

Some Verses by Ḥassān b. Ṭābit al-Anṣārī Not Included in His *Dīwān*

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Abstract

Many poems and fragmentary verses have been ascribed to Ḥassān b. Ṭābit al-Anṣārī (d. ca. 40/659). In some sources of Southern-Arabian cultural or political orientation—as al-Hamdānī’s *Kitāb al-Iklīl*, the commentary to Naṣwān al-Ḥimyarī’s *Qaṣīda al-ḥimyarīyya*, and particularly the anonymous *Waṣāyā al-mulūk* (occasionally ascribed to al-Aṣmā’ī or to al-Ḥuzā’ī)—about fifty lines by Ḥassān are found which are not recorded in his “official” *dīwān*. Here a brief investigation is conducted in order to reconstruct the poems which could be ascribed either to Ḥassān b. Ṭābit or one of his forgers. A collation of those same verses is then presented together with an English translation.

Keywords: Arabic poetry; Ḥassān b. Ṭābit; *qaṣīda*.

The fame of Ḥassān b. Ṭābit b. al-Munḍir b. al-Anṣārī (d. ca. 40/659) is due to his being “the poet of the Prophet”. Being considered a *ḥadramī* (i.e., a poet who lived and was active before and after the Hijra), his poems and his life itself can be seen as a precious source for events contemporary to the rise of Islam. In other words, he might be defined as the earliest poet of the Islamic Era and the latest and historically most genuine of the *ḡāhiliyya* poets.

As happened to many acclaimed poets of ancient times, many fake poems and verses have been ascribed to Ḥassān: his *dīwān* was collected in various versions, more or less extended, and his prestige easily led forgers to put sentences under his authority in order to give strength to some opinion or other.

The last edition of Ḥassān’s *dīwān*, prepared by Walīd ‘Arafāt, one of the most eminent experts on the poet, includes indeed two recensions of the *dīwān* itself, as well as a section of “poems added from other sources”.¹ This latter section counts more than one hundred poems or fragments, often consisting in a single verse (though some fragments might be related to each other, according to metre, rhyme and topic).

¹ *Dīwān Ḥassān*; see also ‘Arafāt’s article “Ḥassān ibn Ṭābit” in *EI*².

I will focus here on some of these fragments which I had occasion to investigate on manuscripts often not considered in the editions of the sources in which those same fragments are preserved. Those sources are mostly texts of Yemenite provenance that clearly supposed to find in Ḥassān's verses evidences of an Anṣār-Yemen linkage. At the end of this paper there is a tentative reconstruction of the Arabic text of those poems and fragments with an English translation.

A thirty-seven verse long *qaṣīda* (in *ṭawīl* metre, rhyme *-ar*) is reported in the commentary on the *Qaṣīda Ḥimyarīyya* by Naṣwān b. Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī,² in support of evidences about Dū al-Qarnayn (quoted in verse 18). This poem was known to al-Hamdānī, who quoted separately verses 14-16 (*Iklīl* I, p. 51; these were included in the *Dīwān* as fragment n. 304, p. 474), verse 25 (*Iklīl* VIII, p. 86) and verses 26-27 (*Iklīl* VIII, p. 230-31). Actually the chapter on Dū al-Qarnayn found in the commentary on Naṣwān seems to be reported from some work of al-Hamdānī that is missing.³

Seven verses, in the same metre and rhyme, are then in the anonymous *Waṣāyā al-mulūk* (formerly ascribed to al-Aṣma'ī or al-Ḥuzā'ī).⁴ These verses exalt the figure of Ya'rub b. Qaḥṭān, claimed to be the first to speak in pure Arabic and the one who gave culture and civilization to the Arabs—who previously were barbarians and naive as little birds.

Metre, rhyme and topic, all suggest that these fragments belong to one and the same poem that might have been extended on certain occasions—in respect of the audience or the context, as it often happened in oral poetry—either by the author himself or the possible forger.

However authentic the single verses or hemistiches may be, all these fragments can be inserted in the frame of an elegiac *qaṣīda* on the glories of the (alleged) ancestors of al-Anṣār. The sad introduction about the overcoming old age of the poet (verses 1-11) leads to the resigned realization of the relentless fate of life, and then to the remembrance of glorious figures passed by. This structure is common to many *faḥr* poems, since *ḡāhiliyya* times, and later became a sort of *cliché*, in which the nostalgia for the strength of youth is paralleled with that for the glory of the past.

It is here that we possibly can perceive, especially in the self-ironic accents of verses 2-9, the genuine tune of an elderly sensitive seventh-century poet. What looks like mere additions—with their highly formulaic structure—are the verses in praise of families or clans, where the simple change of a name or a word would suffice to serve the purpose. Therefore I consider this poem—or at least its second part and the fragments that could be added—to belong to what 'Arafāt classified as the second class of the poems collected in Ḥassān's *dīwān*, i.e., “poems by later Anṣārīs, particularly those who lived after the year 63

2 *Dīwān Ḥassān*, n. 303, p. 471-473; *Mulūk*, p. 126-128; the new recension reported here in the Appendix (Poem 1) is integrated with variants not considered in the Beirut edition of Naṣwān's *Qaṣīda*.

3 See *Mulūk*, p. 129: converting Seleucid Era (called “Era of Alexander”) into Islamic Era, it is stated that “we are at beginning of year 331 Hijra”, that is September 942 CE, two years before the death of al-Hamdānī, but more than 150 years before the birth of Naṣwān!

4 See *Waṣāyā* 1959, pp. 8-9, and *Waṣāyā* 1997, p. 27; both editors noted the absence of these verses in previous editions of Ḥassān's *Dīwān*; 'Arafāt was not aware of these sources. In Appendix text 1, these verses are numbered 17a-g. I am working on a new edition and translation of this work, taking account of some manuscripts not considered in previous editions.

a.h.”⁵ Yet, variants occurring in various manuscripts may be evidence of an evolution of the poem itself among those who transmitted it: for example, the lack in a later manuscript (the one abbreviated here as “L”) of verses 33-35 quoting specifically the Anṣār may be seen either as the result of a *damnatio memoriae* in some tradition or as an addition by some *anṣārī* not accepted by all traditions. The same can be said of the variant occurring in verse 37: if the expression “the kings of Syria” is a comparison referring to some specific moment, then the variants “kings of the earth” or “kings of humanity” will clearly have to be read on a more general and universal level, detaching the comparison itself from its historical context. These ambiguities lead us to suppose that a core part of the poem can be Ḥassān’s authentic production to which variants and additions would have been added in the years after his death.

To this same category probably also belong some other sparse lines found in the same sources. Two of them are quoted separately in *Iklīl* VIII (p. 108 and p. 130), but ‘Arafāt considered them fragments of the same poem since they share the same metre and rhyme.⁶

In the commentary on Naṣwān’s *Qaṣīda Ḥimyarīyya*, a third verse in the same metre and rhyme and with similar subject and formula is reported.⁷ A fourth verse, unnoticed by ‘Arafāt, is introduced both in *Iklīl* and in the commentary to Naṣwān.⁸

In these four verses some peculiar Yemenite figures and their homelands are exalted, and it is not surprising that they were preserved only by two Yemenite champions such as al-Hamdānī and Naṣwān al-Ḥimyarī. Due to the scarcity and the hard formulaic shape of these fragments, it is problematic to relate these to other poems by Ḥassān of the same metre and rhyme,⁹ so that one probably should count them among the group of spurious verses that were attached to similar poems on certain occasions.

- 5 *Dīwān Ḥassān*, p. 28-29 of the English section, whereas ‘Arafāt adds: “...these poems faithfully reflect the ‘humble place’ into which, according to Ibn Qutayba, the Anṣār fell after the battle of al-Ḥarra. The poems are clearly defensive and are no more than long-winded boasts of their ancestry and the “glory” which their ancestors have left as heritage for them to live on.” Given the long life of Ḥassān, I would add that he had himself the chance to see the cruel frictions occurring in the Umma in the last years of his life and, being sensitive of that situation, may thus have expressed such a feeling in a poem like this.
- 6 *Dīwān Ḥassān*, p. 521, n. 365; the first verse is also in al-Bakrī’s *Mu‘ğam mā ‘sta‘ğam*, s.v. *Aryāb*. Here in Appendix, Poem 2, verses number 1 and 3.
- 7 *Mulūk*, p. 211. This occurrence suggests Naṣwān’s independence from al-Hamdānī, since the latter, speaking of the castle of Hakir (*Iklīl* VIII, p. 121-122), does not quote any verse by Ḥassān. Here Poem 2, verse 2.
- 8 *Iklīl* II, p. 91; as for the commentary on Naṣwān, actually this quotation is found only in one manuscript of the commentary (L). This was not checked in the Beirut edition, which anyway recorded (p. 207, note 3) al-Hamdānī’s quotation. Ḥassān is reported in the comment to the figure of Dū Mar‘alī, one of the children of Yankuf b. ‘Abd Šams, whose name occurs only in some recension of the *Qaṣīda Ḥimyarīyya*—not, for example in Kremer’s or Basset’s ones. See Larcher 2003. Here text 2, verse 4.
- 9 One praise fragment (*Dīwān* n. 367, p. 522), of the same rhyme and metre, might be tentatively related to them. It has been quoted in the *Jamharat nasab Qurayš* by Zubayr b. Bakkār, who thought it referred to al-Muṭ‘im b. ‘Adī: it would sound unusual to find the praise of a Qurayšite in a poem where Yemenite princes are boasted. However, in the respective line only the name ‘Adī occurs, a name that easily can refer to any other homonymous figure.

Finally, another single verse, not included in *Dīwān Ḥassān*, is quoted in *Waṣāyā*¹⁰ (here Appendix, Poem 3) as it is similar to some *fahṛ* verses of Maḍḥiḡ tribesmen who magnify the fires they light to signal their camps to travellers. This verse is actually found only in one copy of *Waṣāyā* (manuscript C 68 ar. of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, here abbreviated “A”), the one used for the 1997 edition. It contains a metaphor that can be supposed to compare bonfires—only addressed as “them” (*-hā*)—to red gemstones or to the light of fireflies glowing in the night. This too could actually be attached to any poem by any poet.

I would conclude with the following remarks:

- 1) 45 verses ascribed to Ḥassān b. Tābit are likely to belong to one single poem, composed of mixed material, genuine (i.e. Ḥassān’s) and spurious; it is noteworthy that the respective verses are recorded in sources of Yemenite inspiration, in which the boasting of alleged Anṣār’s ancestors fits with the general tune of a Ḥassānic poem, whatever the single object of boasting might be.
- 2) The other fragments of otherwise unknown poems are recorded, again, in sources of “Yemenite” inspiration, and they could as well be the result of a ‘forgery’. Nevertheless, they are quoted separately as they were fragments of some already known and acknowledged poems that are missing, poems that may either originate from, or be attached to, Ḥassān himself.
- 3) The total of these fifty lines of poetry ascribed to Ḥassān b. Tābit confirm his fame and increasing authority, particularly among Yemenite-oriented scholars/philologists from the ninth to the twelfth century and on.

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- V2 Ms. Vat. Ar. 1120 in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, dated 23 Ġumādā 1127 (23 May 1715).
- A1 Ms. C 29 ar. from the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, copied probably between 1053/1643 and 1097/1686.
- A2 Ms. C 117 ar. from the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan (48ff), dated 1321h (1903).
- L Ms. Or. 363 from the Library of Accademia dei Lincei (Fondo Caetani) in Rome, dated 25 Raġab [13]51 (17 May 1917).

¹⁰ *Wāṣāyā* 1997, p. 129.

Waṣāya al-mulūk

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Appendix: Texts and translations of reconstructed poems

Poem 1

(Dīwān Ḥassān n. 303, pp. 471-473)

Sources: *Mulūk*, pp. 126-128, compared with manuscripts V1, V2, A1, A2, L; *Waṣāyā* 1959, pp. 8-9 and *Waṣāyā* 1997, p. 27, compared with manuscripts A, P2, T and BL.

1	كبرت كذلك المرء ما عاش يكبر	*	وقد يهرم الباقي الكبير المعمر
2	لقد كنَّ يأتين الغواني يزرني	*	بأردائها مسك ذكيٍّ وعنبر
3	ولقد ما رأين البيض شبيبي وذرنبي	*	ونادينبي: "يا عم" والشيب يوذر
4	تتقرن عني حين أبصرت شاملاً	*	على مفريقي كالقطن بل هو أنور
5	وكن خلالي يوم شعري كأنه	*	جناح غداف أسود حين ينثر
6	أربع عليه البان في كل ليلة	*	فيصبح جعداً كالعناقيد يقطر
7	وقد كنت أمشي كالردني ثابتاً	*	فصرت كأني ضالع الرجل أصور
8	فبدلت شيئاً بعد ما اسودَّ حالك	*	متى مسه خضب إذا هو احمر
9	كرايبة حمراء في رأس حالق	*	على شعف باد لمن يتبصر
10	علا الشيب رامي بعدما كان أسوداً	*	وفي الشيب آيات لمن يتفكر
11	وبعد الشباب الشيب والضعف والفنا	*	وموت له ورد عبوس مكدر
12	فكم كم من الأملاك قد ذل ملكهم	*	وهل من نعيم دائم لا يغير
13	سوى ملك ربي ذي الجلال فانه	*	له الملك يقضى ما يشاء ويقدر
14	لقد كان قحطان الندى القرم جدنا	*	له منصب في رافع السمك يشهر
15	ينال نجوم السعد إن مد كفه	*	تقل أكف عند ذلك وتقصر
16	ورثنا سناء منه يعلو ومحتداً	*	منيف الذرى سامي الأرومة يذكر
17	إذا انتسبت شوس الملوك فإنما	*	لنا الراية العليا التي ليس تكسر
17a	تعلمتم من منطق الشيخ يعرب	*	أبيننا فصرتم معربين ذوي نفر

17b	وكنتم قديماً ما لكم غير عجمة	*	كلامٌ وكنتم كالبهائم في القفر
17c	تقولون ما نوح ودُجج وكنتم	*	إذا ما التقينا كالرصاص على الجمر
17d	منازلكم كوثرى ومنها درجتهم	*	إلينا كأفراخ درجن من الوكر
17e	فنحن وأنتم كالذي قال لم أزل	*	أعلمه رمياً ليمنع لي ظهري
17f	فلما نشأ واشتد ساعده رمى	*	فلم يُخَطِ ظهري إذ رمى لا ولا نحري
17g	وليس بغاث الطير مثل عتاقها	*	ولا الذهب الابريز يعدل بالصفير
18	لنا ملك ذي القرنين هل نال ملكه	*	من البشر المخلوق خلق مصور
19	بواتر يتلو الشمس عند غروبها	*	لينظرها في عينها حين يدخر
20	ويسمو إليها حين تطلع غدوة	*	فيلمحها في برجها حين يظهر
21	وكيلاً بأسباب السماء نهاره	*	وليلي رقيباً دائماً ليس يفتر
22	وأوصد سداً من حديد أذابه	*	ومن عين قطر مفرغاً ليس يظهر
23	رمى فيه يأجوجاً ومأجوج عنوة	*	إلى يوم يدعى للحساب وينشر
24	وفي سبأ هل كان عز كعزهم	*	لهم حسب محض لباب وجوهر
25	وقد كان في بينون ملك وسؤدد	*	وفي ناعط ملك قديم ومفخر
26	وأسعد كان الناس تحت سيوفه	*	حواهم بملك شامخ ليس يقهر
27	تواضع أشرف البرية كلها	*	إذا ذكرت أشرافها الصيد حمير
28	وفي الكفر كنا قادة وذوي نهي	*	أنا عدد الفيض الذي هو يذكر
29	وأول من آوى النبي محمداً	*	نصرنا وآوينا نذب وننصر
30	عن المشرق الميمون أحمد ذي النهي	*	كأنا ضراغيم الفضا حين نضجر
31	إذا شممت حرب وهز هزيزها	*	نعضنا مساعير لها حين تسعر
32	نكب الكماة الشوس عند اصطلائها	*	قتلنا ولاة الشرك من كان يكفر
33	إذا زفت الأنصار حول محمد	*	بجيش كريم مزيد حين يزخر

34	يزفون حول الهاشمي نبيهم	*	على وجهه نور من الله يزهر
35	إذا خطرنا بالمشرفية والقنا	*	فبخ لهم من عصابة حين تخطر
36	إذا ما مشوا في السابغات كأنها	*	هزيم من الرعد المجلجل يزأر
37	فضلنا ملوك الشام في كل مشهد	*	لنا الأثر في المرعى وورد ومصدر

- 1 I grew old just like anyone who lives gets old
and decrepit when he survives into an old age.
- 2 Mermaids used to come to visit me
with their scarves (*ardān*) of peppery musk and amber,
- 3 But seeing my white hoariness, they left me,
addressing me as “uncle!”—yes, the grey-headed is abandoned...
- 4 They fled from me when they saw someone filled
my [hair’s] parting with [something] like cotton, nay, even more
shining!
- 5 My hair used to be once my feature, like wings
of black crows when they disband,
- 6 Every night I used to treat it gently with *ben* oil,
so that at morning it became like dripping grapes.
- 7 I used to walk as a straight pole,
but I am now like a lame and bent man.
- 8 Would you change your state that is black
into a grey one that [turns] red when dye touches it—
- 9 Red like a red pinnacle (*rābiya*) on a high top
of a peak, visible to anyone looking from far away?¹¹
- 10 Hoariness climbed my top that used to be black,
and in hoariness are signs for those who think about it.
- 11 After youth comes hoariness, weakness and fading,
then a death whose refrain¹² is sad and murky.
- 12 How many possessions humbled their possessor,
is there any lasting and unalterable estate?
- 13 Except the realm of my glorious Lord, for His
is the kingdom, He judges as He wants and decrees.

¹¹ So (*yatabaṣṣaru*) in *Dīwān*; variant occurring in L is “[even] someone short [eyed]” (*yataqaṣṣaru*).

¹² I choose here the version (*wird*) found in two Yemenite manuscripts, confirmed in V1 and L; the editors of the Beirut edition chose “fate” (*qadr*, so repeated in *Dīwān Ḥassān*).

- 14 But Qaḥṭān, our munificent master (*qarm*) and ancestor,
has a place in the higher heaven notoriously.¹³
- 15 He could take the stars of luck just by stretching out his hand,
[while] hands [trying to do so usually] are [too] small and short.
- 16 We inherited from him a majesty that is high and rivaling (*muḥtadā*),
a noble shelter that stands over roots, to mention.
- 17 When the eye-tail traces back [to] kings, it is only
ours, the high flag that never breaks.
- 17a You learnt from the utterance of *shaykh* Ya‘rub,
our ancestor, and became pure Arabs in flocks.¹⁴
- 17b In ancient times you had [nothing] but a barbaric
speech, you were like beasts in the steppe.
- 17c You used to say: “What is *nūh*” or “[What is] *dulġ*?”¹⁵
and whenever we met, you were like the lead on embers.
- 17d You dwelt in Kūṭā and from there you went on
toward us, as chicks go on from the nest:
- 17e We and you were like the one who said “I did not stop
teaching him to throw [javelin] in order to protect my shoulders”,
- 17f And once his arm got strong in throwing,
he, throwing, does not go further than my shoulder, nor than my throat!
- 17g The chicks of birds are not like adults/their elders,
just as shining gold does not equal brass!
- 18 Ours is the king Dū al-Qarnayn, did he get his kingdom
from created humans that a sculptor created?
- 19 Throughout a tended [bow] string he went after the sun at its set
to look into its eyes when it spares (?)
- 20 And climbed to it when it rises in the morning
and noticed it in its constellation when it appears,
- 21 As a trustee for heaven gates, in daytime
and at night, a constant watcher that never gets tired.
- 22 He shut an iron barrier up melting it,
from a spring of pouring copper that did not appear;
- 23 There he forcedly threw down Gog and Magog
till the day they would be called to a pay-off and scattered away.

¹³ L has: “has the duty in spreading the profit of kingdom” (*la-hu manṣibun fī nāfi‘i l-mulki yašhar*).

¹⁴ This verse is lacking in A.

¹⁵ I retain that these two words (as appear in P2) are here meant as rare and strange words (*ġarā‘ib*), whose meaning is respectively “cooing” (thence “funerary moan”) and “to travel at night”. In some manuscripts these same words are replaced with non-sense words (*būnh wa-dūnh*, *būh wa-dūh*), likely meant to be “barbarous” words.

- 24 Was there among Saba' a glory like their glory?
They had a reputation [of] pure essence and substance.
- 25 In Baynūn there have been a kingdom and lords
and in Nā'it an ancient and proud kingdom;
- 26 Under As'ad's swords¹⁶ were people,
he included them in a glorious and invincible kingdom
- 27 The nobles of earth were all acting humbly
when their nobles mentioned the hunting Ḥimyar.
- 28 In al-Kafr we were leaders and those of authority,
and the abundant¹⁷ equipment is [something] to remember.¹⁸
- 29 And [we were] the first to host the Prophet Muḥammad,
we supported and hosted—and we [continue to] defend and support—
- 30 the shining fortunate Aḥmad, the authoritative,
just as we were lions in the space when we raged.¹⁹
- 31 When war got tough (*šammarat*) with its vibrant roaring,
we rose like wild beasts when they are infuriated;
- 32 We tore down champions of eye-tail watchers (*šws*) when hit,
we killed the realm (*wilā*) of polytheism [and] whoever was
infidel/disbelieving/an unbeliever.
- 33 Here supporters (*anṣār*) fly around Muḥammad
with a numerous (*kayyim*) army that foams when it swells,
- 34 They fly around their Hāšimite prophet
on whose face the light of God blossoms,
- 35 When they wave the *mašrafiyya* [swords] and the spears,
what an excellent waving company they are!²⁰
- 36 When they march in armours [they] howl²¹
like a roaring sound of thunder.
- 37 We were superior to the kings of Syria²² in every scene/aspect,
ours is the mark [that remains visible] on the pastureland, [as well as on]
watering and sources.

16 L has “flags” (*atwiya*).

17 *Dīwān* emends *fīd* with *qibṣ* (and thus “we were the equipment of a multitude”); given the similarity of meaning between the two, I retain this emendation unnecessary; moreover, the term is confirmed in all manuscripts.

18 So in L, elsewhere “that was abundant” (*yakturu*).

19 *Dīwān* thinks *naḡgaru* is a mistake and emends it in *nuṣḥiru* (“we go forth [manifestly toward the enemy]”); however, the version is confirmed in all manuscripts.

20 Verses 33-35 are lacking in L.

21 So (*yaz'ar*) in *Mulūk*, where a variant “swell” (*yazḥar*) is reported; L has “puff” (*yazfar*).

22 V1 has “of humanity” (*al-nās*); L “of the earth” (*al-arḍ*).

Poem 2 (*Dīwān Ḥassān* n. 365, p. 521)

Sources: *Iktīl* VIII p. 108 and p. 130, *Mulūk*, p. 211 compared with manuscripts V1, V2, A1, A2, L.

- 1 وقد كان في ارياب عزٌ ومنعة * وقيلٌ بسيطٌ كفتهٌ وأنامله
2 وفي هكر قد كان عزٌ ومنعة * وذو ثات قيل ما يكلم قائله
3 وأين الذي على بُريدةٍ قصره * وفارس همدان فمن ذا ينازله
4 وذو المرعلين والمقاول بعده * تولوا وكان العزُّ فيهم أوأبله [sic!]

- 1 And in Aryāb there was glory and power
 and a prince with a large [i.e., generous] hand and fingertips!
2 And in Hakir there was glory and power
 and Ḍū Ṭāt was a prince, whatever anyone may say!
3 And where is the one whose castle was set up by Burayda
 [and where is] the horseman Hamdān? And who is the one who
 would compete with him?²³
4 And Ḍū al-Mar‘alayn and the princes (*maqāwil*) who after him
 were entrusted, the glory on them were heavy rains.

Poem 3

Sources: *Wāsāyā* 1997, p. 129.

- 1 تراها كأمثالِ العقائقِ بيننا * تألقن أو توقدن نار الحجاجِ

- 1 You see them [*sc.* those fires] among us like [red] carnelians
 shining, or lighting up [like] the fire of fireflies.

²³ Al-Hamdānī comments this verse saying it is referred to prince (*qayl*) Ḍū La‘wa al-Akbar. – One of the peer reviewers—whose remarks deserve my gratitude—suggested a different reading of verses 2-3. His/her translation would be as follows: “2 And in Hakir there was glory and power / and Ḍū Ṭāt was a prince whose followers never suffer injury. // 3 And where is the one who made his castle high above Burayda? / [and where is] the horseman Hamdān? And [who] is the one who would compete with him?”