

Arabic Text and English Translation

1	بِكَلِّ وَالِدَةٍ تُقْدِي وَمَا وَلَدَتْ	زَهْرَاءُ طَيِّبَةُ الْأَعْرَاقِ مِذْكَارُ
2	أَحْلَاهَا مِنْ ذَرَى عَدْنَانَ فِي شَرْفٍ	عَالِي الذَّرَى مَا لَهُ مِنْ ذَا الْوَرَى جَارُ
3	بَلْ لَيْتَ شِعْرِي مَا يُغْنِي الْفِدَاءَ وَقَدْ	تَشَبَّثْتُ لِلْمَنَايَا فِيكَ أَطْفَاؤُ
4	يَا أَكْرَمَ الْأَمَّهَاتِ الطَاهِرَاتِ لَقَدْ	أُودَعْتَ قَلْبِي غَلِيلاً دُونَهُ النَّارُ
5	بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ بَعْدَ الْمَشْرِقَيْنِ عَلَى	قُرْبِ الْمَزَارِ وَمَا شَطَّتْ بِكَ الدَّارُ
6	سَقَى ثَرَاكِ وَلِلسُّقْيَا حَلَلْتِ بِهِ	كَفَافَهُ دَيْمَةً وَطَفَاءُ مِذْرَارُ
7	إِذَا بَكَتْ فَوْقَهُ أَنْدَاؤُهَا صَحَكَتْ	خِلَالَهُ مِنْ أَنْبِقِ النَّبْتِ أَزْهَارُ
8	قُلْ لِلْجَنُوبِ إِذَا وَاقَتْ مَسَلِمَةً	وَاسْتَضْحَبَتْهَا عَشِيَّاتٌ وَأَسْحَارُ
9	عُوجِي عَلَى عَسَجِدِ الْأَقْدَامِ وَعَانَمِدِي	سَمَتِ الشَّمَالِ وَلَا يَأْخُذُكَ تَسْيَارُ
10	وَنَكْبِي الْجَوْسِقَ الْعَالِيَّ وَلَا تُثْقِي	مَا لَمْ تُثْلِقْكَ أَعْلَامٌ وَأَحْجَارُ
11	عَنْ يَسْرَةِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْمَشْهُورِ مَعْرِفَةً	بِذِي الْعَمُودَيْنِ عِزْفَانٌ وَإِنْكَارُ
12	خَلِي الصِّفَاتِ وَلَكِنْ حَيْثُمَا سَطَّعَتْ	مِنْ الْقِرَافَةِ أَضْوَاءٌ وَأَنْوَارُ
13	وَفَاضَ عَزْفٌ كَمَا قَدْ فَضَّ فِي مَلَأِ	مِنْ التُّجَارِ عِيَابِ الْمِسْكِ عَطَارُ
14	فَنَمَّ حُطَّتْ عَنِ الْأَعْوَادِ سَارِيَةً	مِنْ الْعَمَامِ ثَنَاهَا الدَّهْرُ مِسيَارُ
15	وَتَمَّ بَابٌ إِلَى الْفَرْدُوسِ مُخْتَصِرٌ	مِنْهُ الطَّرِيقُ فَنِعَمَ الْبَابُ وَالِدَارُ
16	يَا رَبِّ كُنْ عِنْدَ ظَنِّي فِيكَ لِي وَلَهَا	كَذَلِكَ يُفْعَلُ رَحْبُ الطَّوْلِ غَفَارُ
17	فَدَّ كُنْتُ أَحْسِبُهُمْ فِي الْقَاطِنِينَ مَعِي	مَا كُنْتُ أَحْسِبُ أَنْ الْقَوْمَ زَوَارُ

18	لا غَرَنِي أَمَلٌ مِنْ بَعْدِهَا أَبَدًا	هَيْهَاتِ كُلٌّ مِنَ التَّأْمِيلِ غِرَارٌ
19	مَنْ كَانَ يُخْبِرُنِي وَالِدَارُ جَامِعَةً	أَنَّ الْأَحَبَّةُ بَعْدَ الْعَيْنِ آثَارٌ
20	يَا مَنْزِلًا بَاتَ مِنْ سُكَّانِهِ عَطِلًا	مَا قِيلَ حَلُوهُ حَتَّى قِيلَ قَدْ سَارُوا
21	قَصِيئُ مِنْهُمْ وَمِنْ إِبْنِاسِهِمْ وَطَرًا	وَقَدْ بَقِيَ لَكَ أُوطَارٌ وَأُوطَارٌ
22	كُلُّ يُفَارِقُ فِي الدُّنْيَا أَحَبَّتَهُ	وَإِنَّمَا هُوَ إِعْجَالٌ وَإِنْظَارٌ
23	وَوَحْنٌ سَفَرٌ مَطَايِنَا إِلَى أَمَدٍ	أَعْمَارُنَا وَفَنُونُ الْعَيْشِ أَصْفَارٌ
24	لَا يَنْفَعُ الْمَرْءَ إِلَّا مَا يُفَدِّمُهُ	لَا دِرْهَمٌ بَعْدَهُ يَبْقَى وَلَا دَارٌ
25	صَدْرًا فَمَا لِقَتِيلِ الدَّهْرِ مِنْ قَوْدٍ	يُزْجَى وَلَا لِعَقِيرِ الْمَوْتِ عَقَارٍ
26	يَا دَهْرُ أَعْظَمُ شَيْءٍ هَدَّنِي أَسْفَاً	طَعِينَةٌ لَكَ لَمْ يُدْرِكْ لَهَا تَارٌ
27	لَوْ كُنْتَ يَا دَهْرَ مَنْ يَلْقَى مُبَارَزَةً	أَوْ كَانَ يُدْفَعُ بِالْمِقْدَارِ مِقْدَارٍ
28	شَاكَ جَيْشٌ يُثِيرُ النَّعَمَ مُشْتَمَلٌ	لَكِنَّهُ بِالْقَنَا الْحَطِيَّ حَطَّارٌ
29	قَصَتْ وَوَحْنٌ حَوَالِيهَا نُطِيفُ بِهَا	كَأَنَّهَا بَيْنَنَا عَقْرَى وَأَيْسَارٌ
30	يَلْقَى الْفَتَى وَهُوَ مُضْطَرٌّ مُصَائِبُهُ	كَأَنَّمَا هُوَ لِلتَّسْلِيمِ مُحْتَارٌ
31	وَكَمْ لَنَا فِي خِلَالِ الْعَيْشِ مِنْ قَدَمٍ	نُسِرُ أَنْ تَنْقَضِيَ وَهِيَ أَعْمَارٌ
32	لِلْمَرْءِ فِي الْمَرْءِ تَنْبِيهٌ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ	لَوْ كَانَ يَنْفَعُ إِعْدَارٌ وَإِنْذَارٌ

Source Texts

Ihsan 'Abbas, ed., *Mu'jam al-'ulama' wa-l-shu'arā' al-Siqilliyyin* (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1994), 108–109; 'Ali b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Siqilli, *Diwan 'Ali bin 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ballanubi al-Siqilli*, ed. Hilal Naji (Baghdad: Dar al-Risala li-l-Tib'a, 1976), 27–30.

Translation

- 1 May every mother be ransomed, or she may as well never have given birth
 A flower of noble origins who has born a son
- 2 Highest nobility is most suited to her—of high¹
 Honor, without equal among peers
- 3 Would that my poetry could serve as ransom,
 As the talons of the fates cling to you²
- 4 O most generous of pure mothers,
 You have placed in my heart a pain stronger than fire
- 5 Between me and you is the breadth of the Eastern horizon
 Despite the nearness of your grave—your abode has not banished you
- 6 A long, gentle rain watered the soil [of your grave] to its fill,
 And you found satisfaction in the watering.
- 7 When she cried her dew over it, there sprang forth
 Throughout [the soil], from the fineness of vegetation, flowers.
- 8 Tell the south, when she completes her course,
 And dusks and dawns keep company with her,
- 9 Turn to the golden nadir; keep to the
 North star, and may travel not take you³
- 10 Put aside the High Palace, and heed not
 Road markers or stones that [may] meet you,⁴
- 11 To the left of the Famous Mosque, known
 For those two columns: virtue and vice,⁵

¹ Tribal name Adnan not retained in translation; the Arabic text claims the most prestigious mythic Arab lineage for Ali's mother.

² The 'fates' represent death.

³ Lines 9–12 describe a journey consisting of a series of marvels, each more impressive than the last. The first, *asjad al-aqdam* is here rendered golden nadir (nadir being an astronomical term meaning the point on the celestial sphere directly beneath a given position and diametrically opposite the zenith). The North star is a marker offering guidance to travelers. The poetic function of both terms is to use celestial imagery to inspire reflection.

⁴ *Al-jawsaq al-'ali*, here rendered literally as the "High Palace," refers to a constellation. Both the markers and the stones are presumably to mark the distance traveled.

⁵ The masjid (potentially the Kaaba in Mecca or the Prophet's Mosque in Medina) is one of several items passed up for something greater. In addition, referring to *al-masjid al-mashhur* may allude to *hajj* pilgrimage. Whether or not Ali's mother ever performed the ritual, she is here associated with the holy sanctuary. The phrase *'irfan wa-inkar* (more exact: spiritual knowledge and the denial of it) is here rendered 'virtue and vice' because of the alliteration in

12 Leave behind noble traits, but where there break
 Rays and beams of light from [within] the grave⁶

13 There overflowed perfume—The perfumer pours out
 In a crowd of merchants, musk into a leather bag.⁷

14 The night cloud unloaded from its wispieness, unlike its custom
 The journeyer extolled it endlessly⁸

15 And here a door to paradise, cutting short
 The path. [Such is] the blessing of the door and of home.

16 O Lord, do not disappoint my hopes in you, for my sake and for hers
 Such is the conduct of The Gracious, The Forgiving

17 I counted them among my folk
 I had not figured they were [merely] visitors

18 No hope will ever delude me hereafter
 How absurd that all are deluded by optimism

19 How was I to know, when the family was assembled,
 That loved ones—after the sight of them—are memories

20 O home, deprived of its people
 It was no sooner said that they had alighted than it was said that they departed.

21 I obtained from them and their people what I desired,
 Yet there remains for you desires upon desires.

22 All part, in this world, from their loved ones
 Sooner or later

23 As for us, our mounts journey on to the end
 Our lives and ways of life are like nothing

24 Nothing benefits a man but what he offers (in virtue)—
 Neither a dollar nor a house will remain.

the English. Together, this twosome provides the vivid image of a highly-renowned sanctuary that serves as a beacon of guidance for believers.

⁶ The brightness of the grave recalls the most famous elegy composed for the prophet Muḥammad. The poet, Hassan ibn Thabit, describes the glowing presence of the beloved prophet's grave in terms so memorable that it is no wonder the prophet's resting place is still referred to as al-Madina al-munawwara (the glowing city). See Ibn Thabit, *Diwan Hassan ibn Thabit* (Cairo: Al-Hay' a al- ' Amma li-l-Kitab, 1974), 377–80. English translation in Stetkevych.

⁷ The word 'pour' may be translated more literally as 'shed,' as in the shedding of tears, returning to lamentation.

⁸ The word *dahr*, here rendered 'endlessly,' also means fate or destiny, key concepts in Arabic elegies.

25 Patience—for the victim of fate has no hope for retaliation,
 Nor is there a remedy for the wound of death.

26 O fate, the greatest affliction I suffer
 Is a camel litter of yours that was never avenged.⁹

27 If only you were the dueling type O Fate,
 Or if an eye could be had for an eye¹⁰

28 An army extols you, an encompassing force that stirs up war
 Moreover, it stabs with a *Khatt*-sharp spear¹¹

29 She dies, and we surround her, circling her¹²
 As if she were a sacrificed camel before us, and [we] a party of gamblers.¹³

30 The young man—compelled—meets his fate
 As if he were chosen to yield

31 How often in life we offer a brave deed,
 and we would rejoice to die *then*, but it is not meant to be

32 For humans, and in them, there is a calling and advice
 So few truly listen—a call of conscience and a call to consciousness.

⁹ The camel litter, since it was used to carry and protect women, represents womenfolk. The speaker of the poem says ‘of yours’ because fate took it, here symbolizing how God appears to have taken Ali’s mother without allowing him to protect her or avenge her death.

¹⁰ If ‘an eye could be had for an eye,’ literally ‘measure for measure.’ Death seems fundamentally unjust.

¹¹ *Khatt* is the name of a place, renowned for its fire-hardened craftsmanship of weaponry.

¹² The word here translated ‘circling’ is the same word used for circumambulating the Kaaba, a central ritual to ancient Arabia and a high point in the *haji*, the customary Muslim pilgrimage to Makka. The mother is here likened to the supreme sanctuary (another symbol of homeland), this time a spiritual shelter.

¹³ *Maysar* is an ancient game of chance in which participants drew arrows to win parts of a slaughtered beast, usually a camel. It is remembered especially for the generosity demonstrated by winners who would distribute the precious goods, thus gaining in social status while contributing to the community. The practice was prohibited by the Quran, and thus effectively halted, presumably because it was associated with paganism and could potentially cause tribal divisions, thus distracting believers from the new social system. Here Ali effectively combines both the sacrifice of the mother (and the homeland) with the uncertain outcome for the living. For more details, see the entry for “Maysar” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.