; clean'n fine,
as th'oryx bends to drink at th'water-line.
- 5
- 5- His quiver well-filled, the sleekest arrows shows.
His arrow-head in flight like ember glows.
- 6
- 6- His shafts with eagle chick's plumes were feathered .
Plumage well-trimmed, and to the shaft, well-tethered.
- 7
- 7- His shaft e'er reaches th'mark, has never strayed.
Becursed be its e'er sharp, ne'er missing blade.¹¹⁹
- 8
- 8- His hunting skills, well-praised; his kills, well-laid.
A vet'ran hunter with no other trade.
- 9
- 9- A friend who from me does abruptly part.
For him I never shall shed tears of th'heart.
- 10
- 10- Courteous am I to offending cousin dear.

¹¹⁸ "Nashmite" bow: "Nashm" a tree from whose wood fine bows are made.

¹¹⁹ "becursed" here is in the way of grudging admiration for the hunter's archery.

Letting him drink first from first waters clear.

-11

11- With cousin, short is th'day of clear joy'n song.
But days of drinking muddied wat'r, are long.¹²⁰

-12

12- Cousin! Struck down! and I to grief doomed.
Crescent! That could to fullest moon have bloomed.

[21]

“lost lineage”

when Hujr, the poet's father, was slain, his daughter, Hind took refuge with 'Uwayr b. Shijna; and his Beni 'Awf tribe, who told 'Uwayr: “Have their wealth, for it will soon be taken by others”. He declined, offering Hind his full protection. At night, leading Hind's camel he crossed over the dune hills with her all the way to Najran, near the Yemen border. There he said to Hind “There are your people. I have done my duty in protecting you”. 'Uwayr was praised by Imru'ul Qays in several poems, this being the most prominent.

-1

1- Their own lineage the Beni 'Awf had built.
But vile treach'ry made it wither and wilt.

-2

2- For sure they will for needy neighbour stand
when absent kin give not a helping hand.

-3

3- They've not, as “Handhal”; done th'treach'rous deed.
T'hand o'er refuge-seekers. Treach'ry indeed!¹²¹

¹²⁰ In Arabic poetry, generally, clear water signifies good times, and muddied water, hard ones.

-4

- 4- Of “Handhal”; “Himyar”, “^cAdas”, “Ast”—rogues all
Bestrapped burden-beasts; low in worth and small.¹²²

-5

- 5- But fine ^cUwayr has nobly cleared his debts.
No slur beslimes him, and no charge besets.

[22]

“A long and heavy downpour”

‘al-Asm^cai was asked “who among the poets described rainfall best?
“Imru’ul Qays” he replied, and went on reciting this poem of Imru’ul
Qays.

-1

- 1- A long, heavy downpour, its rain-lines tall.
Earth-wide its range, gushing its water-fall.

-2

- 2- The tent-pole appears as the down pour recedes.
But vanishes when festive rain proceeds.

¹²¹ He lauds Beni ‘Awf’s chivalry, while reviling Beni Handhal’s treachery. Beni Handhal had handed the poet’s uncle, Shurahbil to his enemy ‘Abu Hanash ‘al-Taghlibi who slaw him immediately.

¹²² Himyar: means Himyarite. “^cAdas” and “Ast” were of the Beni Handhal whom the Poet reviles as treacherous. He reserves especial loathing for “Ast”, whom he calls a lowly beast of burden; bestrapped, and led by a strap.

-3

- 3- The desert rodent shows his swimming pluck.
It's paws outstretched, so not to mud be stuck.

-4

- 4- Only th'topmost of flooded trees are seen.
Like sev'rd heads that, shrouded in veils, have been.

-5

- 5- The downpour did but for a short hour last.
Then, torrentials fell; hard, heavy and fast.

-6

- 6- Fair winds release cloud-bursts, then recede.
Fierce southern winds, t'exploding torrents, lead.

-7

- 7- The pouring rain had swelled floods rising high.
"Khufaa", "Yusur" and "Khaim" submerged did lie.¹²³

-8

- 8- Upon its nose the floods swept me away.
As if, helpless, on dashing steed I lay.

[23]

Fine Youth

Praising Tarif b. Mal', of Tayy:

-1

- 1- Fine Youth! Weakn'd eyes the blazing fires behold
of Tarif b. Mal', on hungry nights and cold.

¹²³ "Khufaa", "Yusur", Khaim": locations overwhelmed by the floods.

- 2- They're like great-humped, tooth-worn camels, that stop
at tallest trees for leafage green, to crop.¹²⁴

[24]

Imru'ul Qays and 'al-Taw'am:

'al-Asm'ai relates that Imru'ul Qays was always challenging other poets. Here he challenges 'al-Taw'am 'al Yashkuri to a poetry contest whereby Imru'ul Qays recites the first hemistich of a line of verse, and 'al Yashkuri completes the second. Al-Yashkuri took up the challenge.¹²⁵

: -1

1- Imru'ul Qays: See you, past nightfall, glowing, flashing light¹²⁶

Al-Taw'am: Like furious Magian fire that blazes bright¹²⁷

: -2

2- Imru'ul Qays: He kept me, wake. Abu Shurayh had slept.

Al- Taw'am: t'is calm, I thought, but it in rage re-leapt.

¹²⁴ A tooth-worn camel cannot graze on harder desert thorns comfortably. For it to find lush leafage, easily masticated, is a godsend. So it is with Tarifs' hungry callers on cold rights. His lavish hospitality is such a godsend.

¹²⁵ In this contest, Imru'ul Qays's first hemistiches are unrhymed, whilst al-Taw'am's second hemistiches are all rhymed. However, I have rhymed the first with the second hemistiches in this translation.

¹²⁶ Light: lightning.

¹²⁷ Magian: "Majus", pre-Islamic Persian fire-worshippers.

: -3

3- Imru'ul Qays:
As though its thunder from past th'unknown came.

:

Al-Taw'am: As aborting camels wails of pain declaim.

: -4

Imru'ul Qays: as full rainclouds beyond "Adakh" oe'rpassed.

:

Al-Taw'am: They paused, then, th'wat'ry load released at last.

: -5

Imru'ul Qays: at "Dhat al-Sirr", no oryx left undrowed.

:

Al-Taw'am: The valley's wild-ass all bedrowned were found.

[25]

"what if you should wait"

Describing his steed, and a hunt.

-1

1- By love, or ailment, am I so beset.
One's beset by with what one's obsessed.

-2

2- Amirites daughter! by your fathers' life!¹²⁸
Let not folk say that I flee free from strife.

-3

3- Let not that charge by "Temim b. Murr" be cast.
With "Kinda" all around me standing fast.

¹²⁸ Amirite's daughter: is "Hirr", previously mentioned; daughter of Salama b. Abd. one of the women he wrote verses to in his early youth when his father banished him for his lechery. Hirr was of the Kalb tribe where the poet spent this early period of banishment.

- 4
- 4- When armed, armoured and mounted, the bold
at gallop would turn ground hot when its cold.
- 5
- 5- Why leave th'homeland so early or so late?
What would ail you should you stand by, and wait.?
- 6
- 6- Where e'r they go, `f what tree their tent-poles be.
The yearning heart shall track them with its plea.
- 7
- 7- Is "Hirr" among those who in th'homeland stay?
Or, in howdah, to strange lands far away?
- 8
- 8- So bent is "Hirr" on snaring manly hearts
But "Hujr" bin 'Amr from th'snares in safety parts.¹²⁹
- 9
- 9- Her eye-shafts pierced my loving heart; so I,
On departure day, vanquished I did lie.
- 10
- 10- My precious tears, as unstrung pearls, flowed free.
As gems that're bought and sold; as th'case may be.
- 11
- 11- Like one with wine who's full, in walk, she sways
o'er th'dunes; enfeebled and slow, in languid daze.

¹²⁹ His father, Hujr, by banishing him to her tribe, had escaped Hirr's snares, whilst he, the one banished, was caught by her.

- 12
- 12- Soft skin, fine manners and form, to her all cling.
A tender branch that splits to leaf in spring.
- 13
- 13- She rises slowly, speaks short words and few.
Her brightsome, well-formed teeth, when smiling, shew.
- 14
- 14- Fine wine, a show'ring cloud, flowr's fragrance free;
Incense awaft; all those in one is she.
- 15
- 15- Her teeth so bright, though oft of wine partakes.
While ears are pleased when night-time cock awakes.
- 16
- 16- In longest winter nights, sleepless I lay
In abject fear of what may come my way.
- 17
- 17- When I moved close, upon her I did lay.
A robe forgott'n, I dragged anoth'r my way¹³⁰
- 18
- 18- None did upon our privacy peep.
We both our secret did from our houses keep.
- 19
- :
- 19- "Of our affair" she said "we've been accused;
your evil's follow'd by anoth'r by what's ensued".
- 20

¹³⁰ He drags another robe behind him to wipe away the traces of the love scene from the ground.

- 20- By morn, I with two hunters, out for th'day
upon hillocks to scan the tracks of prey.
-21
- 21- An ugly hound follows, to hunt e'er keen;
sharp eyed, sharp eared, relentless, hard and lean.
-22
- 22- It's fangs close-packed, its ribs well-curved and wrought,
Empow' red, vig'rous; its prey is hotly sought.
-23
- 23- His fangs went deep in th'oryx bull's thigh vein.
Said I t'myself "close in and have it slain".
-24
- 24- The hound, impaled by th'bull's long horn and keen
Like sucking calf's tongue split for it to wean.¹³¹
-25
- 25- Th'stricken hound, in agony, reeled and surged.
Like flies that in ass's nostrils emerged.
-26
- 26- My lightest, swiftest mare that fright did seize,
flutt'rd, like palm leaves stirred by brisky breeze.
-27
- 27- Her hoofs, like young boys cups, were firm and small.
With stout shins that; on ground would, gripping, fall.¹³²

¹³¹ The bull's sharp horns cutting through the hound are likened to a sucking calf's tongue being split to stop it sucking at the cow's udders.

¹³² Small hoots at end of stout shins would give greater grip, in contrast to large hoots; heavy, awkward, and ungripping.

- 28
- 28- Like eagles plumes black hairs its pasterns loop.
The mare, when tense, they rise; with ease, they droop.
- 29
- 29- Hard flesh around her stout shanks seemed tied.
As if twas from elsewhere to it applied.
- 30
- 30- Her hind; a rock that floods emburnished kept.
Whilst all that lay before, away they swept.
- 31
- 31- Her withers, with solid muscle packed hard.
Like the well-wrought sinews of the leopard.
- 32
- 32- Her profuse mane at high speed freely flows.
Like woman's wild-free hair a cold gust blows.
- 33
- 33- Her long fair neck, high as palm tree is tall.
Like spoilers setting th'tree aflame in gall.¹³³
- 34
- 34- Her burnished brow, a fine and glowing sight.
A shield by craftsman fashioned, gleaming bright.
- 35
- 35- Her nostrils wide; wide as hyenas lairs
They ease out breath that 'gainst her lungs so tears.

¹³³ The mare's long neck is likened to a date-palm set afire by angry spoilers, in that the fair colour of the neck is akin to the fair yellowish colour of flame.

- 36
- 36- Full-mooned and large are her protruding eyes.
 'tween top and low'r eyelids, a furrow lies..
- 37
- 37- You'd say, should she, head on, towards you charge
 "she's like marrow! Small-tipped, her round rear large"
- 38
- 38- You'd say, should she, away from you, discharge:
 "She's like a boulder! Smoothly round and large".
- 39
- 39- Should she gallop past you, you'd look and say:
 "A locust she! To flight she leaps away".
- 40
- 40- If whipped, she into angered gallop falls.
 Like overladen clouds releasing hail-balls.
- 41
- 41- Deer-like are her fine-arched and bounding leaps.
 She canters here; while there to slow walk keeps

[26]

"you allayed the lion"

In praise of Sa'ad bin `al-Dhabab, who gave him refuge:

-1

- 1- Th'lion, devouring Ibn Hujr, you'd allay,¹³⁴
 With Ibn Hujr, th'lion had almost done away.

¹³⁴ Ibn Hujr: himself, the son of Hujr; his father.

-2

- 2- Th' lion stopped; to your favour a debt I owe
Indebted I am; and that you well should know.

-3

- 3- For your defence I give my thanks to you.
Nought can I give but sincere thanks and true.

-4

- 4- No neighbour's trust as well as yours can fare
To your vict'ry, no fine aid, can compare.¹³⁵

[27]

"Tell the Beni Zayd"

Lampooning the Beni Handhal and their affiliated clans.

-1

- 1- Should you meet "Beni Zayd", them, in truth, should tell,
'nd "Beni Lubna", and "Tamadhur", as well.

-2

- 2- Tell! Let the sons of "Minqars" daughte'r take¹³⁶
my wrath; for I a sland'rer's back will break.

-3

- 3- "Handhal!" were you noble, you'd have stood fast.
You'll not before "Temim"s fast-standers last.

[28]

!

"Mawi! Might a weary traveler stay?"

¹³⁵ The victory here refers to Ibn Dhabab's victorious support for Imru'ul Qays.

¹³⁶ Minqar's daughter: The Beni Handhal he is lampooning descend, from the maternal side, from the daughter of one "Minqar".

- 1
- 1- Mawi! might I, a trav'ler, oernight stay?
Or must I, with, such hopes do away?
- 2
- 2- Be frank! For comfort lies in plainest truth.
Distressful doubt is void of comfort's ruth.
- 3
- 3- My mount, so like those "Sherba" wild asses
Alert! It swiftly through "Irnan" passes¹³⁷
- 4
- 4- At night the ass's hoofs pound the ground and beat
for cooler soil to find from baking heat.
- 5
- 5- The dust swirls up, as hoofs are hard at toil.
To seek cool soil the baking heat to foil.
- 6
- 6- The shelt'ring beast, out stretched, lays on its side
It's cheek on ground, like captive thrown and tied.
- 7
- 7- The bush, by th'dug-out, was by moisture fed.
The beast rejoiced, like groom at marriage bed.
- 8
- 8- At dawn the hunt-hounds of "Ibn Murr", and those

¹³⁷ "Sherba": a location where herds of wild ass congregate and pass through "Irnan" a gulch flanked by high hills, favoured by hunters. He says his mount darts forth as swiftly as Sherba wild asses darting through Irnan to escape lurking hunters.

of "Sinbiss" upon the basking bull did close¹³⁸

-9

9- Th'enhungred hunt hounds, joyous at th'prey,
Their bright red eyes agleam at that which lay.

-10

10- The dusted bull rose, like white flame, to pound
away in gallop o'er hard, rocky ground.

-11

11- The bull knew that that was to be the day
at "Rimth"; to slay, or slain be in the fray.

-12

12- The pouncing hounds, its shanks and thighs did tear.
Like boys tear patches off habits monks wear.¹³⁹

-13

13- The hounds, their long chase failed, to tree's shade fled
The bull, still proud though cut, at length was freed.

[29]

"Call at the old folk"

On his return from Constantinope, Imru'ul Qays's skin broke into sores. Here he is addressing his two companions, asking them for help.

-1

1- At "As^cas" call, where th'old folk are installed,
They've responded not, 's if to mutes I called.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ "Ibn Murr" and "Ibn Sinbis" were two famous hunters of the Beni Tayy.

¹³⁹ Devout Christian boys tear patches off monks, habits to treasure as sacred relics.

- 2
- 2- It their welcome is, as once `t was, the best,
I would with them have found some hours of rest.
- 3
- 3- Deny me not, for him am I the same
to “Ghawl” `n “^cAs^cas” spring pastures with you came.
- 4
- 4- For I have not a good full hour of sleep
But doze, after I to swirling thought keep
- 5
- 5- My old ailment `pon me descends at night.
I plunge, with darkness, back into my plight.
- 6
- 6- Where’s th’one, distressed, for whom I rode and fought.
Whom I’ve relieved until his breath he caught.
- 7
- 7- When’s th`day when I return, my hair well-dressed.
To loving belles with softest beauty blessed.
- 8
- 8- Lured by my voice, amrous, to me they draw,
Like fine she-camels that a fine male saw.
- 9
- 9- They love not those who of much wealth are short.
Nor let th`bow-bent aged to them pay court.

¹⁴⁰ He asks his companions to call at the folk at `As `as, a mountain homeland of the Beni `Amir; as if he had already done so but without response.

-10

10- Fearless am I of ailment, and its woes
that me so drains, I fail to wear my clothes.

-11

11- I wish my sick breath would at once expire
so not my ill-frame with slow death, to tire.

-12

12- From health I've lapsed; by bleeding sores abused.
My deaths to lasting mis'ry's been reduced.¹⁴¹

-13

13- `Al-Tammah, far from home, to slander swore
to clothe me with what he in sickness wore.¹⁴²

-14

14- Ruined, one could vast possessions acquire.
Aged, one could to longer years aspire.

[30]

“Imru’ul Qays and ‘Ubayd b. al-`Abrs”.

: -1

1- ‘Ubayd: A dead serpent will ne’er from death arise,
but fangless, toothless, it forever lies.

: -2

¹⁴¹ He refers to his death in the plural, as each of his recurrent pains is a death in itself.

¹⁴² `Al-Tammah, of the Beni Assad, was involved in a blood feud with Imru’ul Qays, whom he followed to Constantinople to slander him at Justinian’s court so as to prevent any forthcoming support to Imru’ul Qays. `Al-Tammah appears to have succeeded, as the poisoned cloak episode indicates. In saying al-Tammah sought “to clothe me what he in sickness wore” refers both to the poisoned cloak and the sick malice of `al-Tammah himself.

- 2- Imru'ul Qays: A well-watered seed, under soil, will live.
Long dormant, it, heaps `pon heaps, will give.
: -3
- 3- `Ubayd: The black, the white, all names—all are as such.
Those bent on change, their changelessness, can't touch.
: -4
- 4- Imru'ul Qays: Those clouds the Compassionate on had sent
to water parched lands; `pon his order, went.
: -5
- 5- `Ubayd: The planets round the wide heavens unwind.
But are to their orbital paths confined.
: -6
- 6- Imru'ul Qays: The stars that in the darkest night arise.
You'd liken t'beacons that the lost will guide.
: -7
- 7- `Ubayd: The winds `cross lonesome, friendless lands that blow,
come fast, and reverse not back home to go.
: -8
- 8- Imru'ul Qays: Those winds when, into raging storms do break.
Tis `nough that dust is swept off by their wake.
: -9
- 9- `Ubayd: Dire public grief that one may so befall
`s no less than what a hostile host may haul.
: -10
- 10- Imru'ul Qays: Those scything strokes of time that none do spare
Both strong and foolish down they mow and tear.

- : -11
- 11- ‘Ubayd: Those racing steeds, with birds in flight do vie.
By bit unreined, but like bit-less birds, fly.
- : -12
- 12- Imru’ul Qays: the warrior host on steeds that onward chased.
With cloth for saddle, on to th’fray had raced.
- : -13
- 13- ‘Ubayd:steeds, through wide open land, dash forth ‘fore morn
Making walking white camels look forlorn.
- : -14
- 14- Imru’ul Qays: Wishing leaves one a king of make-believe
Th’heavens will not his head up to it heave.
- : -15
- 15- ‘Ubayd: No rulers are without hearing and sight,
and tongue el’quent their people to delight.
- : -16
- 16- Imru’ul Qays:The scales th’Compassionate for Man had laid.
So Man, by divinely made scales, be weighed.

[31]

“ Whose is this ruined abode?”

Recited at Ankyra, describing his ailment

- 1
- 1- Whose was th’abode that, ruined, lies so low.
Bestruck by Time and ages long ago.
- 2
- 2- See, how all o’er me, mange has broken out.

As if I have, all o'er, been struck by gout.

-3

- 3- The sickly gown of sores that I now wear.
To wear it none before did ever dare.

-4

- 4- On th'skin, the sores leave scars that are descried
as seal-rings that to wax had been applied.

[32]

“ Will you, in recounting Selma's annals, delay?”

-1

- 1- When Selma's gone far, with her will you break?
A foot forward put, an'ther backward take?

-2

- 2- For she's beyond waste lands; dry, vast and bare.
Deserts thick with bandits who none will spare.

-3

- 3- Her vision at “`Unaiza” t'me appeared,¹⁴³
while on her way onward her mount she steered.

-4

- 4- Her flowing black hair wreathed in plaits encoiled.
Her fine white teeth, enbrighted and unsoiled.

-5

- 5- Her teeth were of the brightest whiteness born

¹⁴³ `Unaiza: a location, probably a mountain. `Unaiza' was also the poet's cousin.

Agleam with milk of the “Sayyal” tree’s thorn.¹⁴⁴

-6

6- Leave her and drive your gnawing cares away,
on hard-boned she-camel, e’er mounted; stay.

-7

7- Full-fleshed is she, not young, nor does she yearn
for home pastures; nor slow to guide or learn.¹⁴⁵

-8

8- Her legs at canter are e’er brisk and light
Although, ‘tis said, cant’ ring is best at night.

-9

9- As if my gear will soon be set alight.
When small flints break out `n flames that blaze alight.¹⁴⁶

-10

10- The long-necked ostrich, and its mate; pacing.
And then, o’er white, firm sandy lands; racing.

-11

11- Both to their nest return at end of day.
For skulking predators to chase away.

-12

12- Does th’ ostrich with my swift camel compare?
Or with th’wild-ass stallion chasing th’mare?

¹⁴⁴ Sayyal tree’s thorn: Sayyal-flowing liquid- was a species of tree whose thorns produce a milky fluid used for dental hygiene.

¹⁴⁵ She: refers to the she-camel.

¹⁴⁶ “My gear” refers specifically in this line to his scabbard, his camel saddle, and his pillow. He means that the camel is so fleet that it is likely to spark off the small flints underfoot into a blaze that would consume those items of his gear.

-13

- 13- Th'wild-ass's belly, in hard leanness bewrought.
It's withers high, through chase of what it sought.

-14

- 14- A hard hunt-scar upon its forelock shows.
It's flank, from bite-marks, all its hair did lose.

-15

- 15- On its' straight back a line lies bright and bold.
Like a fine quiver that's lined with streaks of gold.

-16

- 16- At "Qaww", on young tender herbage they chew.
Herbage cropped, but sprouted yet anew.

-17

- 17- From th' Ostrich plumes; soft, tender down enfrays,
In profusion falls, or is blown away.¹⁴⁷

-18

- 18- In summer, on such herbage th' wild-ass feeds.
When "Ha'il" grazing it likes not or needs.¹⁴⁸

-19

- 19- On wat'ry spring grazing the ass had fed,
t'allay summ'r heat that leaves the locust dead.

-20

- 20- Loud th' wild-ass brays when finding water
that lean camels seek, straining at th' halter.

¹⁴⁷ He likens the tender herbage the wild ass grazes on, with down; young feathers that fall off, or is blown away from the Ostrich's plumage.

¹⁴⁸ "Ha'il", a location, probably the modern town of Ha'il in Saudi Arabia.

-21

21- It drinks at well-watered pools, late at night.
Water plenty and high, a quenching sight.

-22

22- So short of breath, th' asses their drink partake.
While their shanks, with terror, quiver and quake.¹⁴⁹

-23

23- After drink, ass 'n camel t' high ground find way
So lean and light as pots with which boys play.¹⁵⁰

-24

24- A stallion follows the herd's upward trek,
another leads them down, falls, 'n breaks its neck.¹⁵¹

-25

25- From mouth agape, their leader's molars show.
Like "Andar" 's ropes, their hard-twist bodies go.¹⁵²

[33]

" Help me behold lightning flashing bright "

- 1

1- Help me behold lightning flashing hard'n bright.

¹⁴⁹ The beasts are terrified of hunters that might be lurking for them at the water pool.

¹⁵⁰ Young boys play a game using light well-wrought pots. He likens the light playful movements of ass and camel frolicking together, after drinking, and on their way to higher safer ground, with boys playing pots. Camels, of course, are not game as wild-ass are, but seem to absorb the asses fear when drinking at pools.

¹⁵¹ The wild ass herd, having watered, treks up to higher ground, followed by a slow-paced, protecting stallion. When thirsty, the herd races down to the pool, led by a galloping stallion, who stumbles, falls, and breaks its neck.

¹⁵² The lean rounded hardness of the wild ass is likened to the strongest best-made rope, made by one "Andar".

Lighting up clouds o'er high peaks shimm'ring white.

-2

2- It's flash, at times, appears with tardy glow.
Like leg-stricken camel, on three, walks slow.

-3

3- From clouds, instant lightning streaklets break out.
Swift! As joyous winning gamblers, clap'n shout.

-4

4- I sat, and watched the lightning flash, with friends
'Tween "Dharij", n' "Aridh"; "Yathluth", that wat'r sends¹⁵³

-5

5- Rain fell at "Qatatayn", flooding its sand.
Then at "Bedii"; that prom'sing fertile land.¹⁵⁴

-6

6- A country wide, whose soil is rich and soft.
'pon which gushing torrents fall from aloft.

-7

7- The falling torrents flood the lower land.
On high'r ground, stranded desert rodents stand.

-8

8- On my far sister, may rain's blessings fall.
I reach her not; in verse to her I call.

-9

¹⁵³ He and his companions sat between three locations "Dharij", "Aridh" and "Yathluth". The last location is a network of irrigation ditches that sends water to the groves. They sat to watch lightning and ascertain the location of rainfall.

¹⁵⁴ The "Bedii" valley is identified as a homeland of the Beni 'Amir in Nejd; known for its fertility.

- 9- I stand alert on mountain peaks, to watch.
And coming n'going strangers sight to catch.
- 10
- 10- I waited, with my dark unsaddled mare,
My wing broke, support 'n her I find; and care.¹⁵⁵
- 11
- 11- I watched at th' peak for friends throughout the day.
At dusk, down t' my steed went, and rode away.
- 12
- 12- The steed, long 'n lightly built, well wrought and lean.
Like straight lance whose stone-whetted point, is keen.
- 13
- 13- At mounting, th' steed with latent power seethed.
I had to calm it; it to calmly lead.
- 14
- 14- I rise, 'fore dawn, when birds are still at nest.
To mount a steed, that of its breed, is best¹⁵⁶
- 15
- 15- Like wild-ass ribbed; Ostrich legs that rise 'n height
Vig'rous as ped'gree,ired camels, that bite.¹⁵⁷
- 16

¹⁵⁵ The verse reports his dark mare as being covered only by a saddle cloth. He describes himself as wing-broken, like a mountain eagle with broken wing. He leans on his fiery mare for support.

¹⁵⁶ The verse describes the qualities of such a steed: it is short haired, with stout, firm shanks and pasterns, is hard-built and swift at gallop. The gender of the steed is unclear. The verse uses a masculine pronoun when referring to it. Mohammad al-Fadhl Ibrahim, in his commentary, refers to it as a mare.

¹⁵⁷ Fine pedigree white camels, brimming with aggressive energy were known to bite when displeased.

- 16- E'en when 'tis tired, faster forward flies.
Like well-water; drawn, will e'er upward rise
-17
- 17- 'pon it, an oryx herd, I thrilled with fear,
As 'a sheepfold's set afright when wolf comes near.
-18
- 18- First, three it hunted down; then two, then four.
And left a fifth that broken lance did bore.¹⁵⁸
-19
- 19- It wheeled; it turned; it raced in d'rections all;
till pouring sweat, in streams, did from it fall.
-20
- 20- A hefty bull; rock-like, hard and massive.
In heat is stalked, while oth'r beasts are passive.¹⁵⁹
-21
- 21- Behold a fine young man of untold wealth.
Whose wealth is useless if stricken in health.
-22
- 22- 'Tis as if one had never lived ones life.
when death-gasps through one's jaws are rife.

[34]

“ I've grieved, but from remoteness have grieved not ”

-1

¹⁵⁸ “It” refers to the horse – and its rider- as the hunter.

¹⁵⁹ The massive oryx bull is stalked by a hunter on a steed during baking heat when other beasts lie down passively, enervated by the climate.

- 1- I've grieved, but from remoteness have grieved not.
Consoled a heart with lovely belles besot.
-2
- 2- Though I to bygone youth have bid farewell,
yet four, 'f what life offers, still watch full well:-
-3
- 3- I watch hearty boon companions at drink,
close to wine tuns flowing at the brink.
-4
- 4- I watch gall'ping hunters pounding away,
startling peaceful game fleeing from the fray.
-5
- 5- I watch pure white camels, bright at night,
towards unknown lands, heading out of sight.
-6
- 6- Out of the wilds, towards a village, head
to meet loved ones, or t'covet gain, are led.
-7
- 7- I watch a perfumed, soft-dewed belle; alert.
Who guards well her fine-necklaced child, 'gainst hurt.
-8
- 8- She bears my care for her; th'child's cries distress.
To quiet it, it to her neck does press.
-9
- 9- I sent her word when stars through night emerged.
"Beware of coming lest you should be heard".

- 10
- 10- In slow tiptoe she came, so coy ‘n demure.
With four full-breast’d belles onward her to lure.
- 11
- 11- Gently, they help her on. She lightly swayed.
As one needing aid when by much drink is dazed.
- 12
- 12- I took her clothes, and there she was undressed.
Wide-eyed, long-necked like oryx calf. She said:
- 13
- 13- “To no messenger will we now reply.
Nor will I, what you want of me, deny”.
- 14
- 14- O’er night, wild beasts away from us had stayed.
We both were slain; none knew when we were slayed.
- 15
- 15- She, from th’ sword that lay by us, draws away.
And on me draws a cloak that close by lay
- 16
- 16- When thrilled with fear, a pleading hand she laid
on ‘shoulder stout that through hard times had stayed.

[35]

“ Her sudden flight ”

- 1
- 1- With lovers need, Su‘ad fled out of sight.

Her sudden flight so thrilled love with fright.¹⁶⁰

-2

2- Gardens round “Mukhatat” and “Lujj” will stay
within eye and earshot ‘f where “Su‘ad” lay.

-3

3- Should I behold where’er Su‘ad may dwell.
My tears would of re-kindled anguish tell.

[36]

“ The orphans’ father is at rest ”

An elegy on ‘al-Harith b. Habib al-Salmi who accompanied him to Syria:

-1

1- By palms at “Jawf Busra” now lies, at rest;¹⁶¹
of fathers of orphans ‘n striplings; the best.

-2

2- Who now, will, to protect the dest’tute, seek?
And bear the burden of the meek and weak?

[37]

“ Good morn, Folk ”

-1

¹⁶⁰ With lover’s needs: she has fled away with what he needs of her as a lover; thus terrifying him.

¹⁶¹ Jawf Busra: a location in Syria.

- 1- Good morn to you, friends, and let us speak¹⁶²
as those riding togeth'r the truth do seek.
- 2
- 2- And tell how, o`ernight, their camels vanished.¹⁶³
Leaving them like palms whose fruit had perished.
- 3
- 3- Sitting at the camel frames they'd retrieved,
they set to work, `Iraq's bright cloth they weaved.¹⁶⁴
- 4
- 4- On pads, young maids sat to their craft.
Perfumed, with scent of musk and tulip awaft.
- 5
- 5- My eyes followed, till of them lost sight
behind trees rising on a sandy height.¹⁶⁵
- 6
- 6- I followed tracks of folk, bent on their way.
Who at "Aqiq" or "Mutraq" plan to stay.
- 7
- 7- Consoled I was when their cam'l came in sight.
So tall it was, as Jew's house rises 'n height.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² "Good morn" was a standard salutation of the pre-Islamic Arabs. He urges candid conversation with his friends as they set out for the hunt. Those riding together, he says- for mutual protection and gain- are truthful in their conversation.

¹⁶³ He tells a story to his companions as they ride out together.

¹⁶⁴ Their camels having been driven away while at pasture they sat to the camel's saddling frames, which they turned to looms, and set about weaving `Iraqs' bright, ornamented cloth; sitting on sacks used for padding the saddle-frames around the animals', humps.

¹⁶⁵ The verse identifies the species of trees as "Alaa'" and "Shabraq", that flourish on sandy heights.

¹⁶⁶ "Jew's house": refer's to `al-Ablaq", the mansion of the Jewish poet 'al-Samaw'al, known for his loyalty and devotion to those who seek his aid, as Imru'ul Qays did.

- 8
- 8- Prodded, see how she briskly breaks t'canter.
Her ample tail hangs rich; dates in cluster.¹⁶⁷
- 9
- 9- So fast she goes, like cloud whose rain was shed.
And, after oth'r such clouds, had swiftly fled.
- 10
- 10- She canters wild, as if upon her side
a furious scratching cat to her is tied.¹⁶⁸
- 11
- 11- On her; with my saddle, cushions, and sheath;
as if I had an ostrich underneath.¹⁶⁹
- 12
- 12- Such ostrich that paces with great dispatch,
in care for eggs that in far lands will hatch.
- 13
- 13- Westward it roams; across lands far and near.
With brisk breezes for tail wind at its rear.
- 14
- 14- A house where musk wafts 'cross its rooms and floors.
From sickness free, without dark corridors.¹⁷⁰
- 15
- 15- With one fair, full-fleshed belle I laid me down,

¹⁶⁷ The richly clustered dates specifically refer to the choice date palms planted by one Ibn Mu'annaq.

¹⁶⁸ The verse mentions the camel, with a scratching cat tied to its flank, passing through narrow gorges.

¹⁶⁹ With all his baggage on her, she is as fleeting as an ostrich.

¹⁷⁰ The house here is probably 'al-Ablaq, the mansion of the poet 'al-Samaw'al.

who then wiped my footprints off with her gown.

-16

16- The stars, midst heavens held quiet and still.
Like oryx herd, at night, cropping its fill

-17

17- 'fore dawn, when all's quiet, I rise to deed
to mount a temple of a stone-flanked steed¹⁷¹

-18

18- The scout we sent by hill-top trees abides,
like stealthy wolf that in a spinney hides.¹⁷²

-19

19- Flat down, on ground, the lurking scout did lay
Like born calf; so's not him to prey betray.¹⁷³

-20

20- On ground he moves in slowest belly crawl,
To him dust sticks, 'nd till end of crawl, won't fall.

-21

21- Said he "are'nt those oryx herds and wild-ass;
and scattered ostrich grazing on the grass?"

-22

22- I, with bit-strap, arose the horse to rein.
In spirits high, it at the rein did strain.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ the steed is likened to a temple in its height and solid masonry.

¹⁷² The scout was sent to reconnoiter the prey before the poet rose at dawn "to deed", i.e the hunt. The wolf also hides, in stealth, for its prey.

¹⁷³ "Like born calf": Like a newly-born oryx calf lying heavily on the ground. So with the scout; with only slight movements of his head to observe prey.

-23

23- We all tried hard to place our boy on horse
whose frame's well-turned, and races through its course.¹⁷⁵

-24

24- My boy, at length on horse was mounted high.
Like 'pon a hawk that way up high does fly.

-25

25- A hawk, spying a hare from way up high,
zoomed down 'pon that it did from high espy.

-26

26- To boy said I: "spur not! Steer't so with stealth.
Or else its pow'r would throw you down to death".

-27

27- So rich and bright colours th' oryx bedeck,
like richest beads round a well-born boy's neck.

-28

28- The steed soon caught the herd upon the plain.
Like land caught by the heavy pour of rain.

-29

29- A bull, an ass, an ostrich f'r us it caught.
Yet dry it stayed, with sweaty stress unfraught.

-30

¹⁷⁴ The verse likens the horse's supple, finely arched neck to a "ban" tree branch. The horse, enthusiastic about the coming hunt, and in high spirits, does not hold still for the bit to be placed in its mouth.

¹⁷⁵ The boy could not mount the horse of alacrity, by himself and had to be helped on. "well-turned" refers to wood work supporting the camel saddle. The horse was as "well-turned" as the camel saddle's wood work.

- 30- My lad with ease his lance on beasts let fall
on oryx, 'nd asses with fine necks and tall.
-31
- 31- The hunting steed, with prey's spilt blood is smeared.
A sashed Persian grandee; awesome, and feared.
-32
- 32- Said we: "Fine hunt did th' finer hunter pluck.
So let fine tent for us to rest, be struck"
-33
- 33- Prime meat my friends had cut and boiled in brine.
Then in a cave they hung th' boiled in line.
-34
- 34- Like "Ju`atha" kings back from hunting feat
we left; our bags and mounts heavy with meat.¹⁷⁶
-35
- 35- We left on streamlined steeds, speedy and free.
Like sightly birds eyes ever yearn to see.
-36
- 36- The smooth-backed steed could well the lad o'er throw.
't was light; as an unpoint'd, unfeath'rd arrow.
-37
- 37- Besmeared with blood of th' wild-asses it slayed
like "henna" with which graying hair is laid.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ "Ju`atha": a prosperous city in Bahrain, known for its thriving markets.

¹⁷⁷ Wild ass blood on its neck is likened to henna, the blood-coloured hair dye still in use now. Henna was, and is still used as a cosmetic to dye women's hands and feet on festive occasions.

“ M’sire’s blood shall not in vain be shed ”

`al-Hyatham b. ‘Udey relates that Imru’ul Qays, when still a boy, was staying with his relatives, the Beni Handhal when news of his father’s murder came in, with details of the bloody episode. Given the horrendous news, he cried out:

-1

1- Hind! Th’strike at “Kahil” of the mark shot wide.
Where slayers of the noble king still hide.¹⁷⁸

-2

2- To end “Ma`ads” blood line I am intent.
The last of them shall know on what I’m bent.¹⁷⁹

-3

3- On hard and lean war-steeds to war we sped.
By God! M’sire’s blood shall not in vain be shed.

-4

4- Us, and thirsty lances, our steeds will bear.
To thrust at “Sa`ab”, ‘n his flimsy harness tear.¹⁸⁰

-5

5- At their strappings, their hoofs fast pebbles shoot
Last steeds o’er take first; all with surest foot.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Hind is variously named by commentators as the poet’s sister, or daughter. Here he cries out to her in pain. Kahil was an encampment of the Beni Assad, his father’s slayers. Building on what the courier told him, he relates how his clan’s horsemen, aiming at Kahil, missed it and struck elsewhere.

¹⁷⁹ “Ma`ad” is the ancestor of the Beni Assad, his father’s slayers.

¹⁸⁰ Thirsty: blood thirsty. Sa`ab is identified as Sa`ab b. `Ali b. Bekr b. Wa`il- implicated in his father’s murder.

6-

6- Til I with “Malik” ‘n “Kahil” do away.¹⁸²

[39]

“ Deliv’r me not, Rab’i ”

It was related that Imru’ul Qays had grossly offended his father by his cutting verse, so much so that his father ordered one of his retainers, Rabi’a, to take him away, have him slain and bring back his eyes. The retainer took the young offending poet to a mountain, left him there, and brought back the gouged eyes of an oryx. The father, deeply grieved by his hasty, angry decision, sank into deepest gloom. The retainer comforted him, cheering him up with the news that the offending son was alive and well. Rabi’a returned to bring young Imru’ul Qays back, as the remorse-ful father ordered.

As the retainer met him, the young poet recited these lines:

-1

1- Deliv’r me not, Rab’i, to this dire fate.
In you I had full trust till this dire date.

-2

2- Captive I’m not who far from home had sate
to watch, where lightning’s bless’d rain falls, and wait.

-3

3- I’m seen today, atop a mountain, cast.
T’morrow, hunt-bound on stoutest steed and fast.

-4

4- I may startle qu’et prey, grazing away.

¹⁸¹ “Strappings”; Saddle-straps.

¹⁸² Line 6 consists of one concluding hemistich.

And may my eyes on lovely women lay.

-5

- 5- Lovely women, their backs so clear and bare,
Perfumed; who gowns, red'n saffron yellow, wear.

[40]

“ ‘Good Morn’ to you ”

-1

- 1- Good morn to you, o ruined abode of yore.
Do folk prosper who lived here long before?

-2

- 2- Who prospers but one who lives in cheer.
Whose cares are few and ne'er spends nights in fear.

-3

- 3- The closest t'prospering I had ever been
was thirty months in space of score 'n sixteen.¹⁸³

-4

- 4- “Dhi Khal”, Selma's home, is no longer there
t'rrential rain reduced it to ruins bare.

-5

- 5- Selma's vision, at th'vale, appears among
ostrich nest eggs, and oryx with their young.¹⁸⁴

-6

- 6- Selma appears where together once were we;

¹⁸³ The closest he came to prosperity and good fortune was a period of thirty months in the space of three years.

¹⁸⁴ He so imagines Selma after her home is inundated by torrential rain.

where rams drink by th' well in the flow'ry lea.

-7

7- O for Selma's nights! Pearl teeth set aright.
Her bare neck, like a hind's, was fine and white.

-8

8- "Bisbasa" claims, for love I'm old and done;
that my sort know not how t'play games of fun.¹⁸⁵

-9

9- She lies! Women on to me do firmly hold;
and they I hold from wifeless bucks and bold.

-10

10- O for those merry days, and nights till dawn.
With maid pretty as picture is well-drawn.

-11

11- At night her face lights up her bed-mate's bed.
Like lanterns' wicks that light 'pon darkness shed.

-12

12- Jewels 'pon her chest, like live embers, glow.
Like the embers warmth-seekers poke and blow.

-13

13- Embers from fires glowing on wind-blown heights
Beacons to trav'lers on dark, chilly nights.¹⁸⁶

-14

14- The soft, white-cheeked, pearl-teethed, tender young maid

¹⁸⁵ "Bisbasa": a woman he knew in later years.

¹⁸⁶ The jewels glowing on her bare chest guide him to her warmth, as long-lasting hardwood fires, and their embers on wind-bloom heights guide chilled travelers seeking warmth.

so struck me dumb that I my shirt mislaid!!

-15

- 15- Her body's curves in firm roundness stand.
Firm as two boys play on firm dunes of sand

-16

- 16- Unswelled in waist, her sides and belly tight.
Not unperfumed, swaying in her delight.

-17

- 17- After her man, in bed, had her undressed,
ever so gently on to him she pressed.

-18

- 18- Visions of her at "Atharat" had I.
She in "Yethrib", her house stands far and high.¹⁸⁷

-19

- 19- Visions I had when bright shone th'starlit dome.
Like monks' lanterns, guiding travelers home¹⁸⁸

-20

- 20- To her I went when her folk were asleep.
Like water through soil, I to her did seep.

-21

- 21- "Curse you!" she cried "In shame you'll have me bound,.
Folk are awake and chatting all around".

-22

¹⁸⁷ "Atharat": a location in Syria. "Yethrib" is the Pre-Islamic name of the Islamic city of Medina.

¹⁸⁸ Both stars, and monks' lanterns guide travelers home. He hopes that both stars, and lanterns will one day guide him back to her.

- 22- “I swear” said I “that here is where I’ll sit
though caught and torn apart, bit after bit”.
-23
- 23- My oath was false when she of folk took fright.
For I had swore that all were sleeping tight.
-24
- 24- We talked, and when at length her fears were few.
her curls and tender limbs to me I drew.
-25
- 25- Our pleasure came, our talk was sweet and shy.
Fall tamed she was, and ready to comply.
-26
- 26- Her sire then knew that I her beau became
He was engloomed in dire, withering shame.
-27
- 27- His angry words were like a camel’s snort.¹⁸⁹
Me he sought to slay, but was not the slaying sort.
-28
- 28- Slay me? While sword lies by me while I sleep,
and shafts, like devils’ fangs, close by I keep?
-29
- 29- Spearman he’s not; no spear at me could throw.
Swordsman he’s not; nor archer skilled with bow.
-30

¹⁸⁹ A knotted rope was tied round the neck of a rogue camel to tame it, making the beast snort loudly in protest.

- 30- Will he slay me 'cause I her heart had won.
As the camel's heart is won when th' rubbing's done?¹⁹⁰
- 31
- 31- Though he's her sire, yet Selma knows indeed
that he but raves and cannot do the deed.
- 32
- 32- "I've known such lovely maids", him I could tell.
"Gazelles of grace by roy'lty raised so well".
- 33
- 33- Into a house I went one dusky day,
where full-fleshed dames did saunter by and sway
- 34
- 34- Soft were they in manner and in form.
Slim waists! Perfection far above the norm.
- 35
- 35- To paths of death through those of love they lead.
They lure the good through every dastard deed.
- 36
- 36- From them, fear of scandal turned me away
Though we no mutual loathing did betray.¹⁹¹
- 37
- 37- As if I've nev'r mounted with joy a steed.

¹⁹⁰ She- camels, when stricken with ailment, usually mange, are rubbed down with a tar-solution. He says Selma was love sick and I cured her, winning her heart, as the rubber wins the heart of the ailing camel he treats.

¹⁹¹ The verse uses "death" to mean "scandal", in the sense that scandal is so notorious that it does away with him as death does. He turns away from such women though there is nothing loathsome in his, or their, manner or appearance. Only the depraved character of such women turns him away. He is describing a brothel.

Nor anklet-wearing wench to bed did lead.¹⁹²

-38

38- 'Tis as if I've nev'r had full wine-skins bought,
nor steed spurred on that back by fright was brought.¹⁹³

-39

39- As if I've nev'r seen horsemen raid at morn
on stout steeds that on stouter shanks are born.

-40

40- Whose firm sinews their hardy shanks propel.
Whose stout hind bones their hinds with power swell.

-41

41- Hardest hoofs, fearless of being unshod.
's if on ostrich a rider's way had trod.¹⁹⁴

-42

42- I rise early while bird is still at nest
to leas where warring clans nev'r are at rest.¹⁹⁵

-43

43- This lea, to arms is closed from ev'ry side.
To heav'ly laden clouds, is open wide.

-44

44- Hard-tempered mare, whose legs still harder kick.

¹⁹² He laments the passing of his youth. Ageing makes him feel as if the pleasures of youth might just as well not have taken place.

¹⁹³ Spurring onward a frightened horse was considered one of the pleasures enjoyed by a rider.

¹⁹⁴ "rider" refers to a second rider. So light of movement is the horse, that the second rider feels as if he's mounted on an ostrich.

¹⁹⁵ The leas, lush pastures, are fought over by warring clans. At length the clans stay away from it, leaving a neutral outsider to enjoy it. The verse mentions heavy clouds for the lea; heavy rainfall making it unusually lush.

Reddish-black, lean and straight as weaver's stick.

-45

- 45- By it, pure-white oryx were tak'n aback.¹⁹⁶
Their legs, like Yem'ni cloaks, speckled in black.

-46

- 46- The oryx herd, galloping on in fright
were like horses covered in blankets white.¹⁹⁷

-47

- 47- At th'herd's rear was a huge and ageing bull.
Wide-backed, long-horned, short-nosed; tail thick and full.

-48

- 48- Both cows and bulls the hardy hunter slew
while I took count, and kept the herd in view.

-49

- 49- When I, forward, did this swift steed bespur,
I'm on a zooming eagle-hawk awhirr.

-50

- 50- An eagle that zooms down on "Sherba" hares .
From it, "Awral" foxes fled to their lairs.

-51

- 51- Th'eaglet, to feed on heart of bird, awaits
Fresh hearts—like grapes; dry ones—like dry, bad dates.

-52

- 52- Should I go for a modest life and meek.

¹⁹⁶ "By it": The mare.

¹⁹⁷ The verse mentions a location, "Jemza" where such horses are bred.

A pittance (not a kingdom) would I seek.

-53

- 53- But for greater glory I seek to claim.
My sort may well attain glory and fame.

-54

- 54- For one, as long as he remains alive,
braves all, and for what's wanted will e'er strive.

[41]

“Leave talk of plunder ”

Imru'ul Qays, while at refuge with Khalid b. 'Asm 'a al-Nabhani, was raided by the Jabila clan who drove away the poet's camels. He complained to his host, Khalid, who offered to retrieve his camels for him. Catching up with the raiders, Khalid hailed them “you've raided my neighbour!”. “You're neighbour he's not” they retorted. They then manhandled Khalid, pulled him down from his horse, and drove away the rest of his animals. Imru'ul Qays, disconsolate and deeply disappointed with Khalid, sought refuge with the Beni Tha'al clan. Here, he praises his new hosts:

-1

- 1- Leave talk of plunder; there's much to talk about,

And tell of how the mounts were driven out.¹⁹⁸

-2

2- As if “Dithars” camels while giving suck,
by mountain, not hill eagles, were bestruck¹⁹⁹

-3

3- For “Ba‘ith” had on “Khalid’s” honour played,
as he “Isam” had, earlier on, waylaid.²⁰⁰

-4

4- I like how short, pot-bellied Khalid walks.
Like beast, from drinking stopp’d, th’ water hole stalks²⁰¹

-5

5- “Aja” gave not whom refuge with them took.
Let warriors come who could’nt denial, brook.²⁰²

-6

6- My milch camels safely at th’hamlet stay.
Near “Ha’il” they graze every other day.²⁰³

-7

¹⁹⁸ This refers to Khalid’s ignominious attempt to retrieve Imru’ul Qays’s camels for him. In lampooning Khalid for his ineptitude, he is highlighting the disgrace of Khalid’s own mounts being taken away from him.

¹⁹⁹ “Dithar” was Imru’ul Qays camel herdsman. Khalid’s inept attempt he implies, was like Dithar being unwary enough when a powerful mountain eagle, as opposed to a smaller hill top one, struck a milch camel while suckling a foal.

²⁰⁰ “Ba‘ith” was one of the “Jadila” clan who plundered Imru’ul Qays’s camels. Khalid, the poet’s host, in pursuit of the Jadila to retrieve the stolen animals, was accosted by Ba‘ith, and others, who dismounted him and his men and drove away their mounts. The poet describes how Ba‘ith had deceived Khalid, taking away his mounts along with the poet’s plundered camels. It is not clear who Isam was, but the verse says that Isam had entrapped Khalid in earlier incidents.

²⁰¹ He is deriding Khalid, likening him to a beast that prevented from drinking, stalks around the water-hole disconsolate and sulking.

²⁰² “Aja” is the mountain homeland of the Tha‘al clan who gave the poet refuge earlier on.

²⁰³ Ha’il: probably the modern town of Ha’il in Saudi Arabia.

7- The herd is guarded by “Benu Thu‘al, close by.
Should “Sa‘ad “and “Na`il”s’ archers let arrows fly.²⁰⁴

-8

8- The herd, by tow’ring mountains, safely lay.
While young camel, with young antelope, play.

-9

9- Tow’ring mountains, that reddish clouds betop.
Like coloured gowns, down t’flow’ry slopes, they drop.

[42]

“O Mawiyah’s house ”

-1

1- O Mawiyahs house, silent at “Ha`il” stands
before plains; Mount “‘Aqil”; and verdant lands²⁰⁵

-2

2- Mountain echoes rebound throughout its halls,
Is mute and deaf to one that to it calls.

-3

3- Ask “Dawdan”; slaves stick-driv’n with angry cries
“What made you ‘gainst the valiant lion rise”?²⁰⁶

-4

²⁰⁴ The Benu Tha‘al were the poet’s allies and protectors, “Sa‘ad” and “Na`il” were of the Beni Nabhan; the previously mentioned “Khalid’s” clan.

²⁰⁵ Mount “‘Aqil”: at Yamama.

²⁰⁶ Dawdan: A clan of the Beni Assad who revolted against the authority of the Poet’s father, Hujr.

- 4- In joy my eyes rest with vengeance sweet.
 “Malik ‘Amr”; “Kahil” did their dire end meet.²⁰⁷
- 5
- 5- Sons of “Ghanm” bin “Dawdan” in ire we slew.
 Their highest ‘pon their lowest down we threw.
- 6
- 6- We struck them straight, parried left and right
 With shafts returned for shafts, when archers fight.
- 7
- 7- Like locust swarms, steeds were thick ‘pon the fray,
 as thirsty birds to water wing their way.
- 8
- 8- We heaped their dead whose legs, after a while,
 Looked like a steadily rising woodpile.
- 9
- 9- To wine! Now that I have the battle won,
 I’d abstained till my deadly deed was done.²⁰⁸
- 10
- 10- Now guiltless, I alone of drink partake.
 And ne’er into others’ drink-sessions, break.²⁰⁹

[43]

²⁰⁷ “Malik”, “‘Amr”, “Kahil”- Beni Assad clans the Poet wreaked vengeance on for his father’s murder.

²⁰⁸ When told of his father’s murder, he vowed never to take wine till he wreaked vengeance on the Beni Assad, his father’s slayers.

²⁰⁹ Now that he had had his vengeance, he feels absolved of his guilt, his guilt being his vengeance left unfulfilled. His passions for vengeance now satisfied, he wishes to drink alone; and is disinclined to intrude into others’ drinking circles.

“Howdah and pack camels at ‘Azl”²¹⁰

Describing his camel at an early stage, when still a boy.

-1

- 1- Howdah and pack camels, by ‘Azl, recline.
So incongruous is their state from nine.

-2

- 2- What, from travelling with them, holds you back?
Except what you in maturity, lack?²¹¹

-3

- 3- For t’ morrow, and a day, you’ve made me yearn
But worst of misers all, in th’end, you’ve turned.²¹²

-4

- 4- O for a belle who from oth’rs turned away.
In slow’st steps I would towards her sway.

-5

- 5- For I will not, through force, to love be wed.
Nor through deceit to hunt e’er will be led.

-6

- 6- Distant barren waste lands, fatal to all
I’ve crossed on ped’gree camels, stout and tall.

-7

- 7- O’er night they crop whate’er they find the best .
While I, on th’ saddle- frame, my elbows rest.

²¹⁰ ‘Azl: a location, a caravan station.

²¹¹ The verse identifies his own immaturity as: his boyhood, and “his small” (inexperienced) mind.

²¹² He is addressing the camel station, expressing his yearning for travel which the camel station has denied him.

-8

8- A sword for pillow, sharp- edged; wide its blade,
It's grooves like trails that crawling ants had made.

-9

9- They call swords "burnished" ! But this sword of mine
of "burnishing" has never shown a sign.

-10

10- Ruined home! my folk there no longer live.
And gloom rebuffs what they no longer give.

-11

11- And I looked upon the abode, now gone
with the full loving eye of hind for faun.

-12

12- I, like hind, with fullest throat and eye
show such loving care; that none can deny.

-13

13- Amorous ways of pleasure I forsook
My mind awak'd, so paths of wisdom took.

-14

14- With what I need, 'tis God who best equips.
Good deeds are th'best supplies in saddle-scrips.

-15

15- One; keeps to Right's straightest and narrow road.
Another; falls, weighted with deprav'ty's load.

-16

16- I forsake those who shy from me and spurn

And turn to those whose 'ffections to me turn.

-17

- 17- A broth'r is one who'll stand for the forlorn.
One who's well-natured, well-mannered, well-born.

-18

- 18- Who's sweet; who if to his house you e'er come
He'll cry out: "you're most and truly welcome"

-19

- 19- With him at drink, and he with drink high-blown,
him I excuse; his surfeit I'll condone.

-20

- 20- With your twine, mine I will so entwine,
With your arrows' feathers, I'll feather mine.

-21

- 21- Your footprints I'll in best of faith follow
Unless o'ertak'n by some other fellow.

-22

- 22- What's good in me you have well-known, and marked
At night call'r like me, your dogs have nev'r barked.

[44]

"O Thu'al "

In praise of Beni Tha'al

-1

- 1- O Thu'al! and where, so far from me, are they.

I wish to these their mounts they'd come and stay.²¹³

-2

2- At “Amr Dermaa’s” fine house I once had stayed .
So generous! So fine the fare he laid.

-3

3- My milch camels ‘tween “Jaww” and “Mistah” raise
their young, who with land-fowl, together graze .

-4

4- Herdsmen I have who for the herd do care
so much, that I tell them their care to spare²¹⁴

-5

5- To “Ma^cad”; “Ibad”; “Kinda”, and Tayy proclaim:
That I to “Thu^cal” e’er thankfull shall remain²¹⁵

[45]

“As honoured guest with honoured host I stayed ”

-1

1- As guest my gear at “Tha`als” abobe I laid.
As honoured guest with honoured hosts I stayed.

-2

2- Of all good folk and neighbours true and fine
“Abu Hanbal” did his fine peers outshine.

-3

²¹³ “their mounts” refers to mounts “Aja” and “Sulma” in the Tayy homelands.

²¹⁴ His over-zealous herdsmen drive, tend and keep the herd; driving away anyone anywhere near the animals. They are so conscientious that he has to tell them “Enough! Do not over do it”.

²¹⁵ “Ma^cad”: A clan of the Beni Assad. “Ibad”: a clan of Beni Temim.

- 3- To good so close, so far from being mean.
Gen'rous when folk and times are hard and lean.

[46]

“Who hopes”

-1

- 1- Who hopes, in my domain, himself to show.
Once was fast friend, now fierce and fighting foe.

-2

- 2- My cavalry he'll face round his domed tent.
Let his host come; it will by mine be rent.

-3

- 3- Will he approach? Yet one cannot deny
that friendship stirs what deep in man does lie.²¹⁶

-4

- 4- I've never with others threw in my lot.
Nor am, with appeasing others, besot.

-5

- 5- Except brothers with whom I'm quite content.
Who with me share, good birth, deed, and intent.

-6

- 6- To such, in faith am I so closely tied.
Faith that wards off hardship from ev'ry side.

:

-7

- 7- Faith rose 'tween “Aqrun” and “’Ajbal”. Said I:
“For such fine faith I'd let my fam'ly die”²¹⁷

²¹⁶ He implies that the foe attacking him today may well have been his friend of yesterday; and that one cannot predict how one will conduct oneself in such a situation.

-8

8- Care would, to its, foregone conclusion come.
I fear it would away with me have done.

-9

9- On “Ghatafan” fell this worrisome curse.
It’s folk, from home did in anguish disperse.

-10

10- Cauldron!, kindled below with ire and toil
With hardwood stoked, the pot was brought to boil.

[47]

“Drinking”

-1

1- As if fine wine; and rain pouring down in haste.
And scent of flow’r, and honey’s dulcet taste,

-2

2- All on the cool pearl of her teeth were sent.
When stars up to th’ heavens made their ascent.

[48]

“List’n not, echoes”

Recited when he grudgingly asked for the Beni ‘Adwan for refuge
after his fathers’ murder.

²¹⁷ A fast and lasting friendship was struck between these two locations.

-1

- 1- “Adwan”s “Fahm”s favours ask I’d rather not.
List’n not, echoes, “Wa’il’n Kinda are the top.”²¹⁸

-2

- 2- To el’quence they reply with snort and growl
Small eagles they, their stature that of fowl

[49]

“Tell Shihab and ‘Asim”

Addressing Shihab b. Shaddad b. Th^calaba; and ‘Asim b. ‘Ubayd b. Th^calaba.

-1

- 1- Tell “Shihab”, “‘Asim” and “Malik” as well.
Have they been told of what had them befall?

-2

- 2- At “Khaw^ca” we left your injured and dead.
As ghastly ghouls your captives we had led.

-3

- 3- Around our saddling, wretch’dly do they walk
So hungry, lean, ’n mis’rable; they sulk and gawk.

“Shihab” replied to this lampoon as follows:

-1

- 1- O Imru’ul Qays! Why slander us so?
Your folk and wealth we took in whiles ago.

²¹⁸ He resents asking the inferior “‘Adwan” and “Fahm” clans for hospitality. He addresses the mountain echoes to stop their ears as he calls out to the two clans requesting their assistance; as he holds them to be far below his own tribe of Kinda in birth.

-2

2- That; and many a blackened Kindite hag.
Meets people with face like soiled'n tatt'red rag.

-3

3- With us they've stayed for spells long, dry and hot.
With us shared dried meat 'n roots; else we had not.

-4

4- You we've attacked in but one morning raid,
With host close-packed as hardest ground is laid.²¹⁹

-5

5- Our doughty steeds, at charge so swift and straight.
That pant under their heavy armoured weight.

[50]

"Time is but a ghoul"

In reproach of Time

-1

1- Have I not said that Time is mean and dour.
A ghoul that does good men and true devour.

-2

2- It, "Dhil Riyash", from his domains had swept²²⁰
Both mountains and plains were in his kingdom kept.

²¹⁹ Hardest ground refers to a specific location; the hard rocky ground round Mount "'Al".

²²⁰ "It", throughout these lines, refers to Time. "Dhil Riyash" an ancient King of Yemen.

-3

- 3- It's inspired will into th'horizons strives.
To eastern ends, it, conq'ring vanguards drives.

-4

- 4- Up to the sun it rises as a wall.
Up th'mountains, it "Gog", "Magog" hords did forestall.²²¹

-5

- 5- Time may "Shanu`a" fell, or may displace.
It'll show "Ghassan" as th'avuncular race²²²

-6

- 6- Their glory, Time, is yours. If they're in shame,
the shame is yours; you'll have yourself to blame.

[51]

"Free-flowing are your tears"

-1

- 1- Free-flowing are your tears, as though your eyes
were tear-ducts that with channels vie in size.

-2

- 2- As though your eyes were streams by palmy shade
whose flowing courses wide and deep are made.

-3

- 3- O Layla's folk! And where might Layla be?
So very far out of your reach is she.

²²¹ Time rises like a mountain-wall up to the Sun, blocking the advance of the devastating hords of "Gog", "Magog"; a legendary race who indulged in orgies of sweeping destruction.

²²² Time may do away with the "Shanu`a", a tribe of Yemini origins and show "Ghassan" as the paternal uncle of other tribal peoples.

-4

4- O'er lifeless barren ground I range alone
on camel that to th'age of nine had grown.

-5

5- 'Tis swift and smooth, its veins in deep flesh lie.
It's shoulder blades, as mount "Uthal", rise high.

-6

6- A loner, like an ag'd rogue bull, unkept.
By howling wind, and drizzle, is beswept.

-7

7- As swift as distressed hind that's lost its young;
that darts about, in nervous speed upstrung.

-8

8- A pace-setter; its strides are widely spaced.
Propelled by legs that fast forwardly race.

-9

9- Alone, through wide, low lying land, I crossed.
My heart, with awesome fears, was shak'n and tossed.

-10

10- Down 'pon this land poured summer rains in floods.
It's streamlets coloured rich, as "Hira's" goods.²²³

-11

11- I proceed upon a fine, pedigree mare
unfoaled. She's hard; dry grass her only fare.

-12

²²³ The Lakhmite capital, Hira, was known for its richly coloured artifacts and wares.

- 12- Bird-like is she, her head a magpie's beak
that picks like tweezers, 's does a hectic freak.
-13
- 13- She's like those birds their hectic lives that lead.
So hard at work their famished chicks to feed.
-14
- 14- Such birds their chicks do spoil with choicest fare:-
The succulant hearts of prime "Awral" hare.²²⁴
-15
- 15- I raided with whole battalions of horse.
It's squads were vanguards leading on th' main force
-16
- 16- With th' raiding horsemen tense I was and tight
Shoed hoofs shone bright; 's locust wings in sunlight.
-17
- 17- Their camps we struck hard, on a bright day's morn
For men, death. Th' rest were, 'way as captives borne.

[52]

"War is, at first"

Describing war and its dire sequels:

- 1- War is, at first, so like a pretty girl.
Whose luring charms to simple minds unfurl.

-1

²²⁴ "Awral": plateau, higher ground. The comparison between his mare and predatory birds serves to show the horse as an over-energetic hunter.

-2

- 2- But as it grinds away, its fires at rage,
it turns to a manless hag bent with age.

-3

- 3- Her hair turned white. How she has grown so old.
Hideous; loathsome is she to kiss and hold.

[53]

“An armoured knight”

-1

- 1- An armoured knight my lance his chest laid bare.
My fluted sword his stature down did tear.

-2

- 2- In th’ lists his grieved horsemen I left to weep.
Vultures were left about their fare to leap.

[54]

“To whom do these homelands belong”

Here he lampoons Suba‘y b. ‘Awf. b. Malik b. Handhala; one of the Beni Tuhya. Imru’ul Qays had approached him with a request which was declined. Suba‘y then recited derogatory verses vilifying him, and Imru’ul Qays retorted as follows:

-1

- 1- To whom had these “Siham” home lands belonged?

With which “Amya”’s, the heights; “Iqdam” are thronged?²²⁵

-2

2- “Safa”; “Atit”; “Sahatayn”; “Ghadere”,
Ewes ‘n white deer once walked together there

-3

3- There “Hind”; “Rabab”; “Fertna”; “Lamees” lived once.
Before time’s turns’s us all did cruelly trounce²²⁶

-4

4- Steer your mounts t’wards these ruin’d abodes of yore
To weep there ‘s “Ibn Khitham” did long before.²²⁷

-5

5- Their swaying howdahs, early to be seen
Hued, ‘s “Shawkan” dates that ready t’pick have been.²²⁸

-6

6- With perfume, houries well their skins o’ersooth.
Their faces fair; their bodies soft and smooth²²⁹.

-7

7- For long whiles at th’ ruins I lingered on.
Bedazed, as if, in drink quite high I’d gone.

-8

²²⁵ “Siham”; the two “Amyas”, “Iqdam” are mountainous heights. He sees that these homelands have changed hands. They are now occupied by the Beni Tuhyā. Formerly they were the abode of several women he loved.

²²⁶ “Hind” et al..... women he once loved who now have been brutally scattered by events.

²²⁷ Ibn Khitham: The one who preceded Imru’ul Qays in lamenting the ruined abodes of loved ones.

²²⁸ Shawkan: a location in ‘al-Yemen known for its fine palms. The howdahs are tall as palms, and as highly coloured. The green palms are also red and yellow in their dates at harvest time.

²²⁹ Hourī: the ultimate in female beauty. The beauty of a hourī lies in her eyes: the pure whiteness of the eye’s white co-existing with a jet-black pupil. The houries here refer to the women who once lived in the abodes described here, now in ruins.

- 8- As if I'd drunk wine, red as blood of deer,
from "Ana" 'n "Shabam", strong, 'n full of cheer²³⁰
- 9
- 9- Such potent wine, loos'ning a drinkers' tongue
As if with fever one was highly strung.
- 10
- 10- Swift-paced camel! I prod, it hurries on,
as ostrich flees hot sand, quite soon is gone.
- 11
- 11- With head held high, she hardships takes in stride.
Although the cut in bleeding pad be wide.²³¹
- 12
- 12- To have me slain, her efforts were in vain.
Said I: "nough! Slay'ng me, wrongful will remain".
- 13
- 13- Yet her I thanked for her vigorous speed
And wished she'd e'er her way in safety lead.
- 14
- 14- "Badr"; "Kutayfa" "Agil"; "Armam"; I fear
are far apart, yet they she brings so near.
- 15
- 15- If you t' "Suba'y" a verse message recite,
tell him: "Should you 'nother 'gainst me incite..."
- 16

²³⁰ `Ana: a town on the upper Euphrates in `al-`Iraq. "Shabam" an unidentified location, famed for its wine.

²³¹ The pad to a camel is what a hoof is to a horse.

- 16- “From threat’ning me you had better desist.
For I’m well-tried and ready to resist”.
-17
- 17- Awake am I when all are fast asleep.
The riser I, when heads to pillows keep.
-18
- 18- My free-flowing favours “Ma`ad” had praised.
And “Hujr’s” name to glorious heights I’ve raised.
-19
- 19- I challenge th’ awesome champion, sans delay.
In war my arrows never go astray.
-20
- 20- My uncle “Ibn Kabsha”’s standing I’ve well-known.
And “Abu Yazid” ‘n his men of renown.²³²
-21
- 21- A town in which I’m harmed, I will forsake.
And ne’er a home, `xcept home, will I e’er take

[55]

“May God uglify the “Barajim””

Recited at the slaying of Shurahbil b. ‘Amr b. Hujr, Imru’ul Qays’s uncle.

-1

- 1- May God uglify th’ “Barajim”, one ‘n all
Cut “Yarbu`u’s” nose, and “Darim” t’dust let fall.²³³

²³² The verse specifies Ibn Kabsha as his maternal uncle, and Abu Yazid as his paternal uncle. “Men of renown” refers to Abu Yazid’s retainers who follow him faithfully and are known widely for their loyalty.

-2

- 2- May he send down on “Mujash‘i’s” house a curse.
They’re rags that women their menstru’al periods nurse.²³⁴

-3

- 3- They’d fought not for their lord, and so defend.
Nor him have warned and out to safety send.

-4

- 4- They failed their neighbour; so unlike “‘Uwayr”²³⁵
Who stood for “Hind” and challenged all to dare.

[56]

“When I al-Mu‘alla for refuge asked”

Praising “al-Mu‘alla” , one of the Beni Taym, a clan of the Tayy tribe who gave him refuge when ‘al-Munthir, king of Hira was pursuing him ‘al-Mu‘alla had stood up for the poet, successfully warding off his pursuer.²³⁶

-1

- 1- When I “‘al-Mu‘alla” for refuge asked,
twas as if in safe mountain fastness I basked.

-2

- 2- ‘Iraq’s king could not’ “ Mu‘alla” o’erwhelm.
Nor could so do the king of Syria’s realm.

²³³ The Barajim, Yarb‘u, and Darim are all clans of the Beni Temim tribe, involved in slaying his uncle Shurahbil.

²³⁴ Mujashi : another clan of the Beni Temim involved in slaying Shurahbil.

²³⁵ “‘Uwayr”: is ‘Uwayr b. Shajna ‘al-‘Utaridi, who gave Imru‘ul Qays refuge when foes were thick upon him. ‘Uwayr had stood at Hind’s (the poet’s sister) door and dared anyone to harm her.

²³⁶ Al-Munthir king of the pro-Persian Lakhmid state with Hira as its capital, saw in Imru‘ul Qays a potential danger on two counts: First, his pro-Byzantine propensities and second, his attempts to re-establish the Kingdom of Kinda, which, would it come to pass, would constitute, as a client state of Constantinople, a direct threat to the Lakhmid kingdom of Hira.

-3

- 3- For he “Two-Plaits’s” high host from me repelled ²³⁷.
And safely had the king’s dire threat dispelled.

-4

- 4- Imru’ul Qays bin Hujr ne’er will take fright,
when Beni Taym’s lamps turn darkness to light.

[57]

“On mount “Sayl^ca”

Imru’ul Qays was in “Dammooon”, in Hadhramaut, when news came
in of his father’s murder. He recited:

-1

- 1- Whilst I, and friends on “Mount Sayla’” were high.
He came with news that sleep from eyes let fly.

-2

- 2- Said I to th’ rider who from far did hail:
“Coherent be, ‘n make clear your garbled wail”.

-3

- 3- Said he “Let curses “‘Amr” ‘n “Kahil” enfold,
They’ve ravaged “Hujr” and left him lying cold”.

[58]

“Nothing binds us”

Rebuking those reproaching him in the aftermath of his father’s
murder.

²³⁷ Two-Plaits: King al-Harith of Hira; who had two long plaits on either side of his head. Al-Mu’alla had stood up firmly for Imru’ul Qays against at Munthir’s host which the verse describes as “cloud-high”.

-1

- 1- Why're you with me so rife with your reproach?
And did not "Hujr" and "'Usm" with blame approach²³⁸

-2

- 2- No, by God's oath, we by nought are bound.
Till th' "Jeshm" paying courtesy calls, are found.²³⁹

-3

- 3- Till jackals prowl war grounds bethick'nd with gore
Where th'dead are dead 's "Thamood" and "Iram of yore."²⁴⁰

[59]

"Wild Asses at the water-pool".

It is said that these verses guided a delegation, stricken with thirst, sent from 'al-Yemen to the Prophet Mohammad, almost a century after Imru'ul Qays recited these two lines of verse. The delegation had lost it's way, but knew, from these verses, that water was somewhere near. A rider passed them by, and a member of the delegation recited the verses to him, hoping he would guide them to water. "who spoke these lines?" the rider asked. "Imru'ul Qays" was the reply. "He spoke well" the rider replied." There is "Dharij", over there". The delegation proceeded to the pool, fringed with vegetation, and filled their water-skins for the remainder of their journey.

-1

- 1- And seeing th' water they were so in need

²³⁸ He is rebuking those who blame him for his father's murder. Hujr himself, he says, should be blamed for his own fate. 'Usm was probably one of his fathers closest retainers.

²³⁹ The verse refers to the poet's uncles as the "Beni Jashm"; a euphamism for lions. He affirms his insistence on vengeance for his father's murder and there being no possibility of reconciliation whatsoever with the culprits. The verse refers to the poet's clan as being like lions-Beni Jashm- that do not pay courtesy calls on their adversaries.

²⁴⁰ He foresees corpse-strewn battlegrounds with his adversaries. "Thamood" a legendary Arabian tribe annihilated for its iniquity by a devastating wind, Sarsar, that swept through them for seven days and eight nights. "Iram", also an extinct legendary city famed for its gardens and numerous, high pillars.

Yet feared their quaking white stripes yet may bleed²⁴¹

-2

- 2- And so they sought the spring by “Dharij” near,
enfringed with greensome shade, rising thick’n sheer.

[60]

“‘Uwayr and the likes of ‘Uwayr”

Praising ‘Uwayr b. Shejna of Beni Temim, who gave refuge to Hind, Imru’ul Qays’s sister after their father’s death. He also praises the Beni ‘Awf.

-1

- 1- Handhal! Had you stood up in our defence,
my pleased praise for you would’ve been intense.

-2

- 2- To ask base folk for refuge once I tried.
A treach’rous clan asylum me denied.

-3

- 3- Not so “‘Uwayr”; his likes; his goodly band.
For th’care worn in black nights; “Safwan” will e’er stand.²⁴²

-4

- 4- The hearts of “Beni ‘Awf”! so pure and bright.
In times of trial, their faces glowing white.²⁴³

-5

- 5- They gave their distressed kin comfort and aid.
Th’trip ‘tween ‘Iraq ‘n Najran, togeth’r they made²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Thirsty wild-ass are glad to find water, yet quake with fear of lurking hunters.

²⁴² “‘Uwayr” and “Safwan” were of the Beni Temim who gave refuge to Imru’ul Qays’s sister.

²⁴³ “white face” signifies a reflection of good deeds, clear conscience, and righteous conduct.

- 6- For they're Gods' chos'n; and He them had well-blessed.
True to their word; to neighbours give their best.

[61]

"Ruined abodes"

-1

- 1- Ruined abodes! I, down with grief am weighed.
You're scripts on palm with time away did fade²⁴⁵

-2

- 2- Abodes of "Hind"; "Rabab", 'n "Fartan"; so fair.
O for those "Bidlan" nights of joy so rare²⁴⁶

-3

- 3- Love calls at nights, and I to it respond.
At me rest eyes of those of whom I'm fond.

-4

- 4- When deep in thought in nights of gloom and care.
I know what fools, to know, would never dare.

-5

- 5- When deep in thought in nights of gloom and care
I dream of maid whose songs and strums are fair²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ The Beni ʿAwf, so well praised here for their chivalry, hurried to comfort "their kin", the family of the poet's slain uncle Shurahbil, and accompanied them, for their safety, all the way from ʿal-ʿIraq to Najran, in the Yemen, delivering them to Shurahbil's (and the poet's) Kinda tribe.

²⁴⁵ "Scripts on palms"; Palm branches, stripped of leaves, were used as writing material, especially in ʿal-Yemen. Inscriptions on such material, with time, became illegible. The abodes had faded away from their former pride and glory, to ruins, as inscriptions on palm pulp fade away with time.

²⁴⁶ "Bidlan": a high land town in ʿal-Yemen.

²⁴⁷ The verse specifies her strumming on the lute.

-6

6- Lute's tunes; more vibrant than hosts' din and drum.
It's tenor rich when hands upon it strum.

-7

7- When deep in thought in nights of gloom and care,
I long to charge on supple steed and spare.

-8

8- Swift-shanked; at canter cool and at its ease.
At gallop full; yet faster forward flees.

-9

9- It pounds on hoofs that hardest stone can break.
It's supple pasterns all in stride can take.

-10

10- Through grazing dark and green; luscious and high.
On 'long short-haired steed mounted, I let fly.

-11

11- It reels; it charges; veers, retreats- at once
Like oryx ram it feeds and has it's bounce.

-12

12- It's back is supple, t'right, or left when led
Like "Rukhama" roots when by rain are fed²⁴⁸

-13

13- Enjoy your days; they do with joys abound
Where pleasures 'nd fine women are to be found.

²⁴⁸ "Rukhama": surface roots, normally brittle. Rain-fed, they turn rope-like in flexibility. The horse is as flexible.

-14

- 14- The fair is deer-like; th' dark like pretty doll
Th' virtuous 's coy; the gaudy's long looks lull.

-15

- 15- Recall th' "Nabhan" woman, alone she cries
Her folk had left; she tearful left my eyes.²⁴⁹

-16

- 16- Drizzle; shower; downpour, is my tear-flow.
From spray t' torrents, down th' tears do go.

-17

- 17- They 're now like hurried men's wat'r skins; o'er- toiled²⁵⁰
O'er-used, worn-out, and never have been oiled.

[62]

"On ruined abodes of love, lets stand to mourn"

Recited on his way to Constantinople

-1

- 1- On ruined abodes of love lets stand to mourn.
On outlines faded of past times forlorn.

-2

- 2- It's now become, after long years have passed,
like monks old scripts whose lines no longer last.

-3

- 3- It, folks' sorrows stirred, when it I recalled,

²⁴⁹ "Nabhan": a clan of the Tayy tribe. The poet had stayed with them for a while. He appears to have been impressed with the lonely sad charm of this woman.

²⁵⁰ They: his eyes, worn out from weeping.

and stirred past aches that once my soul begalled.

-4

4- My tears soon drenched my cloak; as if they spilled
from holed water-skins with water that were filled.

-5

5- If one's secrets from one's tongue fails to keep,
secrets entrusted t' him, from him, will seep.

-6

6- See me on Jaber's litter, ill, I lay;
my clothes, my death-sheets; 'n wind flapping away.

-7

7- O for wretches whose foes in grave I've laid.
O for captives whose ransoms I have paid.

-8

8- I woke fine lads who were with sleep haggard,
Like th' blind, they stumb'ld; like tott'ring drunks, staggered.

-9

9- Vast lands I've crossed, that windswept were and wide,
on swift camel, supple in its stride.

-10

10- To the foxgrape, to graze, my mount I sent.
O'er head; low thund'ry clouds oft came, and went.

-11

11- My mount, a massive temple of a steed.
Such speed it gives before you ask for speed.

-12

- 12- In speed 'tis like harts that dart and slip,
When "Thahlan" vultures swoop to fasten grip.²⁵¹
- 13
- 13- Expanses; useless as guts of wild-ass.
On high, lean-waisted steed, straight through, I pass²⁵²
- 14
- 14- It jostles beasts of burden, plodding on their ways
Like supple branch, 'gainst stiffer branches sways
- 15
- 15- An army great; as 'Unay'im's wood 's dense,
To foes moves close, its' will and pow'r intense.²⁵³
- 16
- 16- With them I rode; the way was long and strained.
Their beasts were tired; their horses trudged unreined.²⁵⁴
- 17
- 17- The steeds, now dead, of rest were much in need
Were ringed by vultures t'tear at them and feed.

[63]

"His realms from 'Al-'Iraq t' 'Oman extend".
In praise of 'al-Harith, an ancestor of Imru'ul Qays.

-1

- 1- Will kings such as 'al-Harith e'er be sent.
Iraq t' Oman bestretch his realms' extent.

²⁵¹ "Thahlan": a high mountain range in whose peaks rapacious vultures thrive.

²⁵² The wild-ass was inedible. It was hunted purely for sport.

²⁵³ Unay'im: a thickly wooded valley.

²⁵⁴ Their pack-camels were exhausted; their horses plodded on wearily without reins.

-2

- 2- T'live near "Beni Shamaj" is shame indeed.
No other shame this shame e'er could exceed.²⁵⁵

-3

- 3- They offer their ewes, as if they're alms.
O Merc'ful One! Your mercy without qualms!²⁵⁶

[64]

"You've ruined your favours"

Reproaching one of the Beni Tayy who had reminded the poet of some favours the Tayy man had bestowed on him:

-1

- 1- You've ruined what you in favour have bestowed.
Th'gen'rous do not remind of favours owed.

[65]

"O eye, for me cry"

Lamenting the cruel turns of time.

!

-1

- 1- O eye, for me in copious tearflow cry.
And cry for kings who've long since passed us by²⁵⁷

-2

²⁵⁵ The verse identifies this clan, loathsome to the poet as "Beni Shamja b. Jarm".

²⁵⁶ Ewes were loaned to neighbours in need of milk. The animals were returned, with gratitude, when no longer required. He vilifies the Beni Shamaja in that they loan their ewes to neighbours as if they are giving alms to beggars. He cries out to providence for mercy; having been reduced to the deplorable state of asking favours from the likes of the Beni Shamaja.

²⁵⁷ Al-Muthir, King of Hira, was a boon companion of the Kings of Kinda. He envied their chivalry and superior appearance, so much so that he ordered his retainers to follow, and slay them. The assassins caught up with Kinda's Royal party. There, the Kings of Kinda were slain. Of this bloody deed Imru'ul Qays recited this lament.

2- The kings of “Hujr bin ‘Amr”’s line and domain,
in one black night driv’n out they were, and slain.

-3

3- If only they’d fell fighting in honour’s field,
not their lives at “Merina” so cheaply yield.

-4

4- Their heads weren’t washed, t’pur’ty to be restored.
Uncleansed remained, with blood besmeared and gored.²⁵⁸

-5

5- O’er their dead bodies hungry vultures fly,
then swoop to prize the brow and pluck the eye.

[66]

“A Lance-like flame”

Describing his lance.

-1

1- I’cquired a lance, whose hotly pointed blade
so like a gleaming smokeless flame was made.

[67]

“By Course hands dispersed”

Lamenting the cruel turns of time.

-1

1- None roused this passion, burning hot and high
but ru’ned homes that ‘tween “Yethbul”n ’and “Riqqan” lie²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ In burial traditions, the dead were thoroughly washed, as they are today, and then sheet-winded before burial. He laments that his murdered ancestors were not given this consecration.

²⁵⁹ “Yethbul” and “Riqqan” are identified as two mountains in the possession of Beni ‘Amr b. Kilab.

-2

- 2- A tarred camel, with water-buckets, strived
At night, before th'wat'r-camels arrived.²⁶⁰

-3

- 3- A thick-palmed man the loaded camel led
The water splashed th'man's chest, and beard, and head.

[68]

"I wish I had"

-1

- 1- In "Himyar" I, as stranger, fear not t'stay,
Nor fear to "Hamadan's" gate t'make my way.

-2

- 2- Nor in "Dhifar" to totter 'nd grub my lot.
So like a famished wretch I be; or not.

-3

- 3- 'Stead 'f mis'ry, I wish rulers' role was mine.
'Stead of on pips, on ven'son I could dine.²⁶¹

[69]

"If wealth be not camels, goats let it be"

-1

- 1- If wealth be not camels, let goats it be.

²⁶⁰ The mangy camel, smeared with tar, strives on with its load of water-buckets. It's black coating of tar blending in with night-time darkness; and arrives earlier than other healthier water-loaded camels.

²⁶¹ Pips here refer to fruit pips of the "Dom" tree. The pips are edible; eaten when no other food is available.

For old goats horns, in length, like sticks, grow free.²⁶²

-2

2- At “Waqisat”, for them, pastures were lush.
And at “Aram” spring rain for them did gush.

-3

3- When milked, they sound a ringing plaintive bleat.
Like furn’ral wails that boom across a street.²⁶³

-4

4- She pours her milk in rich and flowing haste,
As if milk pails were tied onto her waist.

-5

5- So she’ll supply her folk with cheese and oil
And what is wealth but food and drink sans toil²⁶⁴

[70]

“Lost Lineage”

When Hujr, the poet’s father was slain, his daughter Hind took refuge with ‘Uwayr b. Shijna, and his Beni ‘Awf clan. His folk said to him “Take their wealth, for it will soon be taken by others”. He rebuked them, and instead, at night, he accompanied Hind, leading her camel himself, all the way across the dunes to Najran. There, he said to her “These are your people. I have done my duty in protecting you”. ‘Uwayr was praised by Imru’ul Qays in several poems, such as this.

²⁶² Camels were considered the highest form of wealth. While lamenting his penury in not possessing large herds of pedigree camels, he is content with ageing goats whose horns grow “straight as sticks” with age.

²⁶³ The “street” here refers to the street-like open space separating two sides of a community.

²⁶⁴ ‘Al-‘Asma’i doubts whether Imru’ul Qays actually recited these lines. One with regal ambitions could hardly find contentment in the lot of a goatherd. Mohammad ‘al-Fadhl Ibrahim suspects that these lines were recited out of bitterness; the sylvan contentment being concealed protestation against the turns of time making him content with being a goatherd.

-1

1- Beni Awf had a glorious lineage built.
But some of their own let it with'r and wilt.

-2

2- For sure they will for needy neighbours stand,
When kith and kin decline a helping hand.

-3

3- They've not, as "Handhal", done th'treach'rous deed
T'hand o'er refuge-seekers. Treach'ry indeed.²⁶⁵

-4

4- "Handhal", "Himyar", "Udas", "Ast"—rogues they're all.
Strap-led burden beasts, low in worth and small.²⁶⁶

-5

5- But fine Uwayr has nobly cleared his debts.
For he no slur beslimes, and no charge besets.

[71]

"O for Hind's heart-pangs".

Imru'ul Qays recited these lines as he was about to raid the Beni Assad in vengeance for his father, whom the Beni Assad killed. He attacked the Beni Kinana, the Beni Assad's cousins by mistake. Here, he addresses Hind, his sister, (or daughter) complaining to her of his anguish.

-1

1- O Hind's heart pangs! Those I've pursued, well-armed;

²⁶⁵ The Beni Handhal had treacherously handed over the poet's uncle, Shurahbil, to his enemies. Shurahbil was then immediately slain by 'Abu Hanash 'al-Taghlibi.

²⁶⁶ "Himyar", "Udas" and "Ast" were of the Beni Handhal whom the Poet reviles as treacherous. He reserves especial loathing for "Ast" whom he describes as a lowly beast of burden led by a strap.

if caught, your pains would soothe; have ‘scaped unharmed.

-2

- 2- From punishment, their brothers had them freed,
Yet both, to be punished, shall be decreed.²⁶⁷

-3

- 3- On “‘Ilba’s” tracks set off many a steed.
If him they caught, they would have done the deed²⁶⁸

[72]

“O Selma’s home”

-1

- 1- O Selma’s home! Whose sand banks have blown away²⁶⁹
That once at “Aqil’s” gentle slopes did lay

-2

- 2- Is mute when called; leveled without a trace.
Tongue-tied a caller is at such a place.

-3

- 3- O Selm! Have you aught that you can give²⁷⁰
to one who does in gen’rous honour live?

-4

- 4- One who in full faith keeps his secrets deep.
One you’ll not fear, who to his word will keep.

²⁶⁷ The Beni Kinana saved their brothers (Their cousins, in fact) from retribution, but paid the price.

²⁶⁸ Ilba b. ‘al-Harith ‘al Kahili was the one who killed Imru’ul Qays’s father.

²⁶⁹ A tent’s lower ends were sand-banked for reinforcement. The tent removed, its former site remained identifiable by the sand banks that once surrounded it. Even these sand banks, he says, have blown away.

²⁷⁰ Selm: for Selma.

-5

5- Sulayma, whom love has so firmly fraught.²⁷¹
Is like a hind, in hunter's snares, is caught.

-6

6- Sulayma has ne'er by hard times been drained.
Ne'er basked in scenic spots; by drab unpained.²⁷²

-7

7- One, friends, is by love struck; one by lust.
Is treatment of the just same as th' unjust?

-8

8- Is honest man, who to his folk speaks true
At one with who to what is false speeds through?

-9

9- Are those depraved at one with those who're wise?
Are th' judicious, and fools, in th' self-same guise?

-10

10- Ask many a leprous and stick-driv'n slave,
"why your upstart attempt on lion so brave?"

-11

11- As crescent moon in heaven's high was he.
Of bounty, king; whose bounty gave most free.

-12

12- So thick our muster of red-russet steed.
As thick as forest is, with "Basham" treed.²⁷³

²⁷¹ Sulayma: an affectionate diminutive for Selma.

²⁷² Her attractions are those of primeval virgin innocence; she has not been over-elated by grand beauty, nor has been downcast by misery and ugliness.

-13

- 13- As locust swarms are thick, as fowl in flight
to “Kazima” t’drink; so keen were steeds to fight.²⁷⁴

-14

- 14- At them we struck, head-on ‘nd from either side.
As mounted lancer th’ lone bowman defied.

-15

- 15- Those who, by us, were so bestruck with fear.
Like th’ mountain elks that keep from hunt’r clear.

-16

- 16- To high and roughest ground it flees in fear,
In flat of land I’d give the elk my spear.

-17

- 17- I’ll not take wine until I behold
my father’s foes in scores lie dead and cold.

-18

- 18- Till I “Malik” in their own homeland slay.
and those of “Kahil” that may come my way.²⁷⁵

-19

- 19- “Beni Ghanm bin Dowdan” must also go
Their highest ‘pon their lowest shall we throw.

-20

- 20- “Who are these dead”? a questioner may ask.
Replies t’ questions will be a tiresome task.

²⁷³ “Basham”: a species of tree that grow thickly together, forming dense forests.

²⁷⁴ The horse mustered to fight his foes are thickly packed together as locust swarms, and swift as desert fowl in flight to “Kazima”, near Basra, to drink.

²⁷⁵ “Malik” and “Kahil”: clans of the Beni Assad who slew his father.

-21

21- We'll rise to them with blades keen-edged and wide
And cast them like deadwood along th' way side.

-22

22- Time goes by turns, and turns of time may lead
One to the kill'r who'd done the dastard deed.

-23

23- And then, I'll let myself partake of wine
Before, engrossed was I 'n that deed, of mine²⁷⁶

-24

24- That day, of all guilt free, I'll drink with glee.
From wrong absolved; involved not I shall be.²⁷⁷

-25

25- O rider! Our brethren tell without fail.
From Kinda or from Wa'il may they hail.

-26

26- Let them take rest, for them the task we spared.
of striking cowards who, to fight, ne'er dared.

[73]

“Great Ghanawi’s daughter “Mayy”.

-1

1- “Ghanawi” ‘s daughter “Mayy”, I warmly greet,
though far away she be for me to meet.

²⁷⁶ He will not take wine till he has had his vengeance.

²⁷⁷ The guilt he is burdened with is his father remaining unavenged. With vengeance accomplished, he will be happily free from guilt and all involvement, and could take to wine with glee.

-2

2- Upon your life! I'm deep in love with "Mayy"
As one who's parched, from drink is turned away.

-3

3- If I'm to choose 'tween "Mayy", and night
with soft wom'n spent; 'tis "Mayy" I'd choose outright.

-4

4- O "Mayy"! The only "Mayy" you'll ever be
Of all dear people; you'll dearest be to me.

[74]

"I wond'rd at night lightning".

-1

1- I wond'rd at night lightning's thundering streak.
Whose flash lighted the highest mountain peak.

-2

2- To me came talk whose truth I could not take:
A deed that'd make towering mountains quake.

-3

3- Beni Assad murd'ring their lord; foul deed!
No oth'r enormity need one ever heed.

-4

4- Where are "Rabi`a"? when their lord was well.
In peace they basked and did in comfort dwell.

-5

5- Hadn't they, their way, t' his door, so read'ly beat?
And came to feast when he was at his meat!

[75]

“I’m tired of time”

-1

1- I’m tired of time; my folk of me have tired.
In mires of distance I’ve been mired.

-2

2- At night, awake I lay; by care well-caught.
But when alert, tis you who’s in my thought.

-3

3- You’d say hard times had you engriefed and pained.
Son of good house whose goodness had been drained.

-4

4- When I perish, consoled I then would rest.
In my good nature, my lineage of th’ best.

-5

5- I yearn for wom’n, of finest lineage born.
Who would my time of love with her adorn.

-6

6- Who’d please my heart; her sweetness pure delights.
Her lovely talk lifts me t’ecstatic heights.

-7

7- So fair of skin; at walk her thighs swing free.

Her mouth's moisture: nectar of honey-bee.

-8

8- Her widest smiles turn darkness t'brightest light.
As wide-wicked lamps a night's dark gloom enbright.

-9

9- On eve of leaving, I with much ado
with her I plead to do what I shall do.²⁷⁸

-10

10- I bid farewell, when we were set to part.
"One like me" I said, "you'll ne'er find, dear heart".

-11

11- To you a fort am I; your secrets here shall live.
And it is I who all you ask shall give.

-12

12- The virgins upon mounts with widest side.
Big beasts did th' trav'ling virgins ride.

-13

13- On cam'l- like horse I followed in their wake.
My swagg'ring mount as jaunty as a rake.

-14

14- They rested where the orchard water flows
By verdant leas where tallsome produce grows

-15

15- They served me wine; so clear and finely made

²⁷⁸ When its time to part with her, he asks her, to do what he does, i.e to part happily, each going his own way, full of joyous memories of the delightful affair.

From heat of sun we sat in cool of shade

-16

16- “Meat!” they asked “with you we feel so drained,
as if you’ve us in barren wastes detained”.

-17

17- I, to my mount in quick some dart did dash.
With sharpest sword, so ready for the slash.

-18

18- I pierced its heart, in th’ state in which it stood.
The miser’s mean, and I’m not mean with food.

-19

19- For meat they were with gratitude imbued
And cursed those who on people’s fare intrude

-20

20- My mount, dear maids, is yours; and in a day.
I shall remove myself; be on my way.

-21

21- On my mount’s meat let us together feast
And let my love e’er dwell in maidens’ breast

[76]

“My heart no longer rails”

-1

1- With love, “Lamees,” my heart no longer rails.
Once mad; t’see sense it now no longer fails.

-2

2- My heart with fear of graying hair ‘s deranged.

Those caressing it say: “your hair has changed!”

-3

3- What I see of the change in youth, is strange,
As if ages, not days, that make for change

-4

4- In one evening, a fine youth you may see.
In another, so fleshless and greyhaired he’ll be.

-5

5- If he was giv’n to choose from dark or fair,
Though fairest th’fair be, f’r neither would he care.

-6

6- I served young men wine; with age well it grew.
We quaffed clear wine till cock its call it crew.

-7

7- One of the group, who drinks not, says to me:
“I see the Kindite king ’s merry and free”.

-8

8- Wind-blown pastures; with verdure thick and lush.
Up to the height of beasts in growth they gush.

-9

9- And thunder’s groan, like heavy grindstones turns.
Low lying clouds it splits, it swirls, it churns.

-10

10- The grove’s ditches, with flow’ry hues enriched,
‘re like “Hirite” cushions, with flowers bestiched.

-11

- 11- To th' field I came, on stoutest straight-formed steed.
Against host, sparse or thick, ready for th' deed..
- 12
- 12- The milch-camels it kept in summer's heat.
It brayed like camel; soft in chest and seat.²⁷⁹
- 13
- 13- If viewed from rear, his hind is covered well,
By fullest tail, just short of ground it fell
- 14
- 14- It's ribs proceed, till th' slender waist they claim.
They hold th' belly in firm and tightest frame.
- 15
- 15- It's back, hard-packed; it high and mighty stood .
Like woodwork fine a joiner joins from wood.
- 16
- 16- A neck like palm tree which is shaved and pruned
So much, so that its fruit is dry, and ruin'd.²⁸⁰
- 17
- 17- It's ears like wide, succ'lent leaves of "Markh" trees,
that pickers climb to pick, the leaves to squeeze.²⁸¹
- 18
- 18- Hirsute he is; his goodly mane blows free.
So does the forelock. Hairless not is he.

²⁷⁹ "It" refers to the horse. The horse was kept to herd milch-camels during summer grazing. It took on the characteristics of the camel.

²⁸⁰ The horse's long finely-arched neck looks as if it had been formed by excess of labour; such labour as goes in pruning palm trees.

²⁸¹ The leaves of the "Markh" trees were pressed. The juice was used in perfume and medicinal preparations.

-19

- 19- His cheek that of a fine lad 'bout to wed.
His breast, like ostrich whose plumes had been shed.

-20

- 20- Has doughty limbs that rise on solid hoof
Nothing he has that stands in fault aloof²⁸²

-21

- 21- He bursts with vig'r; throughout his frame it raps.
Such vig'r that snaps his tightened saddle-straps.

-22

- 22- My bodyguard asked me, and I complied.
With ease, he said, he, my steed could ride.

-23

- 23- As mounted hunter, I thrill'd th' prey with fright
At morn, a spotted bull soon came in sight.

-24

- 24- I fell 'pon it, as clouds let fall their rain
in down pours 'pon a sunlit, stony plain.

-25

- 25- My ready lance a wide gash through it ripped.
It fell, and blood from its gashed cut; dripped.

-26

- 26- Who can trust th' days, after "Ibn Hormuz"s day?
To him some went; to Caesar some found way.²⁸³

²⁸² The stallion is perfectly formed. Nothing in him stands out as faulty.

-27

27- After “Ma‘ad”, safety one needs to seek
even in caves; though caves of charnel reek.²⁸⁴

-28

28- The days intercepted him; he could not.
get what a king had planned to get; and got.

-29

29- As my sire, Lord I’ll be of Kinda’s forts.
With armies to command and Berber cohorts.

-30

30- With all Yemen’s Arabs to go on raid.
All for me, till all swords are fin’lly laid.

[77]

The Beni Jamila Clan

-1

1- From “Beni Jamila”, where am I to head?
I leave, famished; as I they’ve not yet fed.

-2

2- Her I behold, and seek what she’d bestow.
Yet her I’d leave, and her I would forego.

-3

3- I then recalled; a captive was my heart.
And it to ransom, none would e’er depart.

²⁸³ Those in need of assistance made their way to the Persian court of Ibn Hormuz’, or to Caesar’s court in Constantinople. Both courts, he complains, were unreliable.

²⁸⁴ “Maad” refers to those who slew his father. He yearns for safety after this traumatic event.

-4

4- With folk at rest, through care my tears flow free.
Comforters stir my cares; not comfort me.

-5

5- A tent I've raised, so like an eagle's wings.
Unpegged to ground, on "Qissi" shoots it clings²⁸⁵

-6

6- From ev'ry fault, who enters finds it free.
In front, my sword and saddling one can see.

-7

7- I keep it for folk who'd a visit pay.
Whilst I, on hills o'er looking valleys, stay.

-8

8- To them I came running when they'd o'erstayed.
"Enough" I said "you've had of rest and shade".

-9

9- The tactful 'mongst them saw that I made sense.
The stubborn sitters; quick to take offence.

-10

10- They're weak of joint; a tattered, pit'ful sight
They're faint of heart; of ev'ry foe take fright.

-11

11- "I've gambled"; if asked who th'gamblers are.
"Tis I" if asked, "who saw the light from far"?

²⁸⁵ "Qissi": bamboo-like shoots, hard and straight, used to make tent-pegs. His tent covers the Qissi shoots in full growth, before being cut down for tent-pegs.

-12

- 12- To call at th'homelands houses, I have walked.
At night, as stealthy hunt'r his prey had stalked.

-13

- 13- Until a hand I took. Fine scents adorn
its wrists. To cook and roast it was not born.

-14

- 14- Beclothed with nights' attire, I then walk free.
The stars, th'eagle, th'zenith, my witnesses be.

[78]

“A motley crew left yesterday”

-1

- 1- A motley crew, left yest'rday; 'nd I, alone,
I, of myself, yet more of it have known.

-2

- 2- They left on deep-eyed camels, fast of pace.
Like swift “samam” that run ahead in race²⁸⁶

-3

- 3- The camels' sweat, from neck, so freely fell
on matted hair; their teeth grind hard and well.

-4

- 4- With them appeared a swaying, free-born maid.
Sloe-eyed; with dark make-up her lips were made.

-5

²⁸⁶ “Samam”: a species of flightless, swift-running bird.

- 5- Her bosom full, her belly tender-tight.
Her rear like sand of softest soil and light.
- 6
- 6- Her wrist well formed, and laid with musk and balm.
Her arm is long; when touch'd, is soft her palm.
- 7
- 7- 's if she, at night has wine that North winds chill.
Or she of date-honey has had her fill.
- 8
- 8- The juice of fruit of palms that rise up high,
whose high— held dates hold just below the sky.²⁸⁷
- 9
- 9- Translucent dates; as freshest milk, are clear.
Beneath their leaves, nor t'eye, nor t'sun, appear.
- 10
- 10- A sure-foot picker picks what th'palms do bear.
Like wary wolf that stays from man well clear.
- 11
- 11- With juice he fills his pouch that is well-lined.
He's strong of limb. Stout ropes his pouch do bind.
- 12
- 12- With him is one, who works the dates t'gather.
Who's from "Hijaz", "Fazara" "Abs"- or oth'r.
- 13
- 13- In God their lord they swore to place their trust

²⁸⁷ The higher the date palms rise, it was held, the choicest are its dates.

and work the ropes well, as indeed they must.²⁸⁸

-14

- 14- He called “togeth’r the ropes lets’ throw and haul.
Before our working day ends at night fall”.

-15

- 15- “Lower your voice, to startle none around.
Restrain all sudden movements, and all sound”.

-16

- 16- The short-limbed man the rope then upward cast.
It, ‘tween the branches flew, and didn’t hold fast.

-17

- 17- The turb’lant skies o’er head, with weather brewed.
Her gleaming whitest teeth she had not shewed²⁸⁹.

-18

- 18- It was not th’most delightful of her nights.
A night of windy rain and cold that bites.

-19

- 19- “Covet not! Safely from hazards retire.
Grind not your teeth at me with bitter ire”.²⁹⁰

-20

- 20- I would, on camel, windy wastes pass through.
With food and drink and servant good and true.

²⁸⁸ Harvesting choice dates from such high palms required the labour of two men; one on the ground and one at tree- top level. The date pouch was lowered and raised through deft use of rope.

²⁸⁹ He moves to another scene. The woman described gathers herself to herself in that cold weather.

²⁹⁰ The cold night appears to have placed her in a chagrined mood. She reproaches and scolds him. He replies, reproving her for her shrewish talk.

- 21- Of temper good; well-fleshed; is quick to race,
At night it goes with steady, nightly pace.

[79]

“Wont you of ‘Umm ‘Amr desist and despair?”

-1

- 1- Wont you of “Umm ‘Amr” desist and despair?
And wake up from that ages-old affair?

-2

- 2- Had not solemn age forbade youthful ploys.
And what you’ve had of youths’ mis’ries, and joys.

-3

- 3- O’erhead, quail flew; to her my, way I found,
With fine ladies she sat on higher ground.

-4

- 4- A yemen striped cloak on one should’r, she wore.
The other shoulder a sun-lit garment bore.

-5

- 5- I pass a pool, bestrewn with pidgeons’ plumes
Like “Yanbut”s’ essence, it, low-watered, looms.²⁹¹

-6

- 6- There, my long-necked she-camel came to drink,
o’er stressed and exhausted, at water’s brink

²⁹¹ “Yanbut”: a plant whose bitter fruit and leaves were used to prepare a shampoo-like hair wash. A small pool of “Yanbut” essence was used for bathing. The pool he passes, low watered and strewn with feathers, looks as if pidgeons have been bathing there.

- 7- Four fowl, from “Sayy”, by stagnant waters perched.
To quench, at night, at brackish pools their thirst.

[80]

“I’m of Kinda’s good ones”

-1

- 1- I’m of the good, whom Kinda I adorn.
Not of ones evil to it who were born.

-2

- 2- From its good lineage, mine in goodness grows.
And from its ancestral glory, mine glows.

-3

- 3- The joyous tidings we have ever had.
to its annals of joyous good, will add.

-4

- 4- To her spacious lap I e’er do return.
From its hard times, or good, e’er will I learn.

-5

- 5- Should you cut Kinda with lampoons, and scrape,
you’d not from Kinda’s cutting claws escape.

-6

- 6- Her sharp cuts may miss you, and strike astray.
Recurrent thrusts ensure that dead you’ll lay.

-7

7- They are such, that if war at them should storm,
their hands at war's raging fires they would warm.

-8

8- Like lions circled by iron, resist they must.
In ire they throw up swirling clouds of dust.²⁹²

[81]

"The kings appear"

-1

1- The kings appear; my heart with doubt is rife.
Of those who've since in sects had lived in strife.

-2

2- Folk won't object when we their kings shall be.
They were but slaves; their lords 'nd masters, were we.

-3

3- For we are kings, and sons of kings, are we.
In our realm these folk lived since ages far.

-4

4- With Roman aid your King I'll be, if aid
"Ghassan" denies. There are ways kings are made²⁹³

-5

²⁹² The verse refers to lions- the Kindites- "in rings of iron". It may mean that the lions are actually chained in iron, or that they are encircled by their iron-clad foes out to slay them.

²⁹³ The Ghassanids, the traditional allies of the Byzantines (The Romans) were first approached by Imru'ul Qays to intercede for him with Constantinople with the aim of re-establishing him as King of Kinda. In these verses he re-iterates his claims to kingship. If Ghassan's aid to achieve this end, he threatens, is not forthcoming, he will approach Constantinople directly. The verses here assert his claims to kingship to those subjects once ruled by the bygone Kings of Kinda.

- 5- Our villeins you once were, as such you'll stay.
To us your allegiance in full you'll pay.

[82]

“You are uncircumcised”

when Imru'ul Qays arrived in Constantinople he was warmly and honourably received by the Emperor Justinian, whose hospitality included a visit to the royal baths. In the baths, totally undressed, Imru'ul Qays noticed to his contempt and horror that the Emperor was uncircumcised, and recited, later, these lines lampooning the emperor for this gross shortcoming.

These ribald, if not offensive, lines contributed to Imru'ul Qays's downfall. Justinian realized that this fellow cannot be trusted, and the poet's adversary, al-Tammah, who vilified him in Justinian's court was- Justinian realized—quite right in his accusations of this “vagabond princeling” with ambitions to be a future “King of Kinda”. These lurid lines, together with al-Tammah's charges that Imru'ul Qays had go the Emperor's daughter with child, finally convinced Justinian that this Arab prince had to go, in more ways than one.

- 1

- 1- In fullest truth, I do solemnly swear
Uncircumcised you are, I do declare

- 2

- 2- Should you thrust it, its head-dress tilts aside²⁹⁴
As wool 'neath spindle; thread it fails to guide²⁹⁵

[83]

²⁹⁴ The head –dress here is the foreskin. “It” is the erect male genital.

²⁹⁵ The uncircumcised genital is like a faulty spindle that fails to spin wool, which piles up beneath it.

“My friends”

- 1
- 1- My friends, if fears you have of me grow strong.
Serve me more drink; the night draws dull and long.
- 2
- 2- Awake are you? For I at lightning stare.
Nude clouds alight, as unsaddl'd mares are bare.
- 3
- 3- The steeds protect the wilds, far from home ground.
Following each other; to battle bound.
- 4
- 4- Be warned! Let your reproach of me abate.
Urge not that I the low should emulate.
- 5
- 5- I, still, in darkest corners, lurk in stealth.
I, there, for you, wish heights of fame and wealth.
- 6
- 6- I, from “Ikhrab” t’ Hurrudh” would find my way
There, cheering crowds in wait for me would stay.

[84]

To Layla your yearnings ranged

-1

1- To Layla's folk's fine house, your yearnings ranged,
It's mem'ries your poor heart have so deranged.

-2

2- For she is not with her affections free.
Nor you the light of sense and reason see.

-3

3- A fair demure woman has you ensnared.
On her slow way to you, she well has fared.

-4

4- Till morning late, in languid sleep she lays.
Awake, at walk, with languid steps she sways.

-5

5- When questioned, great tact her discourse holds.
When questioned not, long silence her enfolds.

-6

6- A witless fool, an idiot her would find.
A man of sense would see her glowing mind.

-7

7- If far may she in prosperity bask.
How well she prospers 'nd fares; do always ask.

-8

8- A picture of prosperity is she.
With pride of birth, she th'homelands pride shall be.

-9

9- As if a hind gave her her neck and eye.

- Her plaits flow down, upon her shoulders lie.
- 10
- 10- Her cheek as brilliant as a gleaming blade.
Whose shine was by diligent whetting made.
- 11
- 11- As if fingers, t'adorn her palm, are made
as gamrents are adorned by silver braid.
- 12
- 12- Her wrist well-turned; it's roundness is so right
that eyes tire not of such a lovely sight.
- 13
- 13- In bed, she pours herself o'er t'either side
As streams of sand from shak'n dunes, down ward slide
- 14
- 14- With oryx steps, she lightly steps to you.
Gazelle is she, that moistened is by dew.
- 15
- 15- Her waist is slim, her belly smooth and tight.
Her thighs full, her bottom rounded right.
- 16
- 16- Her legs well-shaped, in softness she unfurls.
As soft, as freshly prized, are oyster pearls.
- 17
- 17- She's taller than the short; is not too tall.
Her height and form in th'golden mean do fall.
- 18
- 18- Her teeth so white and are arranged so neat.

A mouth whose kisses ever are so sweet.

-19

- 19- Her teeth emit the scent of fragrant wine;
Are moist as plants that to moisture incline.

-20

- 20- Ginger and quince are flavour of her air.
Pure honey adds t'what in her air is fair²⁹⁶

-21

- 21- Her mouth I've tasted not, though it I've seen
saying well what well-spoken mouths can mean.

-22

- 22- With love of her, my nights and morns I spend .
Such tearing passions 'pon my heart descend.

-23

- 23- For love of her I stood 'gainst scorn and strife
And cured not sick hearts that with ire are rife

-24

- 24- From her I turned, my wishes to pursue
By her sire's life! So vile of me to do.

[85]

“Has your heart returned?”

-1

- 1- Has your heart from “Mawya” returned oppressed,

²⁹⁶ “air” here refers to her breath, well-flavoured with ginger, quince, and honey.

to pour its tears when all had gone to rest.

-2

2- Departing folk your passions long sustain;
whose homes are now like books awash with rain.

-3

3- Visions of love released many a tear,
that none had shed for ones who're held so dear.

-4

4- Two years have passed, and I her not have seen.
Two years, that fraught with fear of loss have been.

-5

5- For I hunt down whom I to hunt intend.
And 'gainst the shrewd myself can well defend.

-6

6- I cut what's whole; what's cut I well can fuse.
Largesse I give, but what I'm owed ne'er lose.

-7

7- In body-strewn war-grounds I stab and thrust.
And bear what oth'rs cannot; yet bear they must.

-8

8- Flatlands I roam; soft-speaking maids I seek.
Who from behind their veils and curtains peek.

-9

9- Salute our folk, their homes now waste are laid

by “Kharjaa” storms, and marks that time had made²⁹⁷

-10

- 10- O’er them, the long-end train of time did range.
For time, and turns of time, e’er will be strange.²⁹⁸

-11

- 11- They all had once lived there, but were dispersed.
Time makes amiable folk suffer the worst.

-12

- 12- On “Nu’am” I may call; and her I’d tell.
Weary am I who in her love have fell.

-13

- 13- At times she dwells afar; when she is near.
She comes not near to whom she is so dear.

-14

- 14- A pool with pidgeons feathers is a gleam.
‘s if drinking birds of brighter plumage dream.²⁹⁹

-15

- 15- In there, young beasts to early deaths have dropped.
Who once on “Tawthal” and “Junub” had cropped.³⁰⁰

-16

²⁹⁷ “Kharjaa” storms: The verse mentions “summer storms at Kharjaa” The summer storms refer to the devastating “Khamaseen” summer winds.”Kharjaa” is an unidentified location.

²⁹⁸ Times train — the long, tail end of Time’s garment — had swept over his people’s abodes, leaving them in a deplorable state of ruin.

²⁹⁹ Pidgeons, at the turn of the year, shed some of their plumage. While drinking at the pool, they shed their plumage which gleams on the surface under sunlight. It is as if the birds dream of a yet more brighter plumage than that that was shed.

³⁰⁰ Young animals, surfeited with lush “Tawthal” and “Junub” have slipped into the pool and drowned.

- 16- At night to drink came I. The eagle high.
Its' eyes aglow; a comet shooting by.
-17
- 17- I lower'd my bucket down a darksome well.
But water lay below where th'bucket fell.
-18
- 18- At night, to draw water, the bucket toiled.
At well's head, iron-fanged serpents, lay coiled.
-19
- 19- Blind-deaf, the male serpents lay still in stealth .
Their females close; to comfort dearth of wealth.³⁰¹
-20
- 20- At my full water-bucket, the serpent stared.
To strike at bucket it, at last, had dared.
-21
- 21- Irate it was, its fangs alive with spite.
Twas like a black rope speckled o'er with white.
-22
- 22- To it I stood, and on it cracked my whip.
It writhed; and did o'er water, flip.
-23
- 23- In featureless desert, with nought to see
but leanest wolf; a stranger so is he.

³⁰¹ The poet was drawing water at night from a badly covered serpent— infested well-head. The male serpents, with their females nearby, remind him of those impoverished serpentine men lurking in the shadows whose only possession is their womenfolk.

-24

24- Vast deserts, flat, unknown; where winds behowl.
And sun-stood creatures ever are at prow³⁰²

-25

25- For drought had wiped out all from that bare ground.
Neither Arabs nor aliens there are found.

-26

26- All folk, those hostile grounds avoid in fear.
Hardest camels of its horrors stay clear.

-27

27- Yet I crossed it; on camel swift and tall;
Like wild ass braying to its herd to call.

-28

28- Galloping ass, by hottest summer mauled.
At last, by waters streaming far, is called.

-29

29- At morn, the ass watered by mountain side.
Where will it go to drink at eventide?

-30

30- The wild ass sets on water, one full eye.
The other eye awaits descent of sun from sky³⁰³

-31

31- To him, the night-time rider gathers night.
And pads his way on paces firm yet light.³⁰⁴

³⁰² The sun-stood creatures refers to the desert chameleon, an iguana-like reptile; its head, neck and shoulders always upright under the fierce sun.

³⁰³ The thirsty animal has its sight on its drink, and yet eagerly awaits sunset. Daylight means constant danger from lurking hunters. Nightfall provides safety.

-32

32- Cantering camels; galloping wild-ass.
 Each bent on not letting th'other o'erpass.

-33

33- They raced past streams, which soon they left behind.
 Pure golden waters; th' purest you could find.

-34

34- A black-eyed hunter, well hid, close to ground,
 Who lives but on what in the hunt is found.

-35

35- He holds a bow of pure, yellowish wood.
 And shafts whose heads fell of prey what they could.

-36

36- Asses leftside; he let and arrow fly.
 It missed; o'er an ass's tail flew too high.

-37

37- Is 't that? Or that with bald head, small and queer
 That strides up heights with nought inside but fear.³⁰⁵

-38

38- Running the desert with bleeding low'r legs.
 Like one anguished; in pain, for comfort, begs.

-39

39- From valley's bend, an ostrich cock made tracks.
 To find young hens with down still on their backs.

³⁰⁴ The night-time rider, like the wild-ass, prefers night time. The camel rider because it is cooler, more comfortable to travel by night. The ass is safer from hunters at night.

³⁰⁵ Is it that wild ass that vies with my camel in speed; or that bald and queer headed ostrich that flees in fear to high ground?

-40

40- Or that white oryx bull, by hounds that's chased.
A hunter's hounds! Aroused to hunt in haste.

-41

41- The desert hound-master unleashed his packs.
Bare-legged, well-hid, he lay behind the tracks.³⁰⁶

-42

42- He feels the first 'mong hounds, while lying still.
Short-haired, ears drooping; pouncing on their kill.

-43

43- The bull then stabbed th' attacking hounds, and pressed
his straight and sharp horns through th' attackers' breasts.

-44

44- The hounds withdrew from him, and from the gore.
As he, wide bleeding gashes through them tore.

³⁰⁶ The tracks are those left by the hounds when chasing the oryx.