

Farewell Alissar Iram¹

By Yassin Haj Saleh

August 6, 2014



Alissar Iram died a week ago, an artist, poet and Syrian writer resident in Wales, United Kingdom.

Alissar, whose origins are in Damascus, had been living in every sense of the word in the world of art, music and words. Her knowledge in classical music, as well as English poetry, history of Islamic art, and of Greek and Arabic myths is unmatched. She also wrote a book on Arabic legends book in English, the language in which she mastered writing poetry and distinctive prose texts very eloquently.

Alissar, who lived independently and alone in a house at the sea in Wales, and who was living what she thought and wrote. She called herself Alissar after the Phoenician Queen of Carthage², and took the surname of Iram, after «Iram of the Pillars», the mystical city mentioned in the Koran³.

Did she live alone? No. Alissar had many friends, first of all the Sea, her neighbour, and also thinkers, artists and mythological figures such as Kant, van Gogh, Prometheus, Sisyphus, Dante and Beatrice ... and I am honoured to be one of those friends whom she cared about and about their work without prior knowledge. They read my writings and commented on them, in a rhythm that was difficult to keep up with.

Her friend is also the Owle (whom I dubbed Nasma), and whom she assigned to protect me when I was in Syria. It seems that he did not confine.

Alissar took care to make full use of her time, writing poetry, and essays, creating ceramics and painting. She had vibrant and strong colours, with a significant presence of blue in her work.

¹ The Republic <http://bit.ly/1rf2Otq>

² also known as Elissa or Dido https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dido_%28Queen_of_Carthage%29

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iram_of_the_Pillars

What mostly raised her anger were reckless reports about history and culture, posted by people full of tension and hatred. She was not fanatic for anything, but narrow-mindedness and ignorance raised her outrage.

Alissar was following the revolution since the beginning, and she wrote texts in her blog and on Facebook issued from a spirit full of serenity. Perhaps, the fate of the architectural heritage of the Islamic and pre-Islamic, of which she had an excellent knowledge, was what mostly racked her heart. The “Republic“ published one of her accounts on that heritage in Aleppo.

The last account that she published on her blog was something also about Aleppo. She said that the shelling the city by regime's forces with Scud missiles and explosive barrels caused a great harm to the urban heritage of the city, and that the exchange of shelling between opposition forces and the regime forces caused further damage.

As if she were aware of her imminent departure, she wrote what resembles a will on Facebook five days before she died, a commandment for Gaza: «Whatever happens to us, even as we are laying in agony, and even when the whole world has abandoned us, and even when even our terrible pains overwhelm us, and even as Syria is being destroyed back to raw materials, Gaza remains our responsibility, Gaza remains our responsibility, Gaza remains our responsibility».

We are missing this rare mix of romance, courage, dedication, fantasy and love. Queen Alissar departed from our world suddenly after a brief illness. She went like the daughters and sons of Syria were departing in the past forty months, and like children Syria and Gaza who are departing now, to whom she dedicated an elegy a few days before her departure.

If I call to the children⁴

«If I stretch my soul between the disintegrating

Earth and the pearly heaven

If I stretch it gently and embroider it

With red roses and white roses

With blue birds and opal butterflies

With meadows the colour of passionate green

⁴ Wordpress blog: All hope abandon ye who enter here <http://bit.ly/VumicH>

If I do if I do
Then call to the children
Under the debris
Underneath the rubble
Further down below the mangled concrete and steel
If I call to them
To rise whole and healed
To rise to rise
Then guide them to the carpet of flowers
Stretching high high
Into the tall tall
Gates of a city of light
Blue here and golden there
Silvery above and rippling ultramarine below
Shining to the left
And gleaming to the right
If I do If I do
So that, listening, I hear childish laughter
ringing in the city of light
from twinkling star to a glimmering pool
From an amber moon to a shimmering tower
If I do if I do
Will they forgive me?»

Farewell, your Majesty, the Queen. You have been truly one of the great people of Syria of the sorrows.