

= Imru ' al @-@ Qais =

Imra ? ul @-@ Qais bin Hujr al @-@ Kindi (Arabic : ??????? ?????????? ????? ???????
???????????????? / ALA @-@ LC : Imr? ? al @-@ Qays ibn ?ujr al @-@ Kind?) was an Arabic poet in
the 6th century AD , and also the son of one of the last Kindite kings . He is sometimes considered
the father of Arabic poetry . His qaseeda , or long poem , " Let us stop and weep " (Arabic : ??? ???
) is one of the seven Mu 'allaqat , poems prized as the best examples of pre @-@ Islamic Arabian
verse . Imru ' al @-@ Qais was born in the Najd region of northern Arabia sometime in the early 6th
century AD . His father was said to be Hujr bin al @-@ Harith (??? ??? ??????? / ?ujr ibn al @-@
??rith) , the Kindah monarchy 's regent over the tribes of Asad and Ghatfan , and it is believed that
Imru ' al @-@ Qais was born in the territory of Asad . His mother was said to be Fatimah bint Rabi
'ah al @-@ Taghlibi (????? ??? ?????? ????????? / F??imah bint Rab? ? ah al @-@ Taghlib?) .

Legend has it that Imru ' al @-@ Qais was the youngest of his father 's sons , and began
composing poetry while he was still a child . His father strongly disapproved of this habit in his son ,
believing poetry to be an unseemly pastime for the son of a king . His father also disapproved of
Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' scandalous lifestyle of drinking and chasing women , and eventually banished
him from his kingdom , or so the legend goes . Later , when the tribe of Asad rebelled and
assassinated his father , Imru ' al @-@ Qais was the only one of his brothers to take responsibility
for avenging his death . Renouncing wine and women , he fought the tribe of Asad until he had
exactd revenge in blood , and spent the remainder of his life trying to regain his father 's kingdom .

Like many figures of early Arabia , which at that time lacked a formal writing system and relied on
the oral transmission of stories , the details of the life of Imru ' al @-@ Qais are hard to determine
with any certainty . Even so , historians have been able to compare the various stories written down
by later biographers with clues from Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' own poems and information about major
historical events in the Persian and Byzantine empires to reconstruct a probable account of the life
and ancestry of this most famous of the Jahili (pre @-@ Islamic) poets .

According to one account , his full name and ancestry was Imru ' al @-@ Qais , son of Hujr , son of
al @-@ Harith , son of ' Amr , son of Hujr the eater of bitter herbs , son of Mu 'awiyya , son of Thawr
of the tribe of Kindah (Arabic : ????? ?????? ??? ??? ??? ??????? ??? ????? ??? ??? ??? ??????? ???
?????? ??? ??? ???????) . He was also referred to as " The Lost King " (?????? ??????? / al @-@
Malik a? @-@ ?al?l) , because he was never able to recover his father 's throne .

= = Ancestry = =

The tribe of Kindah had its origins in Southern Arabia of and migrated north to Najd sometime in the
4th or 5th century AD . Sometime in the 5th century they asked the king of Yemen to select them a
king , and Hujr the " eater of bitter herbs " became the first Kindite king . He was succeeded by his
son ' Amr , who was succeeded by his son al @-@ Harith , who was the greatest of all the Kindite
kings . One of al @-@ Harith 's sons was Hujr , and he made him regent over the tribes of Asad and
Ghatfan , and Hujr was the father of Imru ' al @-@ Qais .

Of al @-@ Harith , it is told that when the Persian emperor Kavadh I adopted the teachings of the
religious revolutionary Mazdak , al @-@ Harith converted to Mazdakism with him . This caused
Kavadh to make al @-@ Harith king of the Hirah , a region in the south of modern @-@ day Iraq ,
and expel his previous Arab vassal al @-@ Mundhir . Kavadh 's son Khosrau I rejected Mazdakism
and rebuked al @-@ Harith , restoring al @-@ Mundhir to the throne of the Hirah . It is not known
for sure how al @-@ Harith died , but some reports indicate he was captured by al @-@ Mundhir as
he fled al @-@ Hirah , and then killed along with two of his sons and more than forty of his kinsmen
 . Imru ' al @-@ Qais mourns this tragedy in one of the poems attributed to him :

Weep for me , my eyes ! Spill your tears

And mourn for me the vanished kings

Hujr ibn ' Amru 's princely sons

Led away to slaughter at eventide ;

If only they had died in combat

Not in the lands of Banu Marina !
No water was there to wash their fallen heads ,
And their skulls lie spattered with blood
Pecked over by birds
Who tear out first the eyebrows , then the eyes .
(Diwan , Poem 2)

In 525 AD Yemen was occupied by the Negus (Emperor) of Axum (modern @-@ day Ethiopia) .
With their sponsor destroyed , the Kindah monarchy quickly fell apart . It is probably during this
period that the tribe of Asad rebelled and killed Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' father , Hujr .

= = Early life = =

Historians are divided as to the year of Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' birth , but one estimate is that he was
born sometime around 526 AD . He was said to be the youngest of the sons of Hujr , king over the
tribes of Asad and Ghutfan . Some historians have pointed out that his father had other wives and
concubines than his mother , in accordance with the custom of kings at this time , and it is possible
that he received little fatherly attention . He began composing poetry from an early age , an activity
that his father strongly disapproved of because it was not considered appropriate for the son of a
king . Al @-@ Tahir Ahmad Makki comments that " among the northern tribes , likewise , each tribe
had its chief and its poet , and the two were hardly ever the same . "

Another source of friction with his father was Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' excessive dedication to lewd
drinking parties and his scandalous pursuit of women . One story says that , concerned with his son
's lack of responsibility , Hujr tried putting Imru ' al @-@ Qais in charge of the family 's camel herds ,
an experiment which ended in disaster . Another story says that Hujr finally disowned his son after
Imru ' al @-@ Qais publicly courted his cousin ' Uzayzah , and after failing to win her hand in
marriage , managed to enjoy her affections in secret , which caused a considerable scandal in the
family . Yet other stories say that Imru ' al @-@ Qais may have written some lewd verses about his
father 's wives or concubines , and that this was the cause of their falling out . Whatever the reason ,
most of the stories agree that Hujr became exasperated with his son 's behavior and expelled him
from his kingdom . In his exile Imru ' al @-@ Qais wandered with his group of rebellious friends from
oasis to oasis , stopping to drink wine , and recite poetry , and enjoy the performance of the singing
@-@ girls , sometimes tarrying for days before packing up to wander again .

Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' adventures with women also formed an important part of his early life ,
consisting according to some records of dozens of marriages , divorces and affairs , all ending badly
for one reason or another . Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' lovers feature large in his poetry , as he praises
their graces , lambasts their cruelty , and laments their absence and the longing in his heart .

= = The death of his father = =

Some stories tell that Imru ' al @-@ Qais was in his father 's army fighting the tribe of Asad when
his father was slain , but this is not agreed by all the biographers . The most popular story comes to
us from ibn al @-@ Kalbi (d . 826 AD) . Ibn al @-@ Kalbi holds that Imru ' al @-@ Qais was still in
exile at the time of his father 's death , and that the news reached him while he was in the midst of a
party with his friends . Upon hearing the news , he said " May God be merciful to my father . He let
me stray when I was small , and now that I am grown he has burdened me with his blood . There will
be no alertness today , and no drunkenness tomorrow , " followed by perhaps his most famous
quote : " Today is for drink , and tomorrow for serious matters . " (Arabic : ????? ???? ????? ????)

It is told that of all his father 's sons , Imru ' al @-@ Qais was the only one to take responsibility for
avenging his father . One story tells that the tribe of Asad sent him an emissary and offered him
three options ? either that he kill one of their nobles to equal the death of his father , or that he
accept a payment of thousands of sheep and camels , or that he make war on them , in which case
they asked for one month to make ready . Imru ' al @-@ Qais chose the third option . The tribes of
Bakr and Taghlib agreed to support him and fought with him against Asad , killing many Asad

tribesmen . Bakr and Taghlib withdrew their support once they judged that enough of Asad had been killed to satisfy the requirements of revenge .

= = Exile and death = =

After exacting his revenge upon the tribe of Asad and losing the support of Bakr and Taghlib , Imru ' al @-@ Qais travelled all over the Arabian peninsula and the Levant , taking refuge with different tribes , running from his enemies and seeking support to regain his father 's kingship . His last journey was to Constantinople , to seek support from Emperor Justinian I. The Ghassanid prince Al @-@ Harith ibn Jabalah , Justinian 's north Arabian vassal , sponsored Imru ' al @-@ Qais in his appeal , and most accounts indicate that he won some promise of support from the Byzantine emperor , and perhaps even a contingent of troops . Some reports indicate that Justinian pressed the Negus of Axum to support Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' bid , but that he refused due to the ongoing feud between the Axumite Empire and the tribe of Kindah .

After leaving Constantinople , Imru ' al @-@ Qais travelled until he fell ill near the city of Ankara in modern @-@ day Turkey . He remained there until he died . There is a story which says that Emperor Justinian became angry with Imru ' al @-@ Qais after he left , and sent a messenger with a poisoned jacket , and that Imru ' al @-@ Qais wore the jacket and the poison killed him . This story says that Justinian was angry because he discovered that Imru ' al @-@ Qais had an affair with a woman in his court .

However , most historians downplay the likelihood of this account , in favor of the story that Imru ' al @-@ Qais actually died from a chronic skin disease , a disease which he mentioned in one of his poems .

The best estimates of the years of Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' embassy to Justinian and death in Anatolia are from 561 to 565 AD . It has been said that after the death of Imru ' al @-@ Qais the Greeks made a statue of him on his tomb that was still seen in 1262 AD , and that his tomb is nowadays located in H?z?r?k , Ankara .

= = Poetic influences = =

Makki summarizes the accounts of the biographers in identifying three older poets who Imru ' al @-@ Qais could have met and learned from . The first was Zuhayr bin Janab al @-@ Kalbi , a well @-@ known poet who was a friend and drinking companion of his fathers ' . It is also possible that Imru ' al @-@ Qais learned from Abu Du 'ah al @-@ lyadi , and some accounts say that the young Imru ' al @-@ Qais was his reciter (a poet 's disciple who would memorize all of his poems) . A third possible poetic influence was a ' Amr bin Qami 'ah who was a member of his father 's retinue , and was said to have later joined Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' retinue and accompanied him until his death .

= = Religion = =

Most historians in the centuries since Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' death have been content with the assumption that , as an Arab before the advent of Islam , he was pagan . More recently some researchers have called this view into question , most notably Louis Shaykho (c . 1898) , a Jesuit missionary , who insisted that Imru ' al @-@ Qais was a Christian . The evidence that Shaykho cites to support his claim consists mostly of a handful of references to Christian practices and symbols in Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' poems , as well as a few instances of the Arabic word for (the one) God (Allah) . Other historians have said that references to Christianity can be explained by the presence of monasteries and missionaries along the northern frontier of the Arabian peninsula , and the fact that many Arabs would have been impressed by these scenes without necessarily converting themselves . It can be explained by the fact that Arabs have been close to Jewish tribes since ancient times , too (Gindibu helped the Juda kingdom during the Battle of Qarqar) because of their ethnic similarity and geographic proximity . Others have pointed out that the word " Allah " was in

use by the pagan Arabs long before the advent of Islam , and merely referred to the high God (above all the many others) .

Imru ' al @-@ Qais may have been a Hanif . Makki reports that some historians have suggested Imru ' al @-@ Qais could have been influenced by the purported Mazdakism of his grandfather , but also states that , in his opinion , there is little direct evidence to support this .

= = Cultural impact = =

To this day Imru ' al @-@ Qais remains the best @-@ known of the pre @-@ Islamic poets , and has been a source of literary and national inspiration for Arabic intellectuals all the way into the 20th century . Opening his entry in the Dictionary of Literary Biography , Al @-@ Tahir Ahmad Makki says this about Imru ' al @-@ Qais :

The Prince @-@ Poet Imru ' al @-@ Qais , of the tribe of Kindah , is the first major Arabic literary figure . Verses from his Mu 'allaqah (Hanging Poems) , one of seven poems prized above all others by pre @-@ Islamic Arabs , are still in the 20th century the most famous--and possibly the most cited--lines in all of Arabic literature . The Mu 'allaqah is also an integral part of the linguistic , poetic and cultural education of all Arabic speakers .

Ibn Sallam al @-@ Jumahi (d . 846 AD) said of Imru ' al @-@ Qais in his " Generations of the Stallion Poets " (Arabic : ????? ?????) :

Imru ' al @-@ Qais was the originator of a great many things the Arabs considered beautiful , and which were adopted by other poets . These things include calling up his companions to halt , weeping over the ruins of abandoned campsites , describing his beloved with refinement and delicacy , and using language that was easy to understand . He was the first to compare women to gazelles and eggs , and to liken horses to birds of prey and to staves . He ' hobbled like a fleeing beast ' [a reference to his famous description of his horse] and separated the erotic prelude from the body of his poem . In the coining of similitudes , he surpassed everybody in his generation .

Some historians have emphasized the historical significance of the Kindah monarchy as the first attempt to unite the central Arabian tribes before the success of Islam , and Imru ' al @-@ Qais ' tragic place as one of the last Kindite princes . Others have focused on his colorful and violent life , putting it forward as an example of the immorality and brutality which existed in pre @-@ Islamic Arabia .

Iraqi writer Madhhar al @-@ Samarra 'i (Arabic : ?????) in his 1993 book Imru ' al @-@ Qais : Poet and Lover (Arabic : ?????) , calls Imru ' al @-@ Qais the " poet of freedom " :

The poet Imru ' al @-@ Qais had a gentle heart and a sensitive soul . He wanted the best not only for himself but for all the people of his society . The freedom that he struggled for was not confined to the romantic and erotic relations between him and his beloved Fatimah , and was not limited to his demands to lift the restrictions on sexual relations between men and women , but exceeded all this , so that he was singing for the freedom of all mankind-- and from this point we are able to name him , the Poet of Freedom .