

English translation of al-ḥājj ‘Umar Krachi praise poem to Malam Ṣalaw (3)

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful
And may God shower His blessings and peace upon our Lord Muḥammad

1. Blessed is the Creator, the benevolent,
Lord of humankind, giver of blessings.
2. He has distinguished our Ṣalaw¹ in knowledge and piety.
And he has assigned him exclusive power over the powerful.
3. He gave him a crown in the English reign,²
Despite the hatred of his enemies.
4. He has endowed him, among other things, with kingship,
An agreeable nature and the pleasantness of the happy ones
5. Helping the aggrieved, and humility;
Affection towards writers and scholars
6. How gratifying are his habits and nature!
Temperance and serenity: refinements of leadership.
7. Truly, he assists everyone who is oppressed.
Equal to him are those closest or remote
8. He has given assistance in building the edifice³
Assistance upon assistance without complaint.
9. It was from him we sought for every help to build.
And help he gave instantly without any delay.
10. Although we kept besetting him with more demands,
He gave and showed no remonstrance as he donates.
11. How often people insist in asking just to test,
To test the truth of a lord’s generosity.
12. How often people contest a prince in virtuosity,
But then you show him better virtue unbeknown.
13. Indeed he sent us his gifts, time after time;
For enemies to see how magnanimous an eminent can be.
14. Whenever we so seek to meet some need from him,
It was instantly fulfilled without mediation at all.
15. It is our prayer that he soon gives birth to sons,
And for his reign to last in longer life.
16. Amen and amen, our prayers shall never desist;
And we hope for answer by grace of the night sojourner⁴

¹ The nickname of Ḥussain al-Kashnāwī.

² Reference to Malam Ṣalaw’s recognition by the British Chief Commissioner in Asante as head of the Hausa community in Kumase.

³ Reference to the mosque at Kete-Krachi.

⁴ Reference to the Prophet Muḥammad’s night journey.

17. As for the losers, savages they are,
And so they go about speaking ugly monstrosities.
18. I solemnly confess he has bestowed his gifts on us
Repeatedly, continuously, without a halt.
19. May all his enemies perish, and to hell with them.
Amen for they are abhorrent.
20. This leader⁵ is our treasure house, our pasture land;
Gratifications and sweetmeats are reaped from it.
21. How outstanding you are, Oh eminent overlord!
How generous you are to fathers and to sons;
22. By God, I will forever remain thankful to you.
And to you, I shall, always, my praises and eulogies sing.
23. We have heard what delights our heart,
Happiness upon happiness, as well as bliss.
24. When you set out for Yendi⁶ with your entourage,
Intending to pay your visit to the pious Hawwā,⁷
25. Mother of noble men: Khālid and Khidīr⁸ too,
As well as our Ḥussain,⁹ the noblest of noble men.
26. This sojourn proved to be a wonder in our land.
The story was widely proclaimed.
27. People reported what they saw during your voyage there.
They related their words continuously and faithfully.
28. They were amazed at what power they saw,
The sagacity, serenity and splendor as well;
29. In the midst of so many bodyguards,
All turbaned in red.¹⁰
30. Yea, people were terrified by sound of their voice;
Like the fear of thunder rising from the skies.
31. By God, they have indeed beheld your wonders vividly:
The hearer as well as the beholder were both confounded.
32. Bodyguards like jinns,¹¹ surrounding him with eyes
Glaring white and red like the walnut fruit.
33. How many towns you passed by without any heed!

⁵ Literally *amīr*, Arabic for “commander;” here a reference to Malam Ṣalaw’s appointment by British colonial officials to a titled political role in Kumase.

⁶ A town in northeastern Ghana that was the residence of the ruler of Dagbon, a pre-colonial kingdom.

⁷ Malam Ṣalaw’s mother.

⁸ خاضر in the text, the correct spelling would be خضر , but the former was used due to the poem’s meter.

⁹ Malam Ṣalaw.

¹⁰ Hausa bodyguards customarily wear distinctive red turbans as symbol of office.

¹¹ Spiritual forces, both benevolent and malevolent to humans, that Muslims believe were created by God.

- You were not interested in the rabble's company.
34. People were thronged the roads
To gaze at reverence as well as magnificence.
35. People were scrambling, overcome by love;
Like wolves pouncing upon a herd of sheep.
36. The market folks broke loose and flocked to see,
From East and West, from right and back.
37. So much the tumultuous crowd grew frenzied
Fascinated by the majestic pose gazelle-like.
38. They were lost of words before this comeliness.
They were both stunned and dumb like a massive rock.
39. Until you arrived in Yendi in full glory,
You were beheld in splendor and majesty.
40. You were welcomed with honors, and the awe you strike!
They cried: *lāle* and shouted *lāle*¹² and many more.
41. It was honor to Barra when her son came,
Honor to her as well as the fathers too.
42. Honor to the brothers and the neighbors too;
Honor as well as to all who owed allegiance to him.
43. The supreme leader¹³ of Yendi declared: “this is our guest,
Honorable guest, most eminent visitor,
44. Welcome to you! And this is your commodious home;
In abundance and homage of noblemen.”
45. Kings and subjects were both delighted of your coming home.
The men were delighted as well as the women too.
46. The poor were full of joy as they proclaimed,
“This guest is great, that feeds the weak,”
47. By God, clothes were freely distributed all around:
Striped, expensive clothes
48. Gowns, trousers, jubbahs¹⁴ as well;
And hats, both red and green;
49. Burnouses and multicolored turbans too;
And garments befitting scholars and noblemen.
50. The nude were clothed: their men and women too.
You meet no naked person, but all in clothes.
51. Whichever way he turns you find the drums.¹⁵

¹² This Hausa word can be transcribed as either *lalle* and *lāle*; the former is an emphatic expression of amazement and approval, and the latter is a welcoming expression addressed to a visitor.

¹³ Literally *amīr*, Arabic for “commander;” here a reference to the title *Ya Na*, leader of Dagbon.

¹⁴ An ankle-length gown, often with long sleeves.

- He gives unreservedly like throwing pebbles.
52. He gives the men of rank and others too.
He gives the rich and the poor men as well.
53. Praise be to Him who takes him safely home,
In honor, safety and without pains;
54. In sound health and delights;
In repose, happiness and prosperity.
55. This writing,¹⁶ I have composed from joy,
For what your lord has bestowed on you with honor and wealth.
56. So many of my needs were set before your grace,
That you handed out the messenger without delay.
57. Without vexation or angry mien.
May your lord fulfill your heart's desires with life of ease.¹⁷
58. And wherever you go or return may you be always revered,
And loved as well as esteemed most honorably.
59. Take this gift from me to you, as is my wont
From long ago, as has also been the wont of eloquent men¹⁸.
60. I have composed it in thankfulness, cheer and fun,
Not desirous of anything at all.
61. Praise be to God who bestowed favor upon His servant,
And blessings be upon the seal of all the prophets.¹⁹

¹⁵ طنبور : the term often is used to refer to a stringed, long-necked instrument resembling the mandolin, but here the reference is likely made to a drum; see Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (1966), 570.

¹⁶ Literally "this book", but the context suggests a reference to the poem.

¹⁷ رفاه in the text, the correct spelling would be رفاه , but the former was used for the poem's rhyme.

¹⁸ He means poets like him.

¹⁹ Reference to the Prophet Muḥammad.