Ibn Qutayba and ᶜAntar's Muᶜallaqa: Sources, Traditions and Structure

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Abstract *: This article examines one of the important pre-Islamic poems composed by the black warrior-poet, ᶜAntar Ibn Shaddād (6th century CE). Arab critical tradition casts many doubts on the poem and its author. These include doubts about ᶜAntar himself (for example, about his lineage and his death); doubts about the exact number of lines in the poem; doubts about whether or not it was indeed one of the elite muᶜallaqāt poems. Among the most important of these questions is one which stems from Ibn Qutayba's opinion that this is ᶜAntar's first long poem. However, this article's analysis will refute Ibn Qutayba's point of view by demonstrating that ᶜAntar's poem is too fully developed and conforms too closely to the traditionally accepted muᶜallaqāt constraints to have been his first attempt at a long poem. ᶜAntar's poem incorporates the most typical qualities of the muᶜallaqāt. This article shows how ᶜAntar's poem illustrates the principal themes of pre-Islamic poetry: mourning of ruins; evocation of the beloved; citation of place names and their significance; expression of sorrow, loss and yearning; and reference to life and death. It also compares ᶜAntar's poem to other muᶜallaqāt, showing the elements it has in common with works by such esteemed poets as Zuhayr Ibn Abī Sulmā, 'Imru'u al-Qays, Labīd Ibn Rabīᶜa.*

Key words : *Antar's Muᶜallaqa, pre-Islamic poetry, Arabic poetry, a literary composition.*

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Présentation sommaire

Notre article considère en détail un des plus importants poèmes de l'ère préislamique, celui déclamé par ᶜAntar Ibn Shaddād, poète et guerrier. Ce personnage Noir a vécu au VIᵉᵐᵉ siècle de notre ère. Depuis son temps, la tradition arabe pose de multiples questions sur sa personne (concernant ses ascendants, sa vie, la date et la manière de sa mort...) aussi bien que sur son oeuvre poétique. Ces dernières questions tournent notamment autour de son poème le plus connu, "Muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar". Les critiques ne se sont jamais mis d'accord sur le nombre exact de ses vers, ni même s'il fait partie des muᶜallaqat. Parmi les commentaires les plus intéressants nous trouvons celui d'Ibn Qutayba (mort en 276H/889), qui prétend que muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar fut le premier poème composé par ᶜAntar.

Nous rejetons ce point de vue, en démontrant avec des exemples spécifiques du poème que muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar se caractérise par un développement exceptionnel et une élégance poétique irréprochable, pour être considéré comme un premier essai. En outre, le poème respecte les contraintes imposées par le style et la tradition de la poésie préislamique. Il intègre, d'une façon naturelle et souple, les thèmes exigés par la tradition : la nostalgie devant les ruines du campement de la bien-aimée ; l'évocation de la bien-aimée ; la citation des noms de lieu qui ont de la signification à l'époque ; l'expression de la tristesse devant l'absence de la bien-aimée associée au désir de la retrouver rapidement ; les références à la vie et la mort.

Le poème est long (76 vers dans la version que nous étudions), avec une adhésion aux éléments structuraux de l'époque. Il utilise un mètre standard mais tout en introduisant des variantes subtiles et élégantes. Les transitions entre les vers sont cohérentes et ne choquent pas. Les hémistiches sont conformes aux règles de la poésie préislamique. La structure du poème en est aussi conforme, divisant les vers en trois volets : l'ouverture (nasīb), le voyage, et l'expression de la fierté du poète pour lui-même.

Par un style sophistiqué, le poète se sert des rimes à l'intérieur des vers aussi bien qu'à la fin des lignes, et de l'assonance, une technique appréciée dans cette poésie. Il répète des mots clés avec des différences subtiles qui enrichissent leur sémantisme par un jeu sur les variantes tirées d'une même racine de base. Il emploie un vocabulaire vaste et contraste les synonymes et les antonymes. Son usage de la grammaire est conforme aux normes de ses contemporains renforçant la richesse des mots et du poème entier. L'examen détaillé et linéaire du poème montre donc une structure et un style trop raffinés poétiquement pour être ceux d'un poète novice.

Après l'analyse du poème, nous le comparons à d'autres muᶜallaqāt montrant ainsi les éléments communs et les similarités du style entre ᶜAntar et d'autres poètes tels Zuhayr Ibn Abī Sulmā, 'Imru'u al-Qays et Labīd Ibn Rabīᶜa. L'oeuvre de ᶜAntar apparaît d'une qualité équivalente à celle observée dans le travail de ces contemporains.

Etant donné le niveau du poème des points de vue du contenu, du style et de la structure, le mépris d'Ibn Qutayba pour muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar reste un mystère. De plus, le grand savant Al-Iṣfahānī (mort en 356H/967), auteur du livre "Al-Aghānī" qui est une source précieuse de l'histoire des anciens arabes, ignore muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar totalement. Dans ce cas, il est difficile de croire en un oubli. Est-ce pour des raisons politiques ou autres que sont dus ce mépris et ce silence ? La question devient plus mystérieuse quand on remarque qu'Al-Iṣfahānī cite un poème de ᶜAntar qui est antérieur à sa muᶜallaqa.

Il est fort possible qu'un certain nombre de poèmes composés par ᶜAntar soient perdus dans les siècles suivant sa mort. Nous supposons que c'est le cas puisque nous avons peu de traces de sa poésie, mais les oeuvres que nous pouvons lire de nos jours sont un argument en faveur de l'existence d'autres, perdues, et ceci par leur niveau de développement et de sophistication. Nous sommes chanceux d'avoir au moins hérité de la belle muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar.
Les circonstances ayant influencé l'opinion d'Ibn Qutayba et participant ainsi à amoindrir la portée poétique de la muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar ne sont pas les nôtres. De notre point de vue, ce texte mérite pleinement sa place parmi les poèmes préislamiques les plus prestigieux. L'analyse du poème que nous avons entreprise dans cet article va

donc à l'encontre d'Ibn Qutayba sur ce point précis, malgré son envergure en tant que philologue, historien et écrivain et ses vastes connaissances des anciens arabes.

Mots-clés : *Muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar, poésie préislamique, poésie arabe, essai littéraire.*

Despite the fact that pre-Islamic Arabic poetry has long been discussed and analyzed by Arab scholars, both ancient and modern, as well as by Western scholars[1], many questions about the poems and the poets remain. The black warrior-poet ᶜAntar has been the subject of many such doubts; scholars have had doubts about ᶜAntar's lineage, life and death, about the exact number of lines in his *muᶜallaqa*, and about whether it was indeed one of the elite *muᶜallaqāt*. Most of the information we have about ᶜAntar is derived from two major anthologists, Ibn Qutayba (d.276H/886CE) and al-Iṣfahānī (d.356H/967CE). In his work entitled *al-Shiᶜr wa al-Shuᶜarā'* "Poetry and Poets", Ibn Qutayba consecrates three pages to ᶜAntar. He describes the circumstances that led ᶜAntar to compose his *muᶜallaqa* and cites a number of ᶜAntar's verses[2]. Ibn Qutayba says that[3] *muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar* was either ᶜAntar's first poem ever, or the first entire poem following a series of one or two-line compositions[4]. Ibn Qutayba does not cite the names of sources to support this point of view, but says only "*qīla*"--"it has been said". This lack of a chain of transmission destroys an important element of credibility, particularly in light of the strong tradition among ancient Arab writers to include the chain of transmission. Moreover, Ibn Qutabya gives no other justification for his point of view.

It is surprising that a poet who had never composed such a long work should suddenly be capable of composing an elegant long poem like the *muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar*, and I believe the poem is too fully developed to be his first composition. The poem consists of 74 verses[5]. Like several other *muᶜallaqāt*, the ode uses the *al-kāmil* meter, employing the pattern[6]:

mustafᶜilun mutafāᶜilun mutafāᶜilun// mustafᶜilun mustafᶜilun mutafāᶜilun.

The great poet Labīd Ibn Rabīᶜa (560-661CE) uses the same meter, employing the foot *mutafāᶜilun* 6 times. Specialists of Arabic poetic metrics who study the last foot of the hemstitch call the change ᶜAntar introduces *al-iḍmār*.
ᶜAntar clearly adheres to the literary tradition of his time. In this tradition, we find language which is both descriptive and explicit, termed al-*waṣf wa al-taqrīr* in Arabic, and ᶜAntar employs such language throughout his poem. ᶜAntar's *muᶜallaqa* has a rhyme, or *qāfiya*, based on *mīm*. In his *muᶜallaqa*, the rhyme remains the same throughout the poem except when he uses the letter ya as a long vowel. This occurs five times in the poem: once the verb is imperative—*slamī* in line 2 (which we note rhymes with *ᶜimī* in the same line). Three times later in the poem we find nouns: *takarrumī*, *mukallimī* and *damī* and once a negated verb in the present tense (*lam taᶜlamī*). In these instances, the rhyme has been changed without damaging the rhythm.
In addition, we find examples of *jinās* (assonance) and words derived from the same roots throughout ᶜAntar's poem[7]. In Arabic, we speak of *al-jinās* when

words are identical or nearly so. (Identical words are called *al-jinās al-tāmm*, and nearly identical words are called *al-jinās an-nāqis*.) The use of *al-jinās* and words from the same roots gives the poem a special rhythm.

ᶜAntar's poem contains more than 20 examples of *jinās*. In line 43, we find *biᶜājili ṭaᶜnatin* and the same sentence in line 49, while the verb *ṭaᶜantu* from the same root as the noun *ṭaᶜna* is also found in line 55. We find the word *rumḥ* in line 50, then in line 67 the plural *rimāḥ*. The name of ᶜAntar appears twice, in line 67 and line 72; the nouns *kalām* and *mukallim* in line 70; the verb *'ashtum* and the noun *shatīm* in line 75.

From the point of view of structure, the poem also adheres to the highest literary standards of the time. The poem has three sections: the opening verses (*nasīb*[8]); the journey (*al-riḥla*); and the warrior's boast (*al-fakhr*). This structure was considered essential for poetry in the pre-Islamic era. ᶜAntar employs this fairly strict traditional poetic structure so successfully that it argues for his experience rather than supporting Ibn Qutayba's opinion. We shall consider each section separately.

The *nasīb*

The *nasīb* of a *muᶜallaqa* traditionally describes in a nostalgic way an abandoned campsite, after the nomadic tribe has moved on. The common theme in the *nasīb* is the loss of the beloved. In *muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar*, the *nasīb* (lines 1 to 19) describes the poet's beloved ᶜAbla and the ruins of her tribe's camp. These lines are composed with a great deal of care and show that the poet was aware of his literary forebears. ᶜAntar begins his poem with a question[9]: *have the poets left anything to amend?*; meaning: have the poets left anything unsaid? This question is important because it indicates that ᶜAntar was aware of the long history of Arabic poetry and of his predecessors. The question also reveals ᶜAntar's self-confidence. He is, in essence, saying "even if the poets who have gone before me have said everything, I still have something to add".

In line 2, ᶜAntar speaks directly to the ruins, evoking the departure not only of his beloved, but of the entire tribe which has moved on[10]. ᶜAntar personalizes the abode by using the *ḥarf al-nidā' "yā"* in line 2. He addresses the ruins directly, ordering them to speak to him: *takallami*. We find the same kind of personification in Zuhayr's opening, but while Zuhayr describes, ᶜAntar interacts. The personification of the ruins in the *nasīb* is based on the poetic tradition, *al-ᶜurf al-shiᶜri*[11]. This is another example of ᶜAntar's style and technique being solidly rooted in poetic tradition.

There is a harmony of both rhyme and rhythm in both hemistiches of the opening. In the hemistiches of the first line, we find the rhyming words *mutaradamī* and *tawahumī* as well as the repetition of the interrogative *hal*. In the second line, we have the rhyming *takallamī* and *slamī*, which contain not only a rhyming last letter but also the preceding syllable *lam* which is identical. In the second line, we find the repetition of *dāra ᶜAblata* in both hemstitches. The mastery of form that ᶜAntar demonstrates here is not that of a novice poet.

In addition to consonant and vowel repetition in the *nasīb*, we find *al-jinās*. For example, *dār* repeated in lines 1, 2 and 3. We find *al-jinās al-tāmm* in line 2

and 3, while we have *al-jinās an-nāqis* in lines 1, 2 and 3. These homonyms are an important aspect of classical poetry and we can find numerous examples in *muʿallaqat ʿAntar*: line 2, *dāra ʿAblata* twice; line 2 and 4, *ʿAblata bi al-Jiwāʾi*; line 7, *zaʿman* and *mazʿami*; line 1, the question mark *hal-hal*; line 6 *bnata* and line 44 *bnata*; line 8 *nazaltu* and *manzila*; line 9 *ʾahluhā*, *ʾahlunā* and line 11 *ʾahluhā*.

Another typical aspect of *al-nasīb* in the opening of ʿAntar's poem is his use of the name of his beloved ʿAbla. This name comes from a root meaning "plump, well-rounded, fat"—all positive attributes for a woman at that time and in that culture. ʿAntar addresses his beloved ʿAbla directly: twice we find the word ʿAbla (line 2). He also uses nicknames such as *ʾumm haytham* (line 5) or *bnata makhrami* (line 6). Finally, he uses conjugated verbs that clearly indicate ʿAbla as their subject. These may be in the second person (line 8 *nazalti* and line 10 *kunti*, *ʾazmaʿti*) or in the third person such as in line 4, *taḥullu*, or line 6 *ḥallat* and *aṣbaḥat*. The name of the beloved is a common element in the *nasīb*. Examples from other poets are: the name of *Khawla* in Ṭarafa's poetry, *ʾUmm ʾAwfa* in Zuhayr's work; *ʾAsmāʾ* in al-Ḥārith Ibn Ḥilliza's poem; *ʿUnayza* in Imruʾ al-Qays' work.

From the beginning of ʿAntar's ode, we are aware that our poet is in love with ʿAbla, and we discover his distress that she has departed with her tribe. This is clear when ʿAntar uses the verb *taḥullu* in the present tense. This indicates that the departure was very recent.
The citation of specific personal or place names (regions, rivers mountains...) is also typical of the *muʿallaqāt* and it is particularly related to *al-nasīb*, because they indicate the poet's strong feelings. The place the beloved has left behind is associated with the beloved herself while the impossibility of attaining the camp becomes synonymous with his inability to attain the woman. ʿAntar nostalgically mentions several place names: *al-Jiwāʾ*; *al-Hazn, al-Sammān, al-Mutathallam, ʿUnayzatayni, al-Ghaylami*[12].

We also find the use of a contrast between "here" and "there" in lines 4-9. We learn from the words the poet uses, particularly in line 6 (*faʾaṣbaḥat ʿasiran ʿalayya ṭilābuki*) and line 9 that he fears it will now be impossible to see his beloved. The departure of ʿAbla's tribe is a major difficulty for the poet, for it imposes limits. Notice how he expresses the tribe's departure. First he uses *taḥullu ʿAblatu bi al-Jiwāʾ* in line 4; then *ḥallat biʾarḍi-l-zāʾirīn* in line 6. In line 9 he uses the term *ʾahluhā*, but in line 10 he says *zummat rikābukum bilaylin muẓlimi*, with the plural possessive pronoun *kum*. The entire tribe has left, the place is deserted, and he expresses that by *ʾaqwā* and *ʾaqfar* line 5. *ʾAqfar* means lifeless, because the place is empty and desolate. This association between the word *qafr* and death is found not only in ʿAntar's poem[13]. In ʿAntar's poem, the tribe is gone, and *al-ramād*, ashes, take the place of fire, death takes place of life. The word *ʾaqfar*[14] that the poet uses in line 5 replaces *makān ʾanīs-ʾins-ʾunās-nās*, a human place.[15] Another aspect of the poet's distress is that he does not yet have any authority over his beloved, for they are not yet married. For the time being, she remains under the authority of her father and her tribe.[16] ʿAntar's concern here is therefore one of a warrior in a weakened position, without power to attain his desired goal.
To conclude our observation on the *nasīb*, notice there is quite a lot of imagery in

this first part that implies a physical as well as an idealized love. We find references, among others, to ᶜAbla's sweet mouth (ᶜ*Adhbun muqabbiluhu laḏīḏu-l-maṭ̣ᶜami*, line 13); the wet gleam of her teeth (line 14); the perfume of her breath is like the smell of a verdant prairie (*rawḍatan 'unufan*, line 15); she is a pure virgin like a silver dirham (*bikrin ḥurratin qarrāratin kaddirhami*, line 16).

The *nasīb* is a very important part of the ode, for it is here that the poet expresses his emotions, talks about his beloved, about the places where he has seen her or where she lived. ᶜAntar's poem is typical in this way, as he addresses *al-ṭalal*, the ruins of his beloved's campsite. It is masterfully constructed, and it indicates that ᶜAntar had much prior experience in composing poetry.

The journey

The second part of the poem is the journey, (lines 20 to 34) a typical motif, in this case quite short, which serves as a transition between parts one and three. It describes ᶜAntar on his horse while he imagines ᶜAbla traveling comfortably in a camel-borne sedan. This is followed by the description of the camel, a short transitional technique typical of the structure of pre-Islamic poems. In this section, the poet mentions two animals important to pre-Islamic society, the horse and the female camel. The horse is important in battle and we will see it further described in the boast. The camel is more closely associated with the daily life of the tribe. The poet spends the night on his black horse during battles in line 20; but during times of peace he rides the female camel as we find in line 22 and after[17].

In this section of the poem, we again find the use of a place-name, *Shadaniyya*, as the origin of a camel ᶜAntar hopes will one day carry him to his beloved. This is a place in Yemen, as is confirmed by Al-Tibrīzī in *Sharḥ al-Qasā'id al-ᶜAshr*. Although the journey section of ᶜAntar's poem is short, its level of language, the elegant description, the use of assonance and other literary devices, as well as the traditional subject matter of horse and camel, argue in favor of the poet's previous experience and indicate an awareness of the historic poetic traditions, as well as the techniques employed by his contemporaries.

The warrior's boast (lines 35 to the end).

This section of the poem includes the wine song, as well as praises for the poet's own nobility and generosity and from line forty on, his prowess in battle and heroic deeds. As is traditionally the case, the poem's main theme is found in this third part. Most of the lines in this part begin with verbs in the past tense, preceded by *fa* or *wa*, which either introduce additional information or expand on a previous idea. Sometimes the verbs are preceded by conditional prepositions like *in* or *iḏā,* generally indicating the beginning of new sentence.

Early on this section of the poem (lines 36 and 37) are built around incomplete *jinās* with the repetition of three words (*uẓlami, ẓulimtu* and *ẓulmi*). All three of these words come from the root *ẓ-l-m,* which means "to wrong, to ill-treat, to outrage". In addition, ᶜAntar repeats conditional prepositions 3 times: *in* and *iḏā* in line 35, then *iḏā* in lines 36 and 37. These introduce strong threats, explaining what the poet will do if he is mistreated. This is an integral part of the boast, and

it is elegant from a literary point of view. He will later build upon these threats, describing past incidents that make these threats believable. Then in line 42, the poet proceeds from his personal qualities to his qualities as a warrior. He is addressing this speech to ᶜAbla. In line 44 he says, *hallā sa'alti-l-khayla ya bnata mālikin // 'in kunti jāhilatan bimā lam taᶜlami*[18], opposing *al-jahl* (ignorance) with *al-ᶜilm* (knowledge). He goes on to create a synonym for *al-jahl* from *taᶜlami* by using the negating *lam*. The reason for this repetition of the idea of ignorance is to emphasize ᶜAbla's ignorance of his courage in battle. But it also shows the poet's eloquence. Next, he employs the word *sa'alti,* "ask". He wants her to learn of his exploits from the other warriors in the battle. Then in line 47 he uses the verb *yukhbirki* to instruct ᶜAbla to inform herself. *Al-khabar* follows the initial question. It is implied the warriors should inform her of the poet's superiority in battle, of how he killed his enemies, and how he is eager to join battle. Again, the poet manipulates the language with ease.

In ᶜAntar's description of war, we notice that he uses either the single personal verb forms *tu* in past-tense verbs (lines 50, 51, 54, 62, 63, 66, 72, 74) or he uses the possessive pronouns *ya* or *yi* as he does in lines 41, 47, 62, 73. He also uses *ya* or *yi* with prepositions, for example in line 67, *'ilayya*. In all, he uses over twenty personal pronouns according to their grammatical rules, if we count every use from verb to prepositions. The poet shows he thoroughly understands both grammar and the constraints of his poetic form, while boasting of his personal exploits. The only time ᶜAntar mentions his tribe is when its horsemen need his help in battle (in line 67, *yadᶜūna ᶜAntara,* and in line 72, *qīlu al-fawārisi*), and the tribe could not win the battle without him. As for the battle itself, the poet uses various words: *al-ḥarb (*line 74); *al waqīᶜa (*line 47); *al-waghā (*line 47). He presents the battle in two different ways. The first is by using a singular pronoun to present his enemy: *lahu (*line 42); *nizālahu (*line 48); *thiyābahu (*line 50); *taraktuhu (*line 51); *uriduhu (*line 54) ; *ṭaᶜantuhu (*line 55).
He describes his enemy in some detail: in line 48 as well protected, *mudajajin* and as so strong that nobody wants to fight him, *kariha-l-kumātu nizālahu* and as courageous and self-confident. ᶜAntar is manipulating the language, showing an understanding of nuances in his considerable vocabulary. The poet will only do battle with champions, and this glorification of his enemy is in fact self-glorification.

The second way the poet describes battles is by using plural forms, referring not to the individual but the collective enemy. In line 64, he uses the term *al-qawm,* which means a group of people, and in this case a group of enemies. The transition to this group of enemies is smooth, thanks to the word *abṭāl*, heroes, in line 64.
In the battle scene, the poet again demonstrates his vocabulary when he mentions the arms used: (*rumḥ* line 50-55; *rimāḥ* line 67; *sayf* line 52; *muhannad*[19] line 55). He also uses rich techniques of description when he describes how he killed his enemies, describing the blood (line 68-75), and how he left the dead enemy as carrion (line 51-76).
The poet also praises his companion in battle, his horse (lines 68-70). The horse complains to his rider about the furor of the battle. The poet uses the word *taḥamḥumi* from *ḥamḥama* "to whinny", upon which al-Tibrīzī comments in his *Sharḥ al-Muᶜallaqāt al-ᶜAshr*. The poet's horse is a very active participant in the battle, and the poet draws on all available elements to paint a graphic picture of

war, a beautiful literary description of a violent scene of carnage.

The battles described in these pre-Islamic poems are human in scale[20]. The causes of battles varied: for water, grass for animals, revenge, insults, etc. The battles are described breathlessly, using only a few words, beginning and ending in just a few lines, (lines 42 and 43; lines 46, 49, 50, 51) but in these few lines are compressed the descriptions of the warrior, his courage, how he is killed and the end result of the duel. Such conciseness is a mark of the master of Arabic poetry. It's a very quick description compared to scenes of war such as we find in other literary traditions.[21]

In comparing ᶜAntar's boast with those of other pre-Islamic poets, we find that it is quite different. I attribute this to the difference in social status between ᶜAntar and the other poets. ᶜAntar had been rejected by his tribe, and it seems natural for his boast to be individual in nature because he felt alienated from the tribe. Other poets, more closely integrated in their groups, spoke for their entire tribes[22]. If we compare ᶜAntar's boast to that of ᶜAmr Ibn Kulthūm, for example, the difference in tone is striking[23].

Notice the use of the pronoun *naḥnu*, "us", in ᶜAmr Ibn Kulthūm's poem, rather than the first person pronouns that ᶜAntar uses. ᶜAmr is of noble birth. He represents his entire tribe both in battles of words and swords. But ᶜAntar was rejected by his tribe, and has no reason to glorify it. In ᶜAntar's boast, there is no room for others. In the face of death, ᶜAntar creates his own world, centered on himself, glorifying his own qualities[24].

When ᶜAntar uses the pronouns "I" and "me" to show he is his tribe's savior and how strong he is, it is to convince his beloved ᶜAbla that he is the best fighter and the man most worthy of her love. ᶜAbla is ubiquitous in ᶜAntar's boast, just as she was in the *nasīb*. He addresses his words to her when talking about his generosity in the wine song and about how he hates to be mistreated (line 36).

In his boast, as throughout his poem, ᶜAntar's mastery of the poetic techniques discussed earlier in this article is complete, and such technical competence is difficult to imagine if this were, indeed, his first poem.

Conclusion

As we examine *Muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar* line by line, and analyze it both structurally and stylistically, we see that it is too sophisticated to be the work of a novice poet. First of all, it is very long for an inexperienced poet. In addition, ᶜAntar uses the traditionally accepted structural elements of the time, developing his poem in a standard meter while introducing a subtle variation of it. The transition from one verse to another is coherent. The hemistiches obey the rules of pre-Islamic poetic structure. Furthermore, it adheres to the tradition of dividing the verses into three sections, the opening verses, the journey and the poet's boast.

ᶜAntar's style is also sophisticated. He employs rhymes both within single lines and at the ends of lines, and these rhymes conform to the accepted models of the best pre-Islamic poetry. His use of assonance is masterful and we have cited numerous examples. He judiciously repeats key words either identically or with slight variations, as well as demonstrating a masterful command of vocabulary both in his use of synonyms and antonyms. Finally, his use of grammatical

structure is not only correct but in each case enhances the meaning and significance of the words themselves and thus of the poem.

Why Ibn Qutayba dismissed the poem out of hand, and why Al-Iṣfahānī did not mention it at all will perhaps always remain a mystery. Perhaps political reasons or an aversion for the slave-poets motivated this. It is difficult to believe in a simple oversight. Indeed, Al-Iṣfahānī cites (p. 244-45) an example of ᶜAntar's poetry which is earlier than the muᶜallaqa. We know it is earlier because he declaimed its seven lines while he was still a slave. It is highly probable that other compositions were lost over the centuries since ᶜAntar lived[25]. We are fortunate that the beautiful and subtly crafted muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar has come down to us through the ages.

Notes

[1] Pierre Larcher's recent translations of Muᶜallaqāt (Les Septs Poèmes Préislamiques Fata Morgana 2000) are a priceless addition to the literature.

[2] Ibn Qutayba informs us that muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar was composed in response to an insult concerning ᶜAntar's color, and to the accusation that he was incapable of composing poetry. Ibn Qutayba's version corresponds very closely to Ibn al-Kalbī's version (d. 204H/819CE). He gives the same details of his death as the philologist Abu ᶜUbayda Muᶜammar Ibn al-Muthannā (d. 210H/825CE). The version of another classical writer, Abu al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, in his book al-Aghānī (The Book of Songs) corresponds to Ibn Qutayba's version of ᶜAntar's life. However, al-Iṣfahānī doesn't mention muᶜallaqat ᶜAntar at all. It seems to me impossible that al-Iṣfahāni didn't know about it. Perhaps he didn't find Ibn Qutayba's point of view credible, but had insufficient information to oppose it, and preferred simply not to comment. Or perhaps he agreed and for that reason considered the poem not important enough to mention.

[3] p 149 al-Shiᶜr wa al-Shuᶜarā',

[4] By "composing" we mean "reciting" or "declaiming"-in other words, composing orally.

[5] According to al-Tibrīzī (d.502H)

[6] The meters al-Kāmil and al-Ṭawīl are the most common meters used in the Muᶜallaqāt because their longer hemistiches allow the inclusion of more words and thus more elaborate structure to the poems.

[7] There are also a few examples of ṭibāq, or antonyms. One example is in line 20.

[8] Usāma Ibn Munqidh (d.1188 AD) wrote an anthology al-Manāzil wa al-Diyār organized solely around al-nasīb.

[9] Zuhayr uses the same technique. The second half of ᶜAntar's first line is identical in Zuhayr's nasīb:

Waqaftu bihā min baᶜdi ᶜishrīna hijjatan // fala'yan ᶜaraftu al-dāra baᶜda tawahhumi

I stood on her abode after twenty years and // I recognized her abode from memories

Again from Zuhayr: Falammā ᶜaraftu al-dāra qultu lirabᶜihā // 'alā 'anᶜim ṣabāḥan 'ayyuhā al-rabᶜu wa slami

We find some of the same phrases in ᶜAntar's poem: ᶜAraftu al-dāra and 'anᶜim ṣabāḥan.

It is not uncommon to find such parallels among pre-Islamic poems.

[10] In search of grass and water for their herds, or for some other reason.

[11] Al-Nasīb and the motif of ruins did not disappear from Arabic poetry with the advent of Islam. We find the same theme in the work of the Abbasside poet Abu Tammām:

Qad mararnā bi al-dāri wahiya khalā'un // wa bakaynā ṭulūlahā wa al-rusūmā

We passed by the abode as it lay empty, // And we wept over its ruins and remains

In the second line of ᶜAntar's poem, he is asking ᶜAbla's abode to speak, but these ruins are mute, a characteristic of pre-Islamic poetry. In her book, Reorientations/Arabic and Persian poetry p. 109, Suzanne Stetkevych points out that the ruins in pre-Islamic poetry are mute, they don't answer the poet. But later, we find them answering, as they do in the work of Omayyade poet ᶜUmar Ibn Abī Rabīᶜa.

[12] *al-Jiwā'*, a valley in the territory of the *Banû ᶜAbs*, or a city in the Nejd;
al-Hazn, a camping site of the *Banī Yarbuᶜ* between Medina and Khaybar or between *al-Kūfa* and *Fay*; *al-Sammān*, a hill under control of the *Banī Ḥanẓala* but which is also the name of a mountain in the domain of the *Banī Tamīm*; *al-Mutathallam*, this name is also given by al-Tibrīzī as a name of a place but without precision, al-Zawzanī doesn't mention it; *ᶜUnayzatayni*, the name of a place between *al-Kūfa* and *Baṣra*; *al-Ghaylami*, the name of a valley of the *Yamāma* near *Souaj*.

[13] We have an example that comes from al-Ibshīhī (*al-Mustaṭraf*), who cites a verse which says:
Wa qabru Ḥarbin bimakānin qafrin // walaysa qurba qabri Ḥarbin qabru
The grave of Ḥarb in an empty land // there is no other grave near Ḥarb's grave
We find another association of the word *qifār* or *qafru* with death in a poem by the pre-Islamic poet al-Muhalhil who is calling his dead brother Kulayb :
Daᶜawtuka yā Kulaybu falam tujibnī // wa kayfa yujībunī al-baladu al-qifāru
I called you, Kulayb, and you did not answer // How will the wasteland answer me?

[14] Which we use in the term *makān aqfar* or *makān mūḥish* to indicate a no-man's land

[15] More information about this word *anīs* can be found in *Sharḥ al-Muᶜallaqāt al-sabᶜ* by al-Zawzanī in the section on Muᶜallaqat Labīd.

[16] We can find the same kind of preoccupation in other cultural traditions. For example, Roland Barthes, in his book on Racine, proposes that the fundamental relations between the hero in Racine and his beloved is one of authority.

[17] ᶜAntar uses the word *rikābukum* to refer to these female camels but he also uses the word *ḥamula*, from the root *ḥ-m-l* meaning to carry, as these camels bear either goods or riders. *Ḥaluba* from *ḥ-l-b* means to milk. ᶜAntar describes the camels as being black, comparing them with crows. He uses the consonant *k* to express this simile. These black camels were considered the best ones. The percentage of the journey sequence dedicated to the camel in this poem reflects the importance of this animal to the Arabs of that time. *Al-nāqa* represented wealth, for the number of camels was directly related to a person's wealth and power. *Al-nāqa* provided meat, milk, leather and the skins for tents. To avoid wars, camels were sometimes used to pay a blood-price taking the place of revenge. Abû ᶜAlī al-Qālī, in his book *al-Amālī*, mentions a poem by the pre-Islamic poetess Kabsha bint Maᶜdîkarib in which she encourages her brother to avenge his brother's death and not to accept camels as a blood-price. Moreover camels were used as a bride-price to acquire a wife.

[18] "Oh daughter of Mālik, why not ask the horses // If you do not know and you are not informed?"

[19] A sword made in India

[20] These warriors were knights; the battles never took place between men and gods, and so differ from the Homeric epic. In addition, our poem is much shorter than the Homeric song, or *La Chanson de Roland*.

[21] p 151. *La chanson de Roland* where a typical description runs some twenty lines.

[22] The same reason may explain why no earlier poetry is recorded for ᶜAntar, since he would not, as a slave, have had a reporter, or *rāwī*.

[23] Here is 'Amr Ibn Kulthūm:
wa naḥnu al-ḥākimūna 'iḏā 'uṭiᶜnā // wa naḥnu al-ᶜāzimūna 'iḏā ᶜuṣīnā
wa naḥnu al-tārikūna limā sakhiṭnā // wa naḥnu al-ākhiḏūna limā raḍīnā

[24] We find the same emphasis on the first person pronouns that we see in ᶜAntar's poetry when we study *al-Shuᶜarā' al-Ṣaᶜālīk ᶜUrwa Ibn al-Ward*, poets rejected by their tribes, who live alone in the desert

[25] Al-Iṣfahānī, p. 242-43, gives an example of a short four-line poem that is attributed to ᶜAntar, although he himself has not found it in any official collection, and he speculates that it could have been part of a lost collection of ᶜAntar's poetry.

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