

Classic Poetry Series

Ībn Abî Sūlmâ Zuhayr

- poems -

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Ībn Abî Sûlmâ Zuhayr(520 - 609)

Zuhayr, also Zuhair, (Arabic زهير بن أبي سلمى), full name Zuhayr ibn Abî Sûlmâ, b. c. 520-d. c. 609, was a pre-Islamic Arabian poet who lived in the 6th century AD. He is considered one of the greatest writer of Arabic poetry in pre-Islamic times. Zuhayr belonged to the Muzaynah tribe. His father was a poet. His elder son, Ka'b bin Zuhayr, was also a poet and read poems to Muhammad.

His poems can be found in Hammad Ar-Rawiya's anthology, the Mu'allaqat ("the Suspended"), a collection of pre-Islamic poetry. He was one of the Seven Hanged Poets who were reputed to have been honoured by hanging copies of their work in the Kaaba at Mecca. He was Umar ibn al-Khattab's favourite poet.

Zuhayr's poetry was written when two Bedouin tribes ended a longstanding hostility. His poems deal with raids and other subjects of nomadic desert life. He also wrote satirical poems and poems about the glory of his tribe, but in his verses he was less satiric than most of his brother poets. He strove to express deep thoughts in simple words, to be clear and by his clear phrases to teach his people high and noble ideas. He was a man of rank and wealth, the foremost of a family noted for their poetic skill and religious earnestness. In brief, Zuhayr is the gentleman-philosopher among Arab poets.

The Poem Of Zuhair

'Does the blackened ruin, situated in the stony ground between Durraj and Mutathallam, which did not speak to me, when addressed, belong to the abode of Ummi Awfa?

'And is it her dwelling at the two stony meadows, seeming as though they were the renewed tattoo marks in the sinews of the wrist?

'The wild cows and the white deer are wandering about there, one herd behind the other, while their young are springing up from every lying-down place.

'I stood again near it, (the encampment of the tribe of Awfa,) after an absence of twenty years, and with some efforts, I know her abode again after thinking awhile.

'I recognized the three stones blackened by fire at the place where the kettle used to be placed at night, and the trench round the encampment, which had not burst, like the source of a pool.

'And when I recognized the encampment I said to its site, 'Now good morning, oh spot; may you be safe from dangers.'

'Look, oh my friend! do you see any women traveling on camels, going over the high ground above the stream of Jurthum?

'They have covered their howdahs with coverlets of high value, and with a thin screen, the fringes of which are red, resembling blood.

'And they inclined toward the valley of Soobán, ascending the center of it, and in their faces were the fascinating looks of a soft-bodied person brought up in easy circumstances;

'They arose early in the morning and got up at dawn, and they went straight to the valley of Rass as the hand goes unswervingly to the mouth, when eating.

'And amongst them is a place of amusement for the far-sighted one, and a pleasant sight for the eye of the looker who looks attentively.

'As if the pieces of dyed wool which they left in every place in which they halted, were the seeds of night-shade which have not been crushed.

'When they arrived at the water, the mass of which was blue from intense purity, they laid down their walking sticks, (i.e., took their lodging there,) like the dweller who has pitched his tents.

'They kept the hill of Qanan and the rough ground about it on their hand; while there are many, dwelling in Qanan, the shedding of whose blood is lawful and unlawful.

'They came out from the valley of Soobán, then they crossed it, riding in every Qainian howdah new and widened.

'Then I swear by the temple, round which walk the men who built it from the tribes of Quraish and Jurhum.

'An oath, that you are verily two excellent chiefs, who are found worthy of honor in every condition, between ease and distress.

'The two endeavorers from the tribe of Ghaiz bin Murrah strove in making peace after the connection between the tribes had become broken, on account of the shedding of blood.

'You repaired with peace the condition of the tribes of 'Abs and Zubayán, after they had fought with one another, and ground up the perfume of Manshim between them.

'And indeed you said, 'if we bring about peace perfectly by the spending of money and the conferring of benefits, and by good words, we shall be safe from the danger of the two tribes, destroying each other.'

'You occupied by reason of this the best of positions, and became far from the reproach of being undutiful and sinful.

'And you became great in the high nobility of Ma'add; may you be guided in the right way; and he who spends his treasure of glory will become great.

'The memory of the wounds is obliterated by the hundreds of camels, and he, who commenced paying off the blood money by instalments, was not guilty of it (i.e., of making war) .

'One tribe pays it to another tribe as an indemnity, while they who gave the indemnity did not shed blood sufficient for the filling of a cupping glass.

'Then there was being driven to them from the property you inherited, a booty of various sorts from young camels with slit ears.

'Now, convey from me to the tribe of Zubayán and their allies a message, -'verily you have sworn by every sort of oath to keep the peace.'

'Do not conceal from God what is in your breast that it may be hidden; whatever is concealed, God knows all about it.

'Either it will be put off and placed recorded in a book, and preserved there until the judgment day; or the punishment be hastened and so he will take revenge.

'And war is not but what you have learnt it to be, and what you have experienced, and what is said concerning it, is not a story based on suppositions.

'When you stir it up, you will stir it up as an accursed thing, and it will become greedy when you excite its greed and it will rage fiercely.

'Then it will grind you as the grinding of the upper millstone against the lower, and it will conceive immediately after one birth and it will produce twins.

'By my life I swear, how good a tribe it is upon whom Husain Bin Zamzam brought an injury by committing a crime which did not please them.

'And he had concealed his hatred, and did not display it, and did not proceed to carry out his intention until he got a good opportunity.

'And he said, 'I will perform my object of avenging myself, and I will guard myself from my enemy with a thousand bridled horses behind me.'

'Then he attacked his victim from 'Abs, but did not cause fear to the people of the many houses, near which death had thrown down his baggage.

'They allowed their animals to graze until when the interval between the hours of drinking was finished, they took them to the deep pool, which is divided by weapons and by shedding of blood.

'They accomplished their object amongst themselves, then they led the animals back to the pasture of unwholesome indigestible grass.

'I have grown weary of the troubles of life; and he, who lives eighty years will, mayest thou have no father if thou doubt 11 grow weary.

'And I know what has happened to-day and yesterday, before it, but verily, of the knowledge of what will happen to-morrow; I am ignorant.

'I see death is like the blundering of a blind camel; -him whom he meets he kills, and he whom he misses lives and will become old.

'And he who does not act with kindness in many affairs will be torn by teeth and trampled under foot.

'And he, who makes benevolent acts intervene before honor, increases his honor; and he, who does not avoid abuse, will be abused.

'He, who is possessed of plenty, and is miserly with his great wealth toward his people, will be dispensed with, and abused.

'He who keeps his word, will not be reviled; and he whose heart is guided to self-satisfying benevolence will not stammer.

'And he who dreads the causes of death, they will reach him, even if he ascends the tracts of the heavens with a ladder.

'And he, who shows kindness to one not deserving it, his praise will be a reproach against him, and he will repent of having shown kindness.

'And he who rebels against the butt ends of the spears, then verily he will have to obey the spear points joined to every long spear shaft.

'And he who does not repulse with his weapons from his tank, will have it broken; and he who does not oppress the people will be oppressed.

'And he who travels should consider his friend an enemy; and he who does not respect himself will not be respected.

'And he, who is always seeking to bear the burdens of other people, and does not excuse himself from it, will one day by reason of his abasement, repent.

'And whatever of character there is in a man, even though he thinks it concealed from people, it is known.

'He, who does not cease asking people to carry him, and does not make himself independent of them even for one day of the time, will be regarded with disgust.

'Many silent ones you see, pleasing to you, but their excess in wisdom or deficiency will appear at the time of talking.

'The tongue of a man is one half, and the other half is his mind, and here is nothing besides these two, except the shape of the blood and the flesh.

'And verily, as to the folly of an old man there is no wisdom after it, but the young man after his folly may become wise.

'We asked of you, and you gave, and we returned to the asking and you returned to the giving, and he who increases the asking, will one day be disappointed.'

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