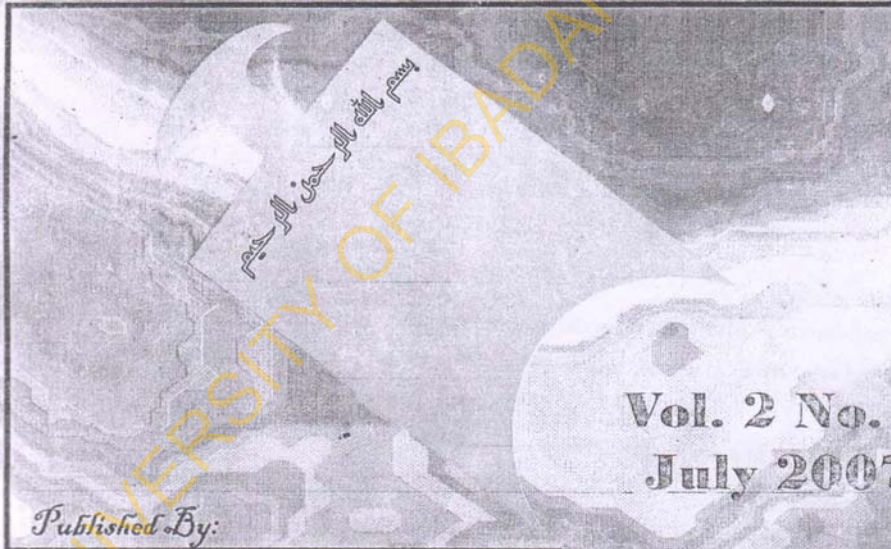


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PATRIOTISM IN PRE-ISLAMIC LITERATURE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF
'AMR B. KULTHŪM'S WORKS

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INTRODUCTION:

Linguists give different interpretation to the word "patriot" but its circumlocution ends at "a person who loves and wishes to defend the honour of his tribe, community and nation at large". 'Amr b. Kulthūm (a tribal poet of Taglib clan) remained faithful to his tribe during peace and upheavals. No single line was attributed to him in praise of an individual, group, king, warrior of other tribe as a result of getting access or gaining gratification except his boastful poems in which he extolled the position of his tribesmen, chiefs, warriors and even infants at the stage of weaning.

His Reproach poetry awaits anybody who fail to accord his tribe due respect and dignity while a very serious lampoon would be on whoever

made an attempt to degrade his tribe. He sincerely answered the clarion call of his tribe with total dedication and loyalty. This earned him an enviable position i.e. one of the Mu'ammārūn by the prestige derived from his resistance of the domination of the king of al-Hira and from being an incarnation of the virtues of Jāhiliyyah. This paper covers his biographical account and assesses his prose and poetry and how they earned him the reputation of an icon of patriotic poetry in the pre-Islamic literature.

The terms Patriot and loyalty are two interchangeable words which denotes:

A person who remains with an existing ruler or government when opposed by those who want to change it.¹

Or

A person who loves and is willing to defend his country.²

While the author of Mawrid gave Arabic interpretation of patriot as³

عنه الدفاع في المتحمس لوطنه المحب الوطني

Meaning:

A nationalist is one who loves his country and is enthusiastic in defending (its honour)

While a loyalist is.⁴

ملك أو حكومة أو لحزب المخلص

Meaning:

A fellow who is sincere to a party, government or ruler

BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF 'Amr B. KULTHŪM

His Life:

His full name is Abū al-Aswad⁵ 'Amr b. Kulthūm b. Mālik b. 'Ital b. Sa'd b. Zubayr b. Jushām b. Wā'il b. Rabi'ah b. Nu'zār b. Ma'd b. 'Adnān.⁶

His mother was Layla daughter of al-Muhalhil b. Rabi'ah (d. 53 C.E) the famous poet and warrior. He was a brother to Kulayb b. Rabi'ah (d. 512 C.E.). 'Amr b. Kulthūm was born in 545 C.E. He belongs to the tribe of Taghlib.⁷ His father Kulthūm was one of the leaders of Taghlibites and his tribe was one of the most powerful in the pre-Islamic period on which 'Amī al-Shaybanī commented:

الناس تغلب بنو لاكلت قليلا الإسلام أيضا لو

Meaning:

Had Islam come late, all the existing tribes would have been eaten up by Taghlib.⁸

HIS BIRTH

There are three narratives on the birth of 'Amr b Kulthūm. The first happened when the poet's mother - Laylā was born: the second happened when his mother Laylā was carrying him (in pregnancy) while the third happened when the poet was one.⁹ The stories go thus:

It was narrated by Muhammad b. Hassan b. Durayd that: when al-Muhalhil - the father of 'Amr's mother married to Hind, and she delivered a baby girl, he told his wife to kill the child in compliance with their custom. She did not argue rather she commanded one for her slaves to keep the child away from her father. When the father slept at night, he dreamt and received clearance contained in these lines of poem.

وسيد شمردل

وكم من فتى يؤمل

في بطن بنت مھليل

عدة لا تجهل

Meaning:

Many a young man who keeps on hoping

And a powerful (Male) leader

An instrument that cannot be ignored

In the womb of al-Muhalhil's daughter.⁹

Her husband quickly woke up and asked for the child to which the wife answered deceitfully that "she has been killed". She further queried for the reason he asked the question. When he narrated his dream to her, she then brought the child back from the hiding place.

It was also narrated that when the mother of the poet - Laylā was carrying him she heard a voice in her dream saying:

يقدم أقدام الأسد

أقول قبلا لا فند

يا لك ليلى من ولد

من جشم فيه العدد

Meaning:

O Laylā! What a boy have you

Who charges like a lion

I say a statement that never belied

From the tribe of Jusham which has a large population.¹⁰

Laylā later gave birth to the baby. And finally, when the poet was at the age of one, there came another vision which reminded his mother through her dream that, the boy would be gallant and great in all his endeavours:

بماجد الجد كريم النحر

وقاض أقر إن شديد الأمر

إني زعيم لك أم عمرو

أشيع من ذي لبد هزير

يسودهم في خمسة عشر

Meaning:

I am your guarantor, O mother of 'Amr

With glory and generosity of the ancestor
(Najar) More valiant than a lion with a mane,

Avenger, who safeguards when delightfulness
disappeared.

Who led them at the age of fifteen¹¹.

The Poet's Relationship with 'Amr b. Hind¹²

After some years, the war between Taghlibites and Bakrites popularly known as *Harb al-Basūs* (The war of Basūs) was extinguished by king Mundhir, the father of 'Amr b. Hind. Nevertheless, internal hatred was still harboured by members of both tribes, despite the treaty which was fostered by king Mundhir. When 'Amr b. Hind became the king of Hīrah he also sought for a final solution to the feud. He asked each tribe to send a hundred men as pawns¹³ to represent their interest in the settlement. It happened that one day both Taghlib and Bakr's men taken as pawns were sent on an errand to the mountain of Tay'i. When they reached the place of the Banū Shayban and Banū Taym¹⁴ who were conceived to be in support of the Bakrites, these two tribes allowed men from Bakrite to drink water and prevented men from the Taghlibite. As a result they died of thirst.

The action nearly caused the eruption of another feud because the Taghlibites believed that 'Amr b. Hind trickishly poisoned the men from Taghlib in order to set men from Bakrite free.¹⁵ Taghlibites, therefore, demanded blood money *fidyah* from the Bakrites. 'Amr b. Hind envisaged that this may cause another war between the two tribes and thus quickly said:

I would not judge between the two of you (the two tribes) until I received Seventy men from each tribe as pawn's

The two tribes did so and the date for judgement was fixed. On that day, 'Amr b. Kulthūm led his tribe while al-Hārith b. Hilizzah led Bakrite men. al-Hārith b. Hilizzah came forward to present his case. He trickishly eulogized the king and he (king) was impressed but when 'Amr b. Kulthūm was called upon to present his tribe's case he did not equate the honor of his tribe with anybody he rather extolled himself and his tribe and refused to praise the king even with a single line. At the end, al-Hārith b. Hilizzah was brought closer and rewarded munificently and thereby gained an upper hand over his competitor. The king then commended him to continue composing his poems with respect. 'Amr b. Kulthūm was provoked by this insult and he left the palace immediately, an act which was a disgrace to the king.¹⁶ He even later satirized the king with these lines.

أبينا أن نقر الـذلل فينا	إذا ما الملك سام الناس خسفاً
ولكن سنبدأ ظالمين	نسى بغاة ظالمين وما ظلمنا
تخبر له الجبابر ساجدين	إذا لـمنا الفظام لنا صبي
فنجعل فوق حمل الجاهلين	ألا لا يجهلن أحد علينا

Meaning:

When a king is used to humiliating (everybody)

We disdain to concede loneliness in our midst
 We are called the leaders of oppressor and we oppress not
 But we shall now start oppressing (the oppressors)
 When a child (of our tribe) has just passed a stage of weaning
 Kings (of other tribes) prostrate before him
 Behold, nobody has never oppressed us,
 We oppress (anyone) far above the oppression of the
 oppressed ones

These satiric poetical lines caused a permanent grudge nursing in the mind of the king against the Taghlibite poet ('Amr b. Kulthūm). He determined to disgrace him and his ancestral glory but this attempt led to the king's death. 'Amr b. Hind's attempt goes thus: "Do you know any Arab whose mother would disdain to serve mine?". They answered: Yes, the mother of 'Amr b. Kulthūm", Why so? Asked the king, because, her father is Muhalhīl b. Rabi'ah and her uncle is Kulayb b. Wā'il, the most puissant of the Arabs and her husband is Kulthūm b. Mālik, the knightliest and her son is 'Amr b. Kulthūm, the chieftain and the poet of the tribe".¹⁷

The king therefore sent a message to 'Amr b. Kulthūm asking him to bring his mother, Laylā to visit his own mother. The request was honoured, 'Amr came to al-Hira's palace with some men of Taghlibite and Laylā came, attended by a number of their women.

As the king entertained 'Amr b. Kulthūm and his entourage in a pavilion that he (the king) had caused to be erected between al-Hīra and the Euphrates. Laylā found quarters with Hind, mother of the king in a tent adjoining. The king dismissed the servants of her mother at the pre-arranged signal, the king decided that his mother be left alone with her guest.

So the king's mother said:

يا ليلي تاوليني ذلك الطبق

Meaning:

"Laylā, "Help bring us that shallow bowl"

And the poet's mother answered;

لتقم صاحبة الحاجة إلى حاجتها

Meaning:

"Let the owner help herself"

The king's mother repeated her demand three times and she answered in the same way, when Laylā noticed that it was an attempt to disgrace her she cried out;

واذلاه يا لتغلب

Meaning:

"O! Shame! Help Taghlib help"

When 'Amr b. Kulthūm heard the voice of his mother crying, the blood flew to his cheeks. He seized a sword hanging on the wall of the pavillion (the only weapon there) and with a single blow, smote the king dead.¹⁸ He even composed this line later in support of his action:

تهددنا وأوعدنا رويدا متى كما لأملك مقتونا

He frightened us and threatened us bit by bit

When did we become your mother's slave?

For this action, 'Amr b. Kulthūm fled to the Peninsula. The son of the king, who reigned after 'Amr b. Hind waged war against 'Amr b. Kulthūm.¹⁹ This hunting for his life led to unrest for the rest of his life as from the time of King 'Amr's death.

HIS DEATH

There are different accounts on his death.

It was narrated that: 'Amr b. Kulthūm was forced to drink unmixed wine more than his capability until he died. While another narration said, it is out of his volition he drank the unmixed wine.²⁰ This submission could be right for the love he had for wine as this could be seen in the opening of his poetical anthology.

ألا هي بصحنك فأصبحينا ولا تبقي خمور الأندرين

مشعشة كان الحصن فيها إذا ما الماء خالطها سخينا

Meaning:

Up! Maiden! Fetch the morning drink (for us)

And hoard not the wine of Andrain

Clear wine takes a saffron colour

When it is mixed with water, warm therein.²¹

Another source narrated from Yazid b. 'Amr that, he ('Amr b. Kulthūm) was forced to drink wine more than his capability by the army of King 'Amr's sons who captured him in the wars waged against him for killing his father King 'Amr.²²

'Amr b. Kulthūm lived long, he died at the age of one hundred and fifty.²³ He was survived by children and they were known as knights. Among them are 'Abbād, a warrior, who killed Bishr b. 'Amr b. Hind, 'Āqib, Bāq and Kulthūm b. 'Amr al-Attabyi popularly known as *Shā'ir-Sāhib al-Rasā'il*.

HIS PROSE AND POETRY

It was narrated by Husayn b. 'Ali as follows:²⁴ At the tail end of 'Amr b. Kultūm's life he said these prosodic lines as an admonition to his children which really spelt out his philosophy to life and the quality of an icon of patriotism poetry in the pre-Islamic Literature.

يا بني قد بلغت من العمر ما لم يبلغه أحد من آبائي، ولا بد أن ينزل بي ما نزل
 بهم من الموت وإني والله ما غيرت أحدا إلا غيرت بمثله إن كان حقا فحقا وإن
 كان باطلا فباطلا. ومن سب سب فكفوا عن الشتم فإنه أسلم لكم، وأحسنوا
 جواركم بحسن ثأؤكم، وامنعوا من ضم الغريب، فرب رجل خير من ألف قرب
 خير من خلف وإذا حدثتم فعدوا وإذا حدثتم فأوجزوا، فإن مع الإكثار تكون
 تكون الأذى، وأتبع القوم العطوف بعد الكبر، كما أن أكرم المنايا القتل ولا خير
 فيمن لا روية له عند الغضب ولا من إذا أعتب لم يعتب، ومن الناس من لا
 عرجي خيره ولا يخاف شره فبكؤه خير من دره، وعقوفه خير من بره، ولا
 تروج فيما بينكم فإنه يؤدي إلى قبيح البغض.

Meaning:

O! My son I have reached an age which none of my forefathers reached. There is no doubt that death which befell them must befall me. I swear by God I have never reviled anybody on a matter unless I have been derided in the same manner. If (what he reviled me upon) were true, it was true and if it were false, it was false, whoever abuses will be abused in return. So desist from insult (by not being the first to abuse anybody) which is the most peaceful for you. Do well to your neighbours you will have an irreproachable praise; prevent inequity of an outsider. How many a man

like thousand (men) rejection is better than faction. Whenever you are informed (about a matter) take caution and whenever you speak, be succinct; with verbosity comes fumbles. The most courageous people are those that are lenient after being hard, as the most honorable death is by killing. Shame on a man who cannot suppress anger and cannot rebuke himself when he is reprimanded. There are people whose goodness is not hoped (by their society) nor their evil feared, mourning them (as corpses) is better than their living. Their recalcitrance is more appropriate than their goodness. Do not marry within your quarters for it leads to intense hatred.²⁵

HIS BOASTFUL POETRY

ورثا مجد علقمة بن سيف أباح لنا حصونا انجد دينا
ورثت محلللا والحير منه زهير نعم ذكر الناخرين
وعتانا وكلثوم جميعا بهم لنا تراث الأكرمين
متى نعقد قرينتنا بحبل نخذ الوصل أو نقص القرينا
قأبوا بالنهاب وبالسيابا وأبنا بالملوك مصفدين
ورثاهم عن آباء صدق ونورثها إذا متنا بنسنا
وأنا الشاربيون الماء صفو وأنا الشاربيون الماء صفو
لنا الدنيا ومن أضحي عليها ونبتش حين نبتش قادرينا

Meaning:

1. We inherited the glory of 'Alqamah b. Sayf,
Which legalized the glorious fortress to subjugate for us.
2. I inherited Muhalhil and another who was better than her
(Zuhayr) what an excellent Treasure:
3. And 'Attāb and Kulthūm altogether thought them
We attained the legacy of the most honourable.
4. Whenever we lock our horns with any rope (enemy)
We cut of their rope or prejudice their horn.
5. They (the enemy) from the battle field) with booty and (female)
captives.
And we return with kings that are enchained up.
6. We Inherited it (that glory and fortress) from the truth worthy
for-bears.
Our Children would also inherit it after our death
7. We drink pure clean water
While others drink dirty and muddy water
8. The entire world and those existing in it belong to us
When we strike, we strike ably.²⁶

His Tribal Rebuke Poetry

اهدد فلا تعجل علينا وانظرنا نخبرك اليقينا
 صدحن حمرا قد روينا باننا نورد الرايات بيضا
 اج الملك يحيى المحجرين وسيد معشر قد توجه
 كونوا في اللقاء لها طحينا متى تنقل إلى قوم رحانا

Meaning:

O! Father of Hind ('Amr b. Mundhir al-Akbar) don't be hasty (in your judgement) on us.

Be alert, we would keep you informed of the truth.

Our flags appear white (on our way to a battlefield)

And they appeared red (on our way home) having satisfied it's thirsty.

A community leader who was crowned as a king

Just equal (to those that guard against our quarry)

Whenever our hand mill move on to a tribe (for a war)

They become grind (powder) in return²⁷.

HIS TRIBAL SATIRIC POETRY

إليكم يا بني بكر إليكم أَلَمْ تَعْرِفُوا مِنَّا الْيَقِينَا
 أَلَمْ تَعْرِفُوا مِنَّا وَمِنكُمْ كَنَائِبٌ يَطْعَنُ وَيَرْتَمِينَا
 إِذَا وَضَعْتَ عَنِ الْأَبْطَالِ يَوْمًا رَأَيْتَ لَهَا جُلُودَ الْقَوْمِ جُونَا
 كَأَنَّ مَتُونَهُنَّ مَتُونُ غَدَرٍ تَصَفَّقَهَا الرِّيحُ إِذَا جَرِينَا

Meaning:

To you Banī Bakr (I addressed this poem)

Haven't you know yet the certainty from us.

Haven't you known between us and you

The squadrons which stab and hit

When the heroes of Bakrite) got rid of a burden in a day.

You would see the inlet of the tribe's skin (dark for thrust of steel).

It seems their body looks like main part of pool

Which the wind slams when it blows²⁸

A STUDY OF THEMES AND STYLES OF HIS PROSE AND POEMS

When reading the prose attributed to 'Amr b. Kulthūm one would understand his philosophy of life in its entirety. It also depicts his personality which could be inferred that 'Amr b. Kulthūm owed his reputation to his own personal qualities. He was a man who excelled in the ideal qualities of manhood as these were understood by a race which never failed to appreciate. He guided an orator who wants to command respect anywhere, anytime. Any responsible person would not insult his partner first, then patriotism is very important that would lead to tireless effort for the progress of society this will make the society feel he is responsible. The poet in his poem clearly advised mankind to shun irresponsible ones who deserve mourning for their death better than their living. Whenever information is given to a responsible man, he should be cautious before he reacts. And he should verify the authentic information and get the news clearly. Not as a result of being threatened. As he said: "Shame on a man who can not rebuke himself when reprimanded". He said, doing well to neighbours brings an irreproachable praise while marrying within someone's quarter leads to intense hatred.

There are several fragments attributed to 'Amr b. Kulthūm forming a small *Dīwān*²⁹ which was firstly published in 1819. His *Dīwān* with that of al-Hārith b. Hilizzah, his contemporary was edited by Krenkow in March 1992 pages 591-611. He is one of the *Mu'allaqāt* poets³⁰ although out of about one thousand lines of his poem only one tenth of it is available in the *Dīwān*³¹. The above excerpts from his poem represent his poetical anthology the composition of which could be classified into two periods. The first part

was during the life of 'Amr b. Hind while the second part was composed after the death of the said king. The excerpts consist of boastful, reprimanding and satiric poems which could be seen in his philosophical approach to life. He boasts with his genealogy but when people felt offended with this boastfulness they rebuke the poet or his tribe in words or action as 'Amr b. Hind did to the poet and his mother. He would now reprimand them in return, and this later often leads to satire. These lines of poem confirm his statement that when he was reprimanded he would reply in the same manner. If what he said was true and what he replied with was true he should be commended. For never insulted anybody at the first instance.

Going through the boastful poems and other lines of his poetry in the available anthology it is in only one line that he used the possessive pronoun "I", that is line two of his boasting with the ancestral glory in his poetic anthology. The boast really shows that he had many things to boast of, even also anticipated that it will not end on him and his generation but their ascendants would continue to keep the flag of honour flying. While other warriors are proud of being returned home from the battlefield with booty and female captives, his own tribe counts much on enslaving the kings, warriors and sending the history of that community into oblivion.

His reproach poem confirmed his quality of leadership right from his youth. Because, the man he reproached was the father of 'Amr b. Hind, the king that virtually all his contemporary poets had one or two lines in his praise. He alerted the king to recognize the quality of his tribe as valour, and his tribe Taghlib did not recognize a king who was not at par with their quarry guards. He should be careful because whenever Taghlib tribe engaged

in war with any tribe, they grind its inhabitants and forget about the community entirely.

The direct satiric poem to Bakrite could serve as enough evidence on how the tongue of the poet could lash and deride a human being. He firstly asked them to recapitulation results of their war encounters for many years which were in favour of Taghilibite. He also deviled their warriors that, their body had sustained serious injuries from the lances of their sword which deformed their body structure. He concluded the lines with a very powerful and accurate simile of the posture of Bakrite warriors.

Going through the quoted prose and poems of 'Amr b. Kulthūm one would conclude as follows:

The poet has demonstrated brilliance in his poetical presentation because when you have a message to a community the language of the message must be clear for a wide audience. The beauty of 'Amr's poetic style is purity of language, serenity and elegance of expression. He really showed how crafty, industrious and ingenious he was through his rare ability to command Arabic language. His supportive stand with some theoretical devices which he applied in the poem beautified the discourse. While the popular metre (*al-wāfir*)³¹ chosen for his poem made it popular to be chanted by the people regardless of the message either boastful or rebuke genre.

The poet was a patriotic poet who did not allow any material worth to distract him from his determination. He felt there was no need for any bribe either in cash or kind before justice could be secured. It is this injustice in this incidence that signaled the beginning of a chain of events which led to

the king's death. Therefore loyalty, sincerity, total commitment etc are among the commendable virtues of pre-Islamic Arabs and for which names of some Arabs were immortalized forever.

The displayed self-reliant action and decisive energy served as enough evidence to regard the poet as a Bedouin poet and warrior who as never tired of proclaiming his unshakable valour and recounting his brilliant feats of arms. Instance of his action during the Kings mother's encounter with the poet's mother is enough. He believed once his mother is being disgraced the whole Taghlibite had been insulted.

In conclusion 'Amr b. Kulthūm was a man weighty in years, surrounded by an aura and prestige derived from defending the honour of his tribe, and especially his resistance to the domination of the king of al-Hirah. He thus received unprecedented treatment in terms of goodness from his tribe and he in return lavished on them his excellent poetical production with an impetuous style and simplicity in language.

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