ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Variant Readings in the Mu’Allaqah Imru Al-Qays

Professor Dr. Tengku Ghani T. Jusoh, Associate Professor Dr. Mudasir Rosder, Anwar Muttaqin, Mohd Irman Mohd Abd Nasir, Abdul Qayyum Abdul Razak, Faizol Azham Mohamad, Dr. Ideris Endot, and Siti Nurul Izza Hashim

Department of Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia
Department of Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia
Institute of West Asian Studies, National University of Malaysia
Arabic Language units, Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia
Department of Da’wah and Leadership, Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia

ABSTRACT

In this article, I wish to record readings that occur in the cairene edition at variance with those of the Beirut edition. I have confined myself to the cairene edition to the exclusion of other editions for two reasons: it is easily accessible to any interested readers; the compass of this book would not admit of a lengthy examination of all recorded variant readings, given what such an approach entails. I would like briefly to discuss what I consider to be the results of my inquiry. Firstly, it will be remarked that the Mu’allaqah as one would expect from what appears to have been and still is so popular and influential, a poem. Contains the greatest number of variant readings. Furthermore, they occur in descriptive passages or as the rhymed-word, places in the poem that would have been most amenable to the substitution of one adjective, known or participle for another. The majority of cases can be attributed to the large lexical availability of synonyms, it is only rarely that these variant readings extend to more than one word. On occasion names appear to have been prone to substitution, perhaps depending on the place or region where the poem was recited. The most important and interesting variants are those in which a metaphor or simile is enlarged and elucidated or endowed with greater subtlety and the questions that these lines pose as an “original” version of the poem. Examples of this are lines 45 and 73 of the Mu’allaqah in the Cairene edition.

Key words: Variant reading, Mu’allaqah, Imru al-Qays.

Al-Mu’allaqah:

Qifa nabki min dhikri habib wa manzil
Bisiqti alliwa bayna al-dakhul fahawmal

1. Stop! Let us cry at the remembrance of a beloved and her lodgings at the extremity of winding sand between al-Dhakhul and Hawmal.

Fatuwidi falmiqrat lam ya’fu rasmuhu
Lima nasajatha min janubi wa syama’il

2. And Tudih and al-Miqrah; its traces have not been erased by what has streaked it of south wind and the north wind.

Tara ba’ara al-rami fi ‘arasatih
Wa qiya’aniha ka’annahu habbu fulful

Corresponding Author: Professor Dr. Tengku Ghani T. Jusoh, Department of Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia
3. You see that the dung of the white antelopes in its courts and depressed plains is like the seeds of the pepper.

Ka’an’ni ghadat al-bayn yauma tahammalu
Lada samurat al-hayyi naqifu hanzal

4. On the morning of the day of separation, when they loaded up, it was as though I were a man who broke colocynth near the acacia trees of the tribe.

Wuqafa biha sahibiy ‘alayya matiyyahum
Yaqawluna la tahlik ’asa wa tajammali

5. My friends stopped their riding-beasts beside me and they said to me “Do not destroy yourself with sadness but bear up”.

Waina syifa’i ‘abratun muhraqatun
Fahal ‘inda rasmi darisi min mu’awwal

6. My remedy for sadness and pain is an effusion of tears, but is there any place for crying near the disappeared traces?

Kada’bika min ’umm al-huwayrith qablaha
Wa jaratiha ’umm al- Rabab bi ma’sal

7. As was your custom with Umm al-Huwayrith before her and her neighbour Umm al-Rabab near Ma’sal.

Iza qamata tadawwa’a al-misk minhuma
Nasyma al-siba ja’at biriya al-qaranful

8. When both of them stood up, the musk diffused from them was like a gentle breeze of the east wind arriving with the sweet smell of cloves.

Fafadat dumuwu’u al-‘ain minniy sababat
‘ala al-nahri hatta bal dam’iya mihmaliy

9. Because of my deep affection my tears flowed from my eyes on to the upper part of my chest, so that they moistened my sword-belt.

Alla rubbi yaumi laka min hunna salihin
Wala siyama yaum bidarat juljul

10. Did you not have many good days with them, especially the day near Darat Juljul?

Wayauma ‘aqartu lil’azara matiyyati
Faya ‘ajaba min kurha al-mutahammal

11. And the day that I slaughtered my riding-beast for the virgins, oh – how wonderful it was when its saddle was loaded up.

Fazalla al-‘adhara yartamina bilahmiha
Wasyahmi kahudabi al-dimaqsi al-mufattali

12. The virgins remained throwing its meat and its suet, like the fringes of strongly twisted raw silk, (into the cooking-pots).

Wayauma dahaltu al-hidra hadra ‘unaizah
Faqalat laka alawaylat innaka murjili

13. And the day that I entered the howdah of ‘Unaizah. She said to me “Woe to you, you will make me walk.”
As she was speaking, the camel saddle inclined with us both, “You have slaughtered my camel O Imru’ al-Qais, so go down.”

I said to her “Take off the saddle and loosen its rein, do not distance me from your gathered fruit.

I have come by night even to pregnant woman or nursing women like you, and have turned her away from her one year old child, the wearer of amulets.

She half turned from me towards her crying child behind her, meanwhile her lower half still remained with me”.

And the day when, on the back of the sand-dune, she excused herself from me and took an oath to which she made no exception.

Have I deceived you by the fact that your love is really killing me and that whatever you command my heart, it performs.

If my moral character has grieved you, extract gently my clothes from your clothes and let them slip off.

Your eyes did not shed tears except to beat me with your two arrows in my broken heart which has been massacred by you.

A white woman of an apartment, whose tent was not greatly sought after: I have enjoyably passed a long time with her without hurry to depart.

I have passed by sentries and a body of men hankering after me, if only they could broadcast my death.
By that time, the Pleiades appeared in the sky like the appearance of a woman’s various ornaments.

I came to her and she had stripped off her clothes for sleep except for a single garment, waiting for my arrival near the curtain.

She said to me, “I swear by God, what cunning you have! I do not think that you will give up your mistaken ways.”

I went out with her and she dragged the skirt of her embroidered silk garment over our traces in order to remove them.

When we passed along the courtyard of the tribe, we headed for the foot of a long sandy hill.

I pulled the tufts of hair on the temple of her head then she inclined towards me, with thin flanks and fleshy ankles.

She has a white and slender body, not ample, her breasts are polished like a mirror.

She was like the first eggs of an ostrich, which has a mixture between white and yellow, fed with salubrious water where no one has alighted.

She turns from me and shows her full and smooth face; afraid – her glancing eyes like the wild beasts with young offspring at Wajrah.

Her neck is like the neck of the white antelope, not ugly, when raised, nor unadorned with jewels.
35. She has black, luxuriant hair adorning her back like the bunch of dates of a palm tree loaded with clusters.

Ghada 'iruha mustasyzirat 'ila al-'ula
Tadhilu al-‘iqasu fi muthna wa mursal

36. Her plaits of hair are twisted up to the top, the hair-tresses go lost whether the hair is doubled or let loose.

Wa kasyhi latif kal jadil mukhassar
Wa qa’qi ka’anbub al-saqyi al-mudhallal

37. She has thin flanks, and is slender in the waist like a twisted rope; her shanks are like the stem of a well-watered palm-tree with evenly set branches.

Wa tudhi fatiyytu al-miski fauqa fira syiha
Nu’uwum al-dhuha lam tantatiq ‘an tafadhal

38. The particles of the musk still spread over her bed, in the morning, when she is a heavy sleeper and she does not put anything over her single garment.

Wata’tu birakhsi ghair syathni kaannahu
‘asari’ zabyi aw masawiyku ishil

39. She raises her thin fingers which are nor hard, rough and callous but are like the red worms of Zaby or like the toothpicks of the tamarisk tree.

Tudyi’u al-zalam bil ‘asya’I kaannaha
Manarat mumsi rahibi mutabattitu

40. She illuminates the darkness during the night like the light of a monk who at night withdraws to the service of God.

’ila mithliha yarnu al-halim sababat
Iza ma ashbakarat bayna dar’I wamijwali

41. The forbearing man is attracted to the like of her with deep affection, since she is erect and well-proportioned neither a woman nor a girl.

Tasallat ‘amayat al-rijal ‘an al-sibba
Walaysa fuwadiy ‘an hawaki bimunsal

42. The errors of men are dispelled after their youth but my heart is not one to be consoled of love for you.

‘ala rubbi khasmin fiki ‘alwa radadatuhu
Nasihhi ‘ala ti’dhaligh ghairi mu’tal

43. How many crooked quarellers have advised me and blamed me about you. They spared no pains doing that, but I have answered them back.

Walayali kamauji al-bahri ‘arkha sudulah
‘alayya bianwa’ al-humumi liyabtali

44. A night like a wave of the ocean let down its curtain upon me with many kinds of anxiety to test me.

Faqultu lahu lama tamatta bisulbih
Wa’ardafa a’jaza wana’a bikalkal

45. I said to it, when he stretched his spine, and mounted the hinder part of the body and raised the breast.

Ala ‘ayyuhu al-laylu al-tawiylu ala anjali
Bisubhi wana al-isbahu mink bi’amthal

46. O long night, become clear with morning! But the morning is not any better than you.
Faya laka min laylin kaanna nujumahu
Bia’mrasi kattani ila summi jandal

47. O you deep night! It is as though your stars were attached carefully with thin flax rope to the hard stone.

Waqirbat ‘aqwam ja’altu ‘isamaha
‘ala kahili minni dhaluli murahhal

48. Many a water-skin of tribes have I placed on the withers of a beast that submits to me and is repeatedly saddled.

Wawadi kajaufi al-‘ayri qafri qata’tuhu
Bihi al-dh’abu ya’awiy kal khali’i al-mu’ayyal

49. I have crossed a valley like the belly of the ass, a barren land where the wolf yelps like the outcast who is burdened with a large family.

Faqultu lahu lama ‘awway inna sya’nana
Qalimyu al-ghina in kunta lama tamawwal

50. I said to him, when he yelped, “Our way is little of wealth, supposing you have never had any wealth.

Kilana iza ma nala syay’a ‘afatahu
Waman yahtarit harthi wahrathaka yahzul

51. Both of us, when we obtain a thing, destroy it, and he who tries to cultivate my land and your land, will surely become emaciated.

Waqad ‘aghtada wa al-tayyru fi wu kunatiha
Bimunjad qayd al’awabid haykal

52. I make my journey in the morning when the birds are still in their nests, on a large, well-bred horses that out-strips the wild beast.

Mikarrin mifarrin muqbilin mudbirin ma’a
Kajalamudi sakhrinhattah al-sayl min ‘ali

53. Useful in both attacking and fleeing, both coming and going, like a large rock which the torrent has driven down from a high place.

Kumayti yazil al-labda ‘an hal matanihi
Kama zallat al-safwa’a bil mutanazzal

54. It is a dark-bay colour; the soft hair in the middle of its back is as slippery as the stone that has slipped because of the pouring pain.

‘ala al-dhabbal jayyashi kaanna ahtizamahu
Iza jash fihi hamyuhu ghalyu mirjai

55. Despite his leanness, he is lively and his galloping, when the heat boils in him, is like the bubbling of a copper caldron.

Misah izama al-sabihat ‘ala al-wana
‘atharna al-ghobar bil kadid al-murakkal

56. A galloper when the swimming horses, despite their fatigue, kick up the dust from the pounded earth furrowed with hooves.

Yazilu al-ghulam al-khiffa ‘an sahawatihi
Wayulwiy bi’athwab al-’anif al-muthqal

57. He causes the light youth to slip from his back and casts away the garments of the rough and heavy rider.

Daririn kakhuzruﬁ al-walid ’amarrah
Tatabu’u kaffáíhi bikhayti muwassal

58. Swift like the boy’s spinning-top, which is made to spin by his manipulation of a string attached to it with alternate hands.

Lahu ’’aytal zabyi wasaqa na’amah
Wairkha’u sirhan wa taqaribbu tatful

59. He was the flanks of an antelope and the legs of an ostrich, the swift run of a lion and the gallop of a horse.

Dali’I iza astadbartah sad farjah
Bidaﬁ ﬁuwayqa al-ardh laysa bi’azal

60. Strong of rib, when you stand behind him he closes the space between his legs with a full and ample tail, hanging a little above the earth. It does not incline to the one side (from force of habit).

Kaanna ’ala al-matnayn minhu iza antaha
Madaka ‘urusi aw salayah hanzal

61. When he leans on one side, the sides of his back are like a bride’s mortar or a pestle used for colocynth.

Kaana dima’a al-hadiyat bina’rih
‘isarat hima’I bishaybi murjal

62. The blood of the leader-camels on his neck is like the juice of Henna in combed white hair.

Fa’anna lana sirbu kaanna ni’ajah
‘adhara duwar fi mula’I mudhayyal

63. A herd of gazelles appeared to us, its ewes like virgins of Duwar wearing long-skirted plaids.

Faadbarma kaljiz’a al-mufasal baynahu
Bijiydi mu’ammi fi al-’ashyirat mukhwal

64. They turned back like the intercalated necklace on the neck of one of good family.

Faalhaqana bil hadiyat wadunah
Jawahiruha fi sarrat lam tuzayyal

65. So he caused us to overtake the leader-camels and behind him were the laggards in a group which had not separated.

Fa’ada ‘ida’a bayna thauri wa na’jah
Diraka walam yandah bima fayughsal

66. He hit a bull and a cow in succession on overtaking them, but had not even sweated so as to be wet/drenched.

Fazalla tuhat allahmi min bayni mundiji
Safiya shiwa’I aw qadir mu’ajjal

67. Then the cooks were roasting some of the meat on a spit, cooking it thoroughly and were stewing the rest of it in a quickly boiling pot.
Waruhna yaku yaqi dxu yuqur duxfu
Matataraq fay-fay fihi tasafallaf

68. We arrived in the evening, and one’s eyesight was almost incapable of appreciating his beauty (i.e he beggared all description) for when the eye was raised to see him, it fell to the ground (immediately such was his beauty).

Fabata ‘alaiha sarjuhu waliyamuhu
Wabata ba’ayni qaima ghair mursal

69. He spent the night saddled and bridled, standing under my gaze and was not let loose.

‘asahitara barqa uriyka wa maydah
Kalim’I al-yadayn fi habbi mukallali

70. O my friend! Look at the lightning which I am showing you, - its faint shining is like the flashing of the two hands in a heaped-up cloud-bank.

Yudiy’u sanau aw masabiyh rahib
‘amala al-salit bi thubbal al-mufattal

71. That illuminates its lightning; or like the lamps of a monk who has poured oil on their tightly-twisted wicks.

Qa’addtu lahu wasuhbata bayna dariji
Wa bayna al-’uzayb ba’da ma muta’ mali

72. I sat down to watch it with my friend - between Darij and Al-‘Udhayb after I had gazed at it long and hard.

‘ala qatan bishaim ayman saubah
Wa’aysaruhu ‘ala al-satar fayadhbul

73. Over Qatan as predicted lay the right side – its left over al-Satar and Yadbul:
Fa’addha yuuhbata al-ma’a haula kutayfah
Yakubbu ‘ala al-azqan dawha al-kanahbul

74. It began to pour water down around Kutayfah and tossed on their faces the lofty trees of al-Kanahbul.

Wamarra ‘ala al-qanan min nafayanih
Faanzala minhu al-’usma min kuli manzil

75. Some of their foliage passed over al-Qanan so that it caused the white-footed goats to descend from all their haunts there/by every path.

Watayma’a lam yatrux biha jiz’a naklah
Wala’utma illa mushayadan bijandal

76. In Tayma’ it did not leave even the trunk of a palm tree nor any strong-hold except for one built with mighty stones.

Ka’anna thabiran fi aranyni wablihi
Khabira unasin fi bijadin muzammi

77. Thabir at the beginning of heavy rain was like a great one of the people dressed in striped clothes.

Ka’anna dhura ra’si al-mujaymiri ghudwatan
min as-saili wa al-aghsa’i falkatu mighzali

78. In the morning the top of the peak of al-Mujaymir, as a result of the torrent and the refuse was like the whirl of a spindle.
Waalqa bisohra’i al-ghabiti bia’ahu
nuzhula al-yamani zi al-iyabi al-muhammali

79. The clouds poured down what it contained on the desert of Ghabit as the Yemeni loaded with leather bags
dismounts (from his camel).

Ka’anna makakiyya al-jiwa’i ghudyatan
sabuhna sulafan min rahiqin mufalfali

80. As if in the morning the whistling birds of the desert of Jiwa’ are given an early draught consisting of the
first juice of the grape – a strong, pure, spiced wine.

Ka’anna as-sibaa’ fihi ghurqa a’shiyatan
biarjaihi al-quswa anabishun unsuli

81. In the evening, the birds of prey are drowned in the furthest parts of the desert of Jiwa’ like plucked roots of
the wild onion.

**Variant Readings In The Mu’allaqah**

1. qifa nabki min zikrahabin wamanzili bisiqti al-liwa baina al-dakhuli fahawmali
2. qifa nabki min zikrahabin wamanzili bisiqti al-liwa baina al-dakhuli wahawmali

The use of ﮪ for ﮪ seems to be a weaker reading.

3. wainna shifa’i ‘abratun muhraqatun fahal ‘inda rasmin darisin min muawwali
4. wainna shifa’i ‘abratun inna safahitha wahal ‘inda rasmin darisin min muhawwali

My remedy for sadness and pain is tears that I shed – so is there any place for crying near the disappeared
traces?

5. kada’bika min ummi al-huwayrisi qablaha wajaratiha ummi al-rababi mima’sali
6. kadaynika min ummi al-huwayrisi qablaha wajaratiha ummi al-rababi mima’sali

Din and Da’b are virtually synonymous in this line.

7. wayawma a’qartu lil’azara matiyyati faya ‘ajaba min kawriha al-mutahammali
8. wayawma a’qartu lil’azara matiyyati faya ‘ajaba min rahliha al-mutahammali

**Rahl** and Kur are synonymous : strictly though a Kur is “a camel’s saddle of the type called Rahl” (Lane
sub – آﻮر ).

1. fazalla al-‘azara yartamina bilahmiha washahmi kahuddabi al-dimaqsi al-mufattali
2. yazallu al-‘azara yartamina bilahmiha washahmi kahuddabi al-dimaqsi al-mufattali

**Fa-zalla** is, I think, a better reading than yazallu.

3. famisliki hubla qad taraqtu wumurdhi’in faalhaytuha ‘an zi tama’ima muhwili
4. famisliki hubla qad taraqtu wumurdhi’an faalhaytuha ‘an zi tama’ima mughili

I have come by night even to pregnant women or nursing women like you : I have turned her away from her
one year old child, still suckled at the breast.

5. iza ma baka min khalfiha insarafat lahu bishiqqin watahta shiqqiha lam yuhawwali
6. iza ma baka min khalfiha inharafat lahu bishiqqin washiqqin ‘indana lam yuhawwali

She turned from me towards her crying child behind her : meanwhile her lower half still remained with me.

7. wama zarafat ‘ainaki illa litadribi bisahmiyki fi a’ashari qalbi muqattali
8. wama zarafat ‘ainaki illa litaqdihi bisahmiyki fi a’ashari qalbi muqattali
Your eyes did not shed tears except to pierce, with your two arrows, my broken heart which has been massacred by you.

1. tajawzatu ahrasan ilayha wam’asharan  ‘alayya hirasin law yusirruna muqtali
2. tajawzatu ahrasan waahwalu ma’asharan  ‘alayya hirasin law yushirruna muqtali

I have passed by sentries and a fearsome body of men, hankering after me – if only they could broadcast my death.

Asarra and Asharra are synonymous

3. faqalat: yamina Allah malaka haylatun  wama in ara al-ghawayata tanjili
4. faqalat: yamina Allah malaka haylatun,  wama in ara ‘anka al-’imayatun tanjili

‘Amayah is strictly “blindness” hence its meaning of “error”.

5. falamma ajazna sahata al-hayya wantaha  bina batnu khabtin zi hiqafin ‘aqanqali
6. falamma ajazna sahata al-hayya wantaha  bina batnu khabtin zi rukamin ‘aqanqali

Rukam is simply “a heap of sand”, whereas Hiqf is “a long and winding tract of sand”.

7. hasartu bifawda ra’siha fatamayalat  ‘alayya hadhima al-kashi riya al-mukhalkhali
8. iza qultu hata nawalayni tamayalat  ‘alayya hadhima al-kashi riya al-mukhalkhali

When I said “Hey, turn towards me”, she inclined, with thin flanks and fleshy ankles.

1. Wafar’i yazinu al-matna aswadda fahimin  athithin kaqinwi al-nakhlati al-muta’askili
2. Wafar’i yaghsha al-matna aswadda fahimin,  athithin kaqinwi al-nakhlati al-muta’askili

She has black luxuriant hair that covers her back like the bunch of dates of a palm-tree loaded with clusters.

3. ghada’iruha mustashziratun ila al’ula  tadhillus al-’iqasu fi muthanna wamursali
4. ghada’iruha mustashziratun ila al’ula  tadhillus al-midari fi muthanna wamursali

Her plaits of hair are twisted to the top and the iron-combs get lost whether the hair is doubled over or set loose.

5. tasallat ‘amayatu al-rijali ‘ani al-siba  walaysa fu’aadi ‘an hawaki bimunsali
6. tasallat ‘amayatu al-rijali ‘ani al-siba  walaysa sabaya ‘an hawaha bimunsali

The errors of men are dispelled after their youth but my youthful infatuation is not such as can be consoled of love for you.

1. faqultu lahu lamma tamatta bisulbihi  waardafa a’ajazan wanaa’ bikalkali
2. faqultu lahu lamma tamatta bijuzihi  waardafa a’ajazan wanaa’ bikalkali

I said to him when he had stretched his middle and mounted the hinder part of the body and rose abreast.

Jawz is the middle of the thing, whether it be a camel, a desert or a night. The metaphor, in which the night becomes a camel, is given a fine nuance by the use of the word “jawz”, though the word “sulb” is perhaps more in keeping with the tone of the second hemistich.

3. faya  laka min laili ka’anna nujumahu  biamrasi kittanin ila summim jandali
4. faya  laka min laili ka’anna nujumahu  bikulli maghari al-fatli shaddati biyazbuli

O you deep night, it is as though your stars were tied to Yadhbul with ropes, every fibre of which is stoutly twisted.

1. ‘ala al-zabli jayyashi ka’anna ihtizamahu  iza jasha fihi hamyuhu ghalyu mirjali
2. ala al-’uqbi jayyashi ka’anna ihtizamahu  iza jasha fihi hamyuhu ghalyu mirjali
Lively despite the racing pace and easily excited by the spur: his galloping when the heat boils in him is like the bubbling of a copper cauldron.

3. Yuzillu al-ghulama al-khiffa ‘an sahawatihi wayulwa biaswabi al-’anifi al-muthaqqali
4. Yatiru al-ghulama al-khiffa ‘an sahawatihi wayulwa biaswabi al-’anifi al-muthaqqali

He causes the light youth to fly from his back and casts away the garments of the rough and heavy rider.

The reading yatiru is much more dynamic and descriptive than yuzillu found in the Beirut edition.

1. daririn kahuzrufi al-walidi amarrahu tatabu’u kafihi bikhaitin muwassali
2. daririn kahuzrufi al-walidi amarrahu taqallubbi kafihi bikhaitin muwassali

_Taqqallub_ and _tatabu’_ differ only in detail; the first is to be “turned over in a restless fashion” the second “to come upon another in succession”.

3. ka’anna ‘ala al-matnayni minhu iza intaha madaka ‘urisin aw salayata hanzali
4. ka’anna ‘ala al-katfayni minhu iza intaha madaka ‘urisin aw sarayata hanzali

When he leans on one side, the sides of his back are like a bride’s mortar or the yellow bud of the colocynth.

_Sarayah_ is obviously a scribal error. It makes little sense in terms of the simile.

1. faa’anna lana sirbun ka’anna ni’ajahu ‘azhara duwarin fi mula’i muzhayyali
2. faa’anna lana sirbun ka’anna ni’ajahu ‘azhara duwarin fi al-mula’i al-muzhayyali

Both lines differ between the definite noun and adjective of the Cairene and the indefinite one, found in the Beirut edition.

3. waruhna yakadu al-tarfu yaqsuru duunahu mata ma taraqqa al-‘ainu fihi tasaffali
4. waruhna waraha al-tarfu yanfudhu ra’sihu mata ma taraqqa al-‘ainu fihi tasahhali

We arrived in the evening together with the noble stallion that tossed its head: when the eye was raised to see him, it fell to the ground.

This reading offers a clearer description of their arrival, the picture of the horse tossing its head from side to side is more graphic than the abstracted aesthetics of the line in the Beirut edition. However the line in the Beirut edition seems more unified and complete than the Cairene edition, because both hemistichs complement one another.

1. dali’in iza istadbartahu sadda farjahu bidafin fuwayqa al-ardi laysa bi’azali
2. waanta iza istadbartahu sadda farjahu bidafin fuwayqa al-ardi laysa bi’azali

And when you stand behind him, he closes the spaces between his legs with a full and ample tail, hanging a little above the earth.

3. asahi tara barqan urayka wamaydahu kalam’in al-yadayni fi habbiyin mukallali
4. ahari tara barqan ka’anna wamaydahu kalam’in al-yadayni fi habbiyin mukallali

_O Harith, Look at the lightning; it is as though its faint shining is like the flashing of the two hands in a heaped up cloud-bank._

1. yudiu’ sanahu aw masabihu rahibin amala al-salita bizzubali al-mufattala
2. yudiu’ sanahu aw masabihu rahibin ahana al-salita bizzubali al-mufattala

Which illuminates its lightning, or (like) the lamps of a monk who has prized but lightly the oil (that he pours) on their tightly twisted-wicks.

3. qa’adtu lahu wasuhbati bayna darijin wabayna al-uzhaiba ba’ada ma mutaammali
4. qa’adtu lahu wasuhbati bayna hamirin wabayna ikami ba’ada ma mutaammali

I sat down to watch it with my friends, between Hamir and Ikam, after I had looked for it long and hard.

5. faadha yasuhhu al-maa’ hawla kutayfatin yakubbu ‘ala al-azqani dawha al-kanahbali
6. waadha yasuhhu al-maa’ “an kulli fayqih yakubbu ‘ala al-azqani dawha al-kanahbali

It began to pour water from every cloud that had been milked already and tossed on their faces the lofty trees of al-Kanahbul.

7. Ka’anna dhura ra’si al-mujaymiri ghudwatan min as-saili wa al-aghsa’i falkatu mighzali
8. Ka’anna tamayyatin al-mujaymiri ghudwatan min as-saili walghathai falkatu mighzali

In the morning mount Tamiyyah in the land of al-Mujaymir, as a result of a torrent and refuse, was like the whirl of spindle.

1. Ka’anna thabiran fi aranayni wabalhi khabiran unasin fi bijadin muzammali
2. Ka’anna abana fi afanayni wadaqhi khabiran unasin fi bijadin muzammali

As though the twin peaks of Mount Aban through the branch-like sheets of rain (i.e. the rain was either so heavy that it obscured Mount Aban as a wood or forest might or its drops were so large that they resembled branches) was a great one of the people in striped clothing.

The imagery of this reading is very striking indeed, especially in comparison with the rather prosaic line 77 of the Beirut edition.

3. Waalqa bisohra’i al-ghabiti bia’ahu nuzhula al-yamani zi al-iyabi al-muhammali
4. Waalqa bisahra’i al-ghabiti bia’ahu nuzhula al-yamani zi al-iyabi al-mukhawwali

The clouds poured down what it contained on the desert of Ghabit as the Yemeni merchant, entrusted with property and loaded with leather bags, dismounts (from his camel).

Conclusion:

The variant readings in Mu’allaqah Imru al-Qays occur presumably to substitute of one adjective, noun or participle for another. It is rarely that these variant readings extend to more than one word.

References

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources