

Mu'allaqat 'Antarah¹

Doaa Atamna

Poetry

My poet trades a cleaver for a needle:
His finger and thumb make an eye, his needle
an emphatic tongue. One hand hovers,
another runs rivers over a well-patched coat.

My poet, kill-weathered hand and bent,
ready knee, pinning light with a palm spread wide,
beseeching fabric, limning nothing,
he takes old scars for his own seams. My poet,
slurring, humming, drunk on a sound—
a plea for prayers—he says his poets left nothing,
nothing in need of patching.

What a blessing it is, he tells me.
Hail, nothing! Speak, nothing!
Then, the give of a chance under his fingers,
and the needle tilts.

¹ You can translate the word *mu'allaqah* as a hanging ode: A poem so prized it was hung on the walls of the *ka'bah*, at least according to legend. 'Antarah, born an enslaved princeling, is the author of such a poem. His freedom he earned in battle, a glory he would relive in tormented verse. The first line of his *mu'allaqah* reads:

هل غادر الشعراء من متركهم

Have the poets left anything in need of patching?

أم هل عرفت الدار بعد توهم

Or did you recognize the abode after long-imagining?

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