

[No Malice in Their Violence]

An Urjouza, a poem in Rajaz metre

by
GHAILAN IBN UQBA IBN BAHISH IBN MASOUD IBN HARITHA IBN AMR IBN RABIA IBN MALKAN
known as
~DHUL RUMMA~

Reports of Dhul Rumma are numerous, so concision is of the essence. He died in 117 AH, may Almighty God show him mercy, and when his end was upon him, he said, I am grown halfway old. I have forty years.
Deaths of the Eminent and Reports of Men in their Time, by Ibn Khallikan (1211-82 CE)

Abou Amr Ibn Al Alaa said, Poetry was opened by Imrul Qais, and with Dhul Rumma sealed.
Various in various sources

He terminates a line of poets who, even in their own age, were considered 'behind the times'.
The Encyclopaedia of Islam, R. Blachère (1991 CE)

Abou Amr Ibn Al Alaa said that Jarir said, If Dhul Rumma had never spoken again after reciting his poem which began, What ails your eye from which the water flows, then he would have been among the greatest of poets. Jarir used to say, The only poem by Dhul Rumma that I would care to have attributed to me is, What ails your eye from which the water flows.

The transmitter Hammad said, Dhul Rumma never completed his poem which began, What ails your eye from which the water flows, and continued to add to it from the day he first recited it until the day of his death.
Various

A poet. In the second rank of the foremost poets of his age.
The Book of Greats, by Khairuddin Al Zirikli (1925 CE)

Dhul Rumma had three brothers, Masoud, Jarfas, and Hisham, all of them poets. One of them would speak lines of poetry and Dhul Rumma would build on these with more lines then recite them all together in public, and due to his fame the poem would be attributed to him.
The Book of Songs, by Aboul Faraj Al Isfahani (897-967 CE)

*Eissa Ibn Omar said, I was lately returned from travel when Dhul Rumma came in to see me, and I asked him, had I not given him anything to keep for me?
No, he said. You and I, we take; we do not give.*
The Encyclopaedia of the Lettered, by Yaqout Al Hamawi (1179-1229 CE)

*The structure of his odes is unconventional but by no means defective.
Most information concerning his life is of dubious validity.*
The Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature, J.E. Montgomery (1998 CE)

The people gathered and formed a circle about Dhul Rumma as he recited to them. His mother, passing by and peering through the crowd, saw a man seated on the ground, and saw that this man was Dhul Rumma. He was short and ugly, pinched and hunched. And his mother said, Listen to his poetry! Do not look at his face!
The Book of Songs

of transport, they
all rise to move away
before I rise to move them,
lazy with their burden,
like the tall palms and the thorns
of red acacia cage
a whole soft crop
of cuddled limbs
and rumps that shift like fine sands, thighs
that meet both bent and straightened and
from pendants in their ears down to their anklets
stretch soft slopes girdled by
yet more sands, see

 a flock,
 forms perfect unadorned,
 waists pinched and fatbacked,
 lumber out at sundown trampling
 hems of shawls and striped gowns,
 and in the chink of hard things in their hair,
 the seed pearls and the rich pearls and
 at O those jewelled throats you hear
 the shake and shift of senna
 in the north wind night.

A vast plain where
mothers' sons are lost
is dressed in mist,
its peaks wrapped round
as if by fine silk, there

 I crossed
 in company on camels, cows
 who shot and rolled to quit
 the nightmare flats with eyes sunk in,
 who joining speed to haste
 were nose-ring round,
 hips flexing down
 touched chests, and back,
 touched spines,
 were curling
 like the ragged robes of Yemen,
 each casting out on that dead ground
 a foetus, coated slick, alive
 enough to cry but not yet knit inside
 and dying,
 brows still bald, the ties
 that bound them broke untimely by

~ the thorns / of red acacia cage ~
Camels bear the *hawdaj*, which is to say
howdah; a bower of boughs.

~ where / mothers' sons are lost ~
"Dhul Rumma once recited lines of poetry in
which he referred to the rainless desert as
thi 'labiyya, Foxground, at which Halbas Al
Assadi said to him, You describe the desert in
terms such that your death must come by it."

~ in company ~
That is, *azwaal*: brave and cheerful companions.
"Al Muntaja Ibn Nahban said,
As Dhul Rumma lay dying, he said to us that he
would not be one of those buried in the low
ground, in a pit in obscurity.
But what are we to do for you? we said. We are
here, in the sands of Al Dahnaa.
He asked us, How far are you from the dunes
of Hawza? by which he meant two dunes that
tower above the low desert around them.
We said, But how are we to dig you a grave in
such sands, when they are heaped so high?
He said, Where then are there trees and clay to
build, and branches?
We prayed over him down by the water, then
we fetched cut boughs and clay on the back of
rams, which climb better through sand than
camels.
We made his tomb there, building it up from
the boughs and clay, then lowered him into it."

the long night running, by
the slapping step, the shift of baggage high
on spines that lashed
long-spurred to breaking
after shine
off distant flanks,
 and hearing
 in the rainless blank,
to right, to left,
the ghoul-whine pitching
high and low,
 and faraway
 a reach of risen damp
and windborne silts and dung
which I was on before the grouse
came flocking or the jackals flinching
or the croak of the first strutting
crow at last of dark unrolling
off me,
 off my pretty,
 off her long neck,
and her long strides straining
wide like sweeping rains,

and morning,
 like a shock of grey.

~ and faraway, / a reach ~

“Dhul Rumma was riding with a Jafari of the Bani Tamim on the Pilgrim Road that leads to Basra, and as they were approaching the city over the desert, he recited,

Now stood upon it, I think, afraid,

Of what Halbas said on Foxground day.

It is said that this was the last poetry he ever spoke, for midway across the arid flats he happened to dismount, and his camel, which had never done so before, shied and ran from him. It was carrying all his water and provisions.

And every time he approached it, it ran further still, until he was dead.”

[**Robin Moger** is a translator of Arabic into English. His translations of prose and poetry have appeared in *The White Review*, *Tentacular*, *Asymptote* and *The Washington Square Review*, among others. He has translated several novels and prose works into English including Youssef Rakha's *The Crocodiles* and Iman Mersal's *How To Mend*. His translation of Yasser Abdel Hafez's *The Book Of Safety* was awarded the 2017 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation]