

“The Battle of ‘Aḳḳebōt”: A poem in the Mahri language  
 Unnamed poet from al-Mahra, Yemen  
 presented by Sam Liebhaber, Middlebury College  
 5/26/2021

POEM

TRANSLATION

1) *hel ysūken bir s`īd // beyn bwōdī we-hrīt // we-  
kkwōrī dē-mhārūt*

Where the son of S`īd lives // between the deserts of  
Hrīt // and the feeder ravines of Mahrūt

2) *we-ḳṣeylet `ōfyōt // we-dḡawt amāmālēt // le-ḳnawṭer  
dē-zhūt*

The cease-fire expired // the “field has sprouted” // at  
the irrigation channels, it has grown tall (and abundant)

3) *nūka be-hbēr drey // le-mḡawma dē-hhāḡūr // tōba  
be-štīrfūt*

They brought strange news // to all of those  
assembled // the possessors of excellent, exalted virtues

4) *fōn heḡs ertābūb // d-tīṣawten le-ffālēk // hebīā w-lē  
sbūt*

And after the passion [of S`īd] became dense [like the  
stars] // he listens carefully for the appointed time //  
whether it is delayed or comes earlier

5) *tē hbēr ḡrōh w-fār // sōyer ke-mneddābīn // we-sfeth  
teyrūt*

Until the news came and spread // going with the  
messengers // and its information flew all around

6) *we-hsōbī le-slōm // bēl aḡesm w-hammēt // habrē d-  
semdayūt*

My hopes are with Slōm // possessor of fortitude and  
power // son of the Smōdī woman

7) *bēr aḡōrem leh `āṣūr // yeṣḳōf w-heh klawl // w-la  
'āyneh hāḡfūt*

[Days] and nights have already passed over him // he  
lays down [to sleep] and is kept awake by pains // and  
his eyes do not sleep

8) *tē ḡsēdeh artekawḳ // we-mṭā `t d-mehḡalīḳ // l-ād  
ḡōlet seydūt*

Until his body becomes emaciated // and the food of  
humans // does not help his condition

9) *annākawd mehḡazūr // w-nḡā l-heh shawṭ // hel  
ahaffeh seyrūt*

[Slōm] chose the choice fighting men of his tribe //  
under him [i.e., his command] (are) the bravest ones //  
wherever he goes

10) *ṣalb we-ḡsēdeh ṭāt // wel hāser beh ḡsūr // men  
asōseh we-ṣmūt*

All from one back and body [they are kin] // in no one  
is there mixed a mixing // from his roots, his is of one  
flesh

11) *w-ewōber beh bsul // sill `āyneh we-nṣārūt*

His mounts are swift and strong // lifting their eyes and  
walking proudly [being happy]

12) *kūneh bīsen assābēḡ // teḳrīren b-hāwēl / tē ṣnēdeḡ  
le-ḳhūt*

He sets off with the camels across the plain // trotting at  
the front // he brought them up to their secret camp

13) *wōfeḳ we-ḡrīm ḡzawr // we-ḡdīdem leh yheyt // we-  
hdīyet ḡabrūt*

They found what they wanted and that their target was  
present // they begin the encounter anew and shouted  
“yheyt!” at him // a gift that was there

14) *ḡmōleh be-ḳsēl // bād amazh we-ḡḡāk // w-hōbītem  
we-ḡmūt*

They threw him down after a bit // after playing a  
joke // they pinned him down and covered his face

15) *sēlem kawṭa le-fwōd // bēh bhēys mharḵōn // we-nyēt mhelwūt*

Sēlim [the quarry] cut off [the feelings] of his heart // in him were pains well-known // his intentions all wrought up

16) *ḵōbel ke-swīyet lā // we-bkōr w-lū `ākawr // we-klēf ḵ-yertābūt*

He doesn't think about the things [done to him] // or the pile [of worries], even if it grows large // and its burden increases

17) *we-ṭmūten ebtālul // sūra men ḥmō krā' // we-frūd l-hākfūt*

Their thirsty camels drank their fill // and drank pure water // and then took off for their hills

18) *tē w-lū brēk aḵeyḵ // we-mlōda de-ffārūḵ // aḡmūlem we-ḵfūt*

Even if they are [ridden] in a narrow area // their eyes glance around in fear... // they threw him to the ground and pinioned his arms

19) *`ār ḥḵeyr w-lō `āmūm // we-shīb ḵ-īḵḵādūt // le-mkawser we-nkāsūt*

Like the ocean when it is angry // waves follow upon wave // over the reefs [the ocean] roils

20) *kem men tūt w-seh ṭnūh // aṭḡawleḵ amūḥeyr // beh ṣrōt mhōḥafūt*

How many raging she-camels // looking upon an fenced-in garden // but ropes stop them from moving at all

21) *ḵ-`ār adarb hawrēs // bāl azōyed de-ḥwōl // we-śśāḵāt l-`āfdūt*

But the road prevents her [from reaching the garden] // the wall is large and has many layers // and the steps [she takes] do not take [her] over [it]

22) *we-b-sats `ālkōt // we-ḥṭāb men aṣerbeyt // w-ḡellōt aḡensafūt*

And soon [war] broke out // its fuel [taken] from the ṣarbeyt tree // hot flames burning from the stumps

23) *we-ḡḵawret yekrūr // w-sūmeydī le-slōm // hēs hatf anḡazūt*

The “lions” attacked // and the Smōdī surrendered // when his rifle was emptied

24) *le-ḵlūten yebhōr // be-ḡmūlet we-drēḵ // we-slōmet ḥeṣlūt*

He called for help from the young men // [to come] well and speedily // the help arrived

25) *we-ḥḡūfem leh ḡyūḡ // men adēfer we-lḥīb // ḥōzem leh men aḥwūt*

Men came to protect him // from the fire and flames // and defended him from the net of death

26) *w-sādīt dlūf w-ferr // we-ḵdōm ḥṭeyr aḵōn // aḡfōr ḵ-bēr ḵnūt*

Sādīt jumped up and went // coming to the very top of a mountain // May God have mercy on the woman who bore him

27) *yekhōb ḵ-heh ṣendūd // yestūfī men aḡell // berh nōḡeḥ we-ṭbūt*

He who is brave came // throwing dust on himself out of excitement // indeed he is ready (“well cooked”) and steadfast

28) *we-brūkem hārḡōn // le-mḥawbet aḡzōn // ṣnets anḡabūt*

The “rams” kneeled [with their rifles] // in order [to shoot] their new bullets // fresh from the factory

29) *b-śīwōṭ ḵ-seh nḡiḥt // men `awafḥ ḵ-ṭerrāb // wet rišt anḵabūt*

With the fire that is strong and continuous // from the rapid action of the firing pin // and the clicking of the trigger

30) *we-ḥzūrem meṣwōf // we-ṭḵawnem zebtāt // hel aśawket ḥaṭfūt*

They know well the rifle sights // and are experts at taking aim // when the bullets whiz by

- 31) *tē mīzōn dkūs `āḳā // we-ḡwēher dē-zhē // men akabś eftālūt* Until the scale tilted to the ground // and “the jewels of the wedding” escaped // and were lost from their hand
- 32) *we-zḡīf d-hāhmanōn // w-kīlōten ḡāryōt // šāreb bēhem we-hbūt* They poured out their cartridges // running through measures [of ammo] // [there was] a loss [of ammo] and a heedless expenditure
- 33) *we-ḥsōb el menh bedd // mīzōn tē l-šār // le-brē men hkūt* But there is no avoiding [taking vengeance] into consideration // until the scales are even once again // and is fixed of its tilt
- 34) *w-ber `āmer men khēn // d-el yṭōmeh šḳāt wel yrikt dē-rkūt* And Bir `Āmer, for a long time past, // is not one greedy to overstep [the bounds] // and is not one who stomps on one who has stomped on him
- 35) *ḡeyr we-killēm hāmtōn // we-šrūkem men aḥawf // yebseyr šūdāfūt* Except if they cause him pain in his back // or it is split in half from fear // or if he sees the end-game coming
- 36) *we-šrōma we-krēm // hēs alēhen artabūb // w-mehšāt l-ḡārāffūt* And now *ōdī we-krēm krēm* // when the melodies gather // a reservoir that can't be emptied by scooping
- 37) *men ta `mērem anśakōt // d-`ār ḥmō brēk sōs // w-mehšāt mhaḥsūt* [Beware] of saying that it has dried up // indeed there is water in its deepest bedrock // and the reservoir has been re-dug
- 38) *wet nkūśes tentakūs // ke-mḥawreḡde-rbā // we-mdīt dōṭayūt* If it is searched for, it is found // [as though it were a well] at the time of the departure of Rbā // and the *mdīt* of Dōṭa
- 39) *kem men īṭ w-seh ṭmīt // mnōhel sedrūt* How many she-camels when she [sic] is thirsty // goes forth from the streams [quenched of thirst]
- 40) *wet ṭwōren thāḳawb // beyn arāmel we-ḥṭāt // hēs abīr messanūt* Sometimes the “muse” migrates // between the sandy plain and the pasture land // like a spring from which people habitually draw water
- 41) *w-adh ḡēza medḥeyḳ // we-bḳāt d-šāḳawt* And Wadi Ḡēza is still well-travelled // and the place of Šāḳawt
- 42) *hād šeydet dē-hḥalē // dīk tehyūm `āḳā // le-hnefs we-ḥlūt* No one but the desert gazelle // the one who roams the land // by herself in the desolate waste
- 43) *bēr thawzer alebbōd // ke-rdōten d-rīḥeyn // wet aḡēs aškerfūt* She has known the hunter // when the wind blows back and forth // when she smells his sweat
- 44) *tehrīren b-āzīb / tē men hāl ḡeyṭāt / we-ḥrō aḡteybūt* She takes off at a run // until she has disappeared // and her head has completely disappeared.