

English translation of al-ḥājj ‘Umar historical poem: colonial rule 2

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful;
May God bless Muḥammad, his family and his companions, and bestow everlasting salvation upon them. And it is his assistance I seek.

1. In God’s name, I begin my composition,
The only God, Lord of humankind.
2. Evolver of all temporality according to His will,
Exalted is our Lord, Resurrector of bones.
3. He does what He wishes, as He wished,
Hallowed is He, Glorious and Sublime.
4. He sent His messengers with guidance and law,
And signs that dissipate obscurity.
5. He sealed them with the best of all humankind,
God’s Messenger, Aḥmad,¹ the high-ranking one.
6. He sent His *ruh*² to him with revelation
For guidance to *dār al-salām*.³
7. He⁴ battled against the infidels and the misguided,
And set His faith upon solid ground.
8. Shower your blessings upon him, O Eternal Lord,
And grant him salvation, O Lord of peace, till resurrection day.
9. Likewise upon his family and his companions all together,
And his family members are most perfect indeed.
10. And now, our purpose is to string pearls
For notifying and warning nobility.⁵
11. It is for the benefit of wise men that I compose my verse,
And I have no concern for those who are depraved.
12. The slanderous and the malevolent might be thwarting,
But unto the Lord is the utmost goal.
13. Those who are wise will harken to it,
And will discern the import of our words.
14. The sun of calamity has risen from the west,
Aiming for the inhabited lands and deserts.
15. It is of Christians’ calamity I mean to poeticize;
Their calamity has descended upon us like dark clouds.
16. On the onset of their mission, they came with peace
And soft spoken words, melodiously composed.
17. They declared: “We have come for trade,
And to restore roads across the lands.
18. And to prevent injustice in the world and thievery,

¹ One of the 201 names of Muḥammad.

² Literally spirit, but used here for the Angel Gabriel.

³ Literally, abode of bliss, another name for Paradise.

⁴ Muḥammad.

⁵ Title of the poem.

- And to promote goodness and exact punishment.”
19. We did not know of their true intents
Until we became like dullards to them.
 20. They beguiled us with their paltry gifts
And gave us candies and sweetmeat.
 21. We could not know that they came just
To rule like kings in tents;⁶
 22. And to construct barracks across the lands,
Designed with colored marble stones.
 23. And soon enough, they went back on their words;
Just as God has declared in retrospect.
 24. They fixed their banners in every town,
And the inhabitants were treated like slaves.
 25. They said, “No slave should be sold
Or bought, and no human being should be enslaved.
 26. And no one should be confined by shackles or rope,
And no harmful beating causing pain.”
 27. The freeman is like a slave unto them,
And the slave is treated like a dignified freeman by them.
 28. And then we said, “This is not why you claimed you came.
Are you reneging on your promises?”
 29. Truly, I have not seen this sort of rule,
The nobles treated like lowly knaves.
 30. The lowly men honored like noblemen.
How odd alas! And woe to nobility!
 31. This (sort) of rule is without remedy
Except endurance and holding one’s tongue.
 32. And I can see nowhere one can escape to
If we were to flee and (seek) safety.
 33. Can you not see how they have occupied the lands
From every side, and enclosed it like dark clouds?
 34. From Sansandi,⁷ say up to Segu⁸ and Jenne,⁹
And in Segu they fought the mass.
 35. Regarding Jenne, they went there with an army
Commandeered by Jahannama,¹⁰ the evil man,
 36. And from Debe¹¹ to Sanankoro,¹² O audience!¹³
Likewise to Bambara,¹⁴ the land of food.

⁶ Arab chiefs

⁷ Town in middle Niger River valley, Mali.

⁸ Town in middle Niger River valley, Mali.

⁹ Town in middle Niger River valley, Mali.

¹⁰ Hell.

¹¹ Town in Mali.

¹² Town in Mali.

¹³ *Yā hā’ulā’i*, is meant to address the readership at large for whom the poem is composed.

¹⁴ Town near Mopti, Mali.

37. Then to Yoro,¹⁵ Fūta Jallon¹⁶ and Toro.¹⁷
The town of Meou¹⁸ became covered in dust.
38. Then to Chinguetti,¹⁹ Timbuktu,²⁰ and Tūba,²¹
As well as Māsina²², the land of noblemen.
39. And to Bandiagara,²³ Douentza,²⁴ as well as Korientze²⁵
And Sarafere,²⁶ market of culinary salt.
40. They stopped over in Sofara²⁷ and its surroundings.
Their commander was an ignoble lieutenant.
41. We will mention every land they occupied,
As much as our composition can possibly muster.
42. Then to Touma²⁸ and its surroundings and Dōri,²⁹
And Kouroutibia³⁰ and Dagaba,³¹ the herds.
43. And all across Songhai³² including Namari,³³
Tera³⁴ and Dargol,³⁵ lands of proud men.
44. They took possession of all the lands over there,
Both large and small of the earth.
45. In Holo,³⁶ the prince took flight in fear,
To Dakala³⁷ and Sandire³⁸ among the masses.
46. From Yagha³⁹ to Giladji⁴⁰ as well as Sorbo(n)⁴¹
To Zangori⁴² and Say,⁴³ which are like twins,

¹⁵ Probably a town near Mopti, Mali.

¹⁶ Precolonial kingdom in highlands of Guinea.

¹⁷ Precolonial kingdom in middle Senegal River valley.

¹⁸ Town near Mopti, Mali, also known as Meou-Foulbe.

¹⁹ Town in the Adrar region of Mauritanian.

²⁰ Town in Mali.

²¹ Town in Mali.

²² Inland Niger River delta state.

²³ Town near Mopti, Mali.

²⁴ Town near Mopti, Mali.

²⁵ Also Korienza and Korienze, town near Mopti, Mali.

²⁶ Town near Timbuktu, Mali,

²⁷ Town in Mali.

²⁸ Town in Mali.

²⁹ Town in Mali.

³⁰ Town in Mali.

³¹ Town in Mali.

³² Ethnic group in Niger.

³³ Town in Niger.

³⁴ Town in Niger.

³⁵ Town in Niger.

³⁶ Town in Niger.

³⁷ Town in Niger.

³⁸ Probably town in Niger.

³⁹ Town in Niger.

⁴⁰ Town in Niger.

⁴¹ Perhaps town in Niger.

⁴² Town in Niger.

⁴³ Town in Niger.

47. Kirtachi,⁴⁴ Kou(n)fa⁴⁵ and Loumbou-Loumbou.⁴⁶
Likewise Beknou⁴⁷ and Nattangou⁴⁸ respectively.
48. These are all lands belonging to the Fulani,⁴⁹
Except few modifications⁵⁰ necessitated by our verse.
49. Then we shift to koudougou⁵¹ and Lele,⁵²
And Yadiga,⁵³ all inhabited by ignoble men.
50. Did you not see that they have planted their flag
In Bousouma?⁵⁴ Then they became like serfs.
51. They stopped over in Wagadugu⁵⁵ without a doubt,
And its barracks are surrounded with security.
52. I could not find any brave men among the Mosi.⁵⁶
They had all fled like stray animals.
53. Their men and their women were all alike.
In this shame they fled like herds.
54. So there is no difference between dancing
And faka⁵⁷ to them? This is indeed shameful.
55. Have you heard how they stormed Kouna⁵⁸
With banners, and Sologu,⁵⁹ not in peace?⁶⁰
56. It was likewise with Boulsa,⁶¹ and all its inhabitants,
Lago⁶² as well and Kadjateon⁶³ respectively.
57. Bire(i)⁶⁴ and Namori⁶⁵ and then Dakon⁶⁶ were treated alike
And Kombisiri⁶⁷ which has a wine market.
58. Then Zagou⁶⁸ and the people there, say Busanga.⁶⁹

⁴⁴ Town in Niger.

⁴⁵ Probably Kourfa in Niger.

⁴⁶ Town in Niger.

⁴⁷ Perhaps Pengona in Niger, it would be easy for 'Umar to modify the [p] sound to [b].

⁴⁸ Perhaps Natourgou in Niger.

⁴⁹ Also known as Fula and Fulbe..

⁵⁰ The poet probably changed the names of some towns for the sake of the meter.

⁵¹ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁵² Town in Niger.

⁵³ Perhaps Yandégen in Burkina Faso.

⁵⁴ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁵⁵ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁵⁶ Ethnic group in Burkina Faso.

⁵⁷ Same as *kada*, "A game of colliding with one another, chest to chest. (= faka; ka'diya; cf. ka'bba; ka'de I.1(d). [On-line Bargery Hausa-English Dictionary; <http://maguzawa.dyndns.ws/>; *Ka'da*, III,{2. n.f.} (b)]

⁵⁸ Probably a town in Burkina Faso.

⁵⁹ Perhaps Sologo in Burkina Faso.

⁶⁰ 'Umar seems to be expressing some irony here as the name Sologu recalls to him *salām*, peace in Arabic.

⁶¹ Town situated in Burkina Faso.

⁶² Perhaps Laogo or Laougou in Burkina Faso.

⁶³ Perhaps Kadiateon in Burkina Faso.

⁶⁴ Town in Burkina Faso (also possibly Bere or Bera both in Niger).

⁶⁵ Town in Burkina Faso, close to the Ghanaian border.

⁶⁶ Town in Burkina Faso. Could also be Dakou in Benin.

⁶⁷ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁶⁸ Probably Ziga in Burkina Faso.

⁶⁹ Ethnic group.

- They marched on Koupela⁷⁰ on an ominous day.
 59. As for the land of Gurma⁷¹ they surrounded it,
 In complete occupation; they are now like slaves.
 60. We did not hear of any one who fought among them
 And none who disputed (their rule),
 61. Except Garju who disdained to be shamed.
 He died (fighting them) and was interred.
 62. That is how honorable men should behave:
 When they descend, he should die without illness⁷² (not in vain).
 63. Life in abasement is like death,
 And death in honor is like sleep.
 64. But those who can answer death's call
 Are few among men, except the noble.
 65. We loved Garju truly, and truly we mourn him,
 But those left behind shall live in regret.
 66. And Bankatatougou⁷³ they invaded with force,
 Its chief took flight like a child.
 67. Then Madouba,⁷⁴ Sambalgou,⁷⁵ and Botou⁷⁶
 As well as Pergbalembiro⁷⁷ and Tafe⁷⁸, the twin towns,
 68. Then Sowadoubila,⁷⁹ Dagou,⁸⁰ and all around,
 As well as Diakougou,⁸¹ Bendougou⁸² respectively.
 69. Then Karemamma⁸³ likewise, followed by Tenado,⁸⁴
 As well as Yalou,⁸⁵ land of culinary salt.
 70. Have you heard how they stormed Kourori⁸⁶
 With black banners like crows?
 71. Its prince was fearless and courageous too;
 He died with honor without any shame.
 72. How wonderful his deeds were! He disdained shame.
 He battled them and died and was interred.
 73. Those who were left shall live and regret.
 How great a leadership he showed, no leader could.

⁷⁰ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁷¹ Ethnic group.

⁷² Stating a preference to die on the battlefield rather than to die ill in bed.

⁷³ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁷⁴ Probably town in Burkina Faso.

⁷⁵ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁷⁶ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁷⁷ Probably a town in Burkina Faso.

⁷⁸ Town in the Liptougou district of Burkina Faso.

⁷⁹ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁸⁰ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁸¹ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁸² Town in Burkina Faso; also can be read as Bendogo.

⁸³ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁸⁴ Town in Burkina Faso.

⁸⁵ Town in Benin; or Yelou in Burkina Faso.

⁸⁶ Probably Kournere, a town in Burkina Faso.

74. He died without cowardice fearing no pain in battle.
May God reward him in Paradise.
75. They came to Nikki⁸⁷ facing no fighting or dispute.
The chief became docile like a dove.
76. Then followed Djougou,⁸⁸ Djangala⁸⁹ likewise Kounde⁹⁰
And add Ouesse⁹¹ and Sinende⁹² respectively.
77. And from Gurma⁹³ and Tam(ar)ou⁹⁴ in Borgou;
They were slaughtered, dying terribly.
78. And all eminent men who refused to fight
Died slaughtered by guns or swords.
79. They were thrown naked on the garbage dump
To become food for birds and scavengers.
80. They went to Kourek(par)ou⁹⁵, and Woré⁹⁶ and Kékélé⁹⁷
But they shed no blood on arriving there.
81. How many scholars died without a cause,
For just in fear of them and was interred?
82. They did not care about killing anyone;
It was for them like killing wild ass.
83. We thought in Borgou⁹⁸ there were valiant men
Warlords without reproach.
84. We saw them carrying magic bowls on their heads,
And bows and poisonous arrows.
85. They claimed they had weapons and medicines;
And poisons of various types filled in bottles.
86. This proved to be all false and utter lies;
They threw them away and fled like flocks.
87. No one stood firm except a few of them.
They turned into black donkeys and wild foxes.
88. We then heard how they set out towards the east,
With flags and lots of weaponry.
89. They took the road towards Zabarma⁹⁹ land
To Dosso,¹⁰⁰ as well as Tombokire¹⁰¹ in the wild.

⁸⁷ Town in Benin.

⁸⁸ Town in Benin.

⁸⁹ Shortening of Djangalame or Djangalamne both towns in Benin.

⁹⁰ Town situated in Benin; or could be Kouande.

⁹¹ Ouesse or Ouessa and also Ouéssé in Benin.

⁹² Town in Benin.

⁹³ Ethnic group in Benin.

⁹⁴ Town in Benin.

⁹⁵ Town in Benin.

⁹⁶ Town in Benin.

⁹⁷ Town in Benin.

⁹⁸ Region in Benin.

⁹⁹ Also Zarma, Djerma, ethnic group in Niger.

¹⁰⁰ Town in Niger, capital of the king of the Zabarmawa known as Djermakoye.

¹⁰¹ Town near Dosso, Niger.

90. Then to Lou'lou¹⁰² and Kanda¹⁰³ and Doutchi,¹⁰⁴
As well as Giwaye¹⁰⁵ and Doumega,¹⁰⁶ the twin towns.
91. They came to Ismael, the chief of Kebbi,¹⁰⁷
Peacefully without combating or fighting him.
92. Yes, then they went towards Tagazar and Azben,¹⁰⁸
As well as Salame.¹⁰⁹ Oh may we live in peace.
93. O God, save us together with all Muslim nations.
Protect us from the calamities of the ignoble.
94. They went to Tera¹¹⁰, Gobir¹¹¹ and Maradi¹¹²
As well as Tessawa¹¹³ and Agar¹¹⁴, lands of noble men.
95. How many were the towns they ravaged on their way,
Destroying and burning all foods?
96. Their army went to Zinder¹¹⁵ with evil intent,
Carrying banners and heavy weaponry.
97. To avenge Jahannama (the evil man) they came in rage,
But only white bones were at the gates.
98. We heard when they went over to Share;¹¹⁶
They built a house of marble at its centre.
99. Then to Lagoni, Mandara¹¹⁷ and Musgu,¹¹⁸
And the lands of Sara¹¹⁹ respectively.
100. They went to Dikwa¹²⁰ to fight Rabeh.¹²¹
They captured him and tied him like a child.
101. Massive smoke arose at his capture
And covered the sky like heavy dark clouds.
102. That day their project was a great success,
And that is the nature of the world with humankind.
103. Vicissitudes of time, from this to that,
And then from that to this, do not last.
104. There is no condition that will not pass away

¹⁰² Town in Niger.

¹⁰³ Town in Niger.

¹⁰⁴ Probably town in Niger.

¹⁰⁵ Probably a town in Nigeria.

¹⁰⁶ Town in Niger.

¹⁰⁷ Town in Kebbi state, Nigeria.

¹⁰⁸ Tuareg regions.

¹⁰⁹ Town near Sokoto, Nigeria.

¹¹⁰ Town in Niger

¹¹¹ Town in Nigeria.

¹¹² Town in Niger.

¹¹³ Town near Maradi, Niger.

¹¹⁴ Town near Maradi, Niger.

¹¹⁵ Town in Niger.

¹¹⁶ Town in Nigeria.

¹¹⁷ Town in Nigeria.

¹¹⁸ Perhaps Musko in Nigeria.

¹¹⁹ Perhaps town in Nigeria.

¹²⁰ Town in Borno state, Nigeria.

¹²¹ Rabah Zobeir led a large army from Sudan into West Africa in the late nineteenth century.

- As soon as it reaches its appointed end.
105. And all crises, however long they last,
Will pass away, just as it came: like arrow-shot.
106. And from out of crises rainy clouds arise,
Without a drop of rain they pass away like rainless clouds.
107. O Living God, and Eternal Lord, ward off
From us this crisis of our time as it looms nigh.
108. And then Bābīma¹²² and its village of Sikāso,¹²³
Jahannama (the evil one) came there with his hordes.
109. He attacked and quickly defeated them.
And he conquered Keredougou¹²⁴ too, the land of food.
110. Then followed Dawakara,¹²⁵ Tera¹²⁶ and Gilāso¹²⁷
And all the way to Lu'be¹²⁸ and followed by Dār al-Salām.¹²⁹
111. Then to Bobola¹³⁰ as well as the land of Wedi,¹³¹
To Warakui,¹³² which has a market of wine.
112. Then to Goni,¹³³ Bitugu¹³⁴ and Shibanagu¹³⁵ too,
To Dafi¹³⁶ and Wahnābou¹³⁷ completely.
113. It is there that Mukhtār, the valiant reverend, lives
And spends nightlong sleeplessly,
114. Save in reciting litanies and night-prayers
And throughout the day keeping the fast.
115. He was in that state when they arrived, but gave him no reverence,
Although he made his peace with them and gained honor,
116. And a warlord with many regiments
Who was their leader and was known as Imam,¹³⁸
117. But his surname also was Samori¹³⁹
And his children were known as children of Imam.
118. He had Gere and Kuntugi and women;
We heard they captured him trying to escape
119. To Umul Kura pretending but running away –

¹²² Perhaps Babilena, a town in Mali.

¹²³ Town in Mali.

¹²⁴ Town in Mali and another situated in Burkina Faso.

¹²⁵ Perhaps either Dakoura, Diakora or Dyoukoura; towns in Burkina Faso.

¹²⁶ Probably Tiyeira in Burkina Faso.

¹²⁷ Possibly Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso.

¹²⁸ Perhaps Loaba, a town in Burkina Faso.

¹²⁹ Town in Burkina Faso.

¹³⁰ Bouboulou is a town in Burkina Faso.

¹³¹ Widi is a town in Burkina Faso.

¹³² Town in Burkina Faso, also Warokui and Warokoye.

¹³³ Several readings are possible here: Goni, Gonna, Gono or Gonou and Gonu, towns in Burkina Faso.

¹³⁴ Perhaps Pètogo, a town in Burkina Faso.

¹³⁵ Probably Tyébanaga in Burkina Faso.

¹³⁶ Town in Burkina Faso.

¹³⁷ Town in Burkina Faso.

¹³⁸ Muslim prayer leader.

¹³⁹ African leader from the upper Niger River region who conquered to the east as French colonial forces expanded into the interior.

- Thus it was rumored privately and publically.
120. And where are the armies of those who ruled Gurunshi?¹⁴⁰
The Zarma¹⁴¹ and the Hausa, side by side?
 121. They have ruled over Kassena¹⁴² and Leo¹⁴³ and Paga¹⁴⁴
As well as Sate,¹⁴⁵ Dablo/Debari,¹⁴⁶ lands of ignoble men;
 122. Likewise Bishe,¹⁴⁷ Mankru¹⁴⁸ and Nyoro¹⁴⁹
As well as Wey;¹⁵⁰ it is the land of noble men.
 123. And forget not Walembele¹⁵¹ and Sakulo,¹⁵²
And Kaleo,¹⁵³ Napali¹⁵⁴ as well as all their lands,
 124. Chanchango,¹⁵⁵ Firatan¹⁵⁶ and Basiasan,¹⁵⁷
Up to Nafaru¹⁵⁸ and Gangari¹⁵⁹ respectively.
 125. They had ruled over Gurinshi unchallenged
From right and front.
 126. There were no revolts except from slaves.
They were fully contented with them without blame.
 127. The slaves of Gurinshi are not dependable.
Truly there is no trust in barbarous men,
 128. Especially those among the Isala,¹⁶⁰ and Dagarti,¹⁶¹
Kasem,¹⁶² Kyefarshi¹⁶³ and Kanjaga,¹⁶⁴ respectively
 129. They repudiated their overlords relentlessly
And loathed them for eaten seasoned food.
 130. And long ago, they used to [live] like kings
Who would have carpets spread for them to sleep.
 131. Something like this has never dawned on them

¹⁴⁰ Ethnic group in Ghana.

¹⁴¹ Immigrants from Niger who migrated to middle Volta River basin in the late nineteenth century and raided local ethnic groups.

¹⁴² Ethnic group in Ghana.

¹⁴³ Town in Burkina Faso.

¹⁴⁴ Town in Ghana.

¹⁴⁵ Sati or Sate, both towns in Burkina Faso.

¹⁴⁶ Town in Burkina Faso; but Debari is in Ghana.

¹⁴⁷ Perhaps Pissie, Pissi, Pisen, all towns in Burkina Faso.

¹⁴⁸ Perhaps Minkiro in Burkina Faso.

¹⁴⁹ Town in Burkina Faso.

¹⁵⁰ Either Wéi, or We, towns in Burkina Faso.

¹⁵¹ Town in northern Ghana.

¹⁵² Town in northern Ghana.

¹⁵³ Town in northern Ghana.

¹⁵⁴ Town in northern Ghana.

¹⁵⁵ Town in northern Ghana.

¹⁵⁶ Perhaps town in northern Ghana.

¹⁵⁷ Town in northern Ghana.

¹⁵⁸ Perhaps Napari, a town in northern Ghana.

¹⁵⁹ Town in northern Ghana.

¹⁶⁰ Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

¹⁶¹ Or Dagaaba, an ethnic group in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso.

¹⁶² Or Kasena, an ethnic group in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso.

¹⁶³ Unknown reference.

¹⁶⁴ Or Balsa, an ethnic group in Ghana.

- No, not even in their wildest dreams.
132. On that day, they took refuge with Dagomba,¹⁶⁵
In Wafuri¹⁶⁶ where there is earthen pot market.
133. Was it the forest that deceived Asantes?¹⁶⁷
Or the thick twisted woods covered in darkness?
134. Or is it idols or money or gold?
Or is it pride or drinking wine?
135. Certainly they were deceived by lies and falsehood
As well as ignorance and wearied foolishness.
136. Their outcome was in swift death
And those who had escaped met the claws of fate.
137. The Christians have conquered Dina-Akyemfo¹⁶⁸
As far as Accra,¹⁶⁹ where there are noble men,
138. Likewise the town of Gua Asinfo and all around
Up to Sambarfu in the count respectively,
139. All the way to Tetemu,¹⁷⁰ Kunda¹⁷¹ and Agona,¹⁷²
As well as Awuna and Ayigbe,¹⁷³ which are like twins,
140. Likewise Ajashi,¹⁷⁴ Dahomey¹⁷⁵ and all around
And many numerous lands uncountable,
141. Likewise Ibadan,¹⁷⁶ Abeokuta,¹⁷⁷ the Yoruba¹⁷⁸ lands
Up to Ilorin¹⁷⁹ as well as Atu¹⁸⁰, Alufa¹⁸¹ among the list,
142. And likewise Lafāge¹⁸² and all surrounding lands
Up to Bunu,¹⁸³ lands of barbarians,
143. And some of the lands of Nupe,¹⁸⁴ Lafiya¹⁸⁵ and Adamawa,¹⁸⁶

¹⁶⁵ Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

¹⁶⁶ Likely Wapuli, a town near Yendi in northern Ghana.

¹⁶⁷ The Asante are an ethnic group that founded an empire based in the rainforest and extending into the savanna lands of the middle Volta River basin. The Asante Empire imposed heavy tributes, so the British colonial era freed savanna peoples from the Asante yoke.

¹⁶⁸ Town in southern Ghana.

¹⁶⁹ Capital city of Ghana.

¹⁷⁰ Town northern Ghana.

¹⁷¹ Town in northern Ghana.

¹⁷² One of several towns with this name in Ghana.

¹⁷³ Or Ewe, an ethnic group in eastern Ghana, Togo and Benin; Awuna is a dialect of the Ewe language.

¹⁷⁴ Likely the province around Porto Novo, Benin.

¹⁷⁵ Precolonial kingdom in Benin.

¹⁷⁶ Town in Nigeria.

¹⁷⁷ Town in Nigeria.

¹⁷⁸ Ethnic group in southern Nigeria.

¹⁷⁹ Town in Kwara state, Nigeria.

¹⁸⁰ Town in the Benue state, Nigeria.

¹⁸¹ Town in Ondo state, Nigeria.

¹⁸² Name for several towns situated in Kwara state, Nigeria.

¹⁸³ Probably Buna, a town in Benue state, Nigeria.

¹⁸⁴ Town in Nigeria.

¹⁸⁵ Several towns in Nigeria have this name.

¹⁸⁶ Town in Yobe state, Nigeria.

- As well as Mumsi,¹⁸⁷ Kafi,¹⁸⁸ Nasarawa¹⁸⁹ like twins,
 144. Likewise lands of Yawuri,¹⁹⁰ Busa,¹⁹¹ and Gombe¹⁹²
 As far as Ilo,¹⁹³ in which there is a slave market,
 145. Likewise “the house of floor”, they burnt it down
 In raging fire, and they marched ahead.
 146. Could it be really true that they reached Zaga?¹⁹⁴
 If true, then their aim is to march ahead.
 147. Did you see how the Dagomba¹⁹⁵ kept wondering,
 Whether they will come to them in peace?
 148. The chief of Yendi¹⁹⁶ was among those people
 Who spoke wisdom and truth;
 149. As for his subjects, and his children too,
 They’re all evildoers and of bad reputation.
 150. When he died disaster descended upon them.
 They were attacked by German regiments.
 151. Mention Gambaga,¹⁹⁷ then Kusasi¹⁹⁸ and Mango;¹⁹⁹
 As well as (M)barba,²⁰⁰ Tassi,²⁰¹ Segou²⁰² in the list.
 152. Remember Kete,²⁰³ our town, that day how it was occupied
 As well as Nanumba²⁰⁴ and Konkomba,²⁰⁵ the savages,
 153. And the Basare,²⁰⁶ the Kabre²⁰⁷ and all the rest
 Who used to live in fortresses above hills,
 154. Likewise Sogode,²⁰⁸ and Kirkiri²⁰⁹ and Fasao²¹⁰
 Including Gafilu²¹¹ and Semeri,²¹² which are like twins,

¹⁸⁷ Hausa name for the Tiv people of Nigeria.

¹⁸⁸ One of several towns with this name in northern Nigeria.

¹⁸⁹ One of several towns with this name in northern Nigeria.

¹⁹⁰ Yawar is in Kano state and Yawuria is Kebbi state, Nigeria.

¹⁹¹ Town in Katsina state, Nigeria.

¹⁹² Town in Gombe state, Nigeria.

¹⁹³ Two towns located in Oyo and Ogun States of Nigeria respectively.

¹⁹⁴ Town in Kebbi state, Nigeria.

¹⁹⁵ Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

¹⁹⁶ Town in northern Ghana, pre-colonial capital of Dagbon.

¹⁹⁷ Town in northern Ghana, pre-colonial capital of Mamprusi royals.

¹⁹⁸ Ethnic group in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso.

¹⁹⁹ Probably Sansane-Mango, a town in Togo.

²⁰⁰ Possibly a town in northern Benin; could it be Mborko?

²⁰¹ Tassi/e, a town in Borgou, Benin.

²⁰² Town in Borgou, Benin.

²⁰³ Kete-Krachi are one town in northern Ghana; the poet’s residence.

²⁰⁴ Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

²⁰⁵ Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

²⁰⁶ Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

²⁰⁷ Ethnic group in Togo.

²⁰⁸ Town in central Togo.

²⁰⁹ Town in central Togo.

²¹⁰ Fazao, a town in central Togo.

²¹¹ Perhaps town in Togo or Benin.

²¹² Town in Benin.

155. And Arju²¹³ and Salmanga²¹⁴ and all its environs;
The Chief of Soubroukou²¹⁵ fled among the crowd.
156. The tall Christian came to battle him
He ran away and left the lofty palaces.
157. Have you witnessed how they surrounded Boukouro²¹⁶
And its environs and how they marched beyond?
158. We have been horrified with what they did to us.
Their aim is only to control the world.
159. Have you seen how they came to Wushishi?²¹⁷
A noble prince reigned there in the town.
160. That is their way of scorning us,
And they swooped upon us like dark swallows.
161. And if we asked: “What do you want from us?
Is it your intent to fight peaceful people?”
162. They scoffed and said: “How can you battle us?
Sit back and endure us without a shame.”
163. Have you heard how they descended upon Abuja?²¹⁸
As well as Gwau²¹⁹ and Daforo,²²⁰ which are like twins.
164. Their real intention is to fight Muslims
And they would sow discord without a doubt.
165. I do not know how this will come to end;
We ask our Lord to end it well for us.
166. We also heard they went to Illela,²²¹
As well as Agadez²²² which are noble lands.
167. They said their envoy came up to Bauchi²²³
To beguile them with ornate rhetoric.
168. They also sent Adam to Kano²²⁴ with some funds,
And men carrying stuff to bribe the lords.
169. I saw that devilish commander, in the wilderness of Rubu²²⁵
With lots of loads marching to go beyond.
170. Their landing would be in Zar,²²⁶ no doubt at all.
Well, we have no one upon who to call except our Lord.
171. Silence, we have to keep in these our days
And patience from oppression and abuse.

²¹³ Perhaps Aledjo, a town in Benin.

²¹⁴ Town in Benin.

²¹⁵ Town in Benin.

²¹⁶ Town in Benin.

²¹⁷ Town in Niger state, Nigeria.

²¹⁸ Town in central Nigeria.

²¹⁹ Town in Abudja municipality, Nigeria.

²²⁰ Town in Niger state, Nigeria.

²²¹ One of several towns with this name in Sokoto and Kebbi states, Nigeria.

²²² Town in central Niger.

²²³ Town in central Nigeria.

²²⁴ Major city in Northern Nigeria capital of Kano State.

²²⁵ Probably a town in the state of Katsina in Nigeria.

²²⁶ Town in Borno state, Nigeria; but it could also be Zara, Zari, Zare, Zaru or Zarra, all towns in northern Nigeria.

172. He who would dare to speak the truth aloud
Will live in grief and woe.
173. People bemask themselves in idiocy and lies,
Deception, and retailing in calumnies.
174. Truth in these our days is not approved,
And he who says the truth will be reviled.
175. Truth has become a bitter pill in these days
And propagating lies has become commendable.
176. O God, o Merciful, have mercy
Upon your servants, free or slave.
177. Truly, their gristles are of guff and idiocy;
As for their blood, it's mixed with envy and hate.
178. Their veins are made of chronic grudge and viciousness.
Their bones ingrained in human hatred.
179. The love for wealth is what they have for skins.
And love of power what they have as hair.
180. Malicious gossip is their litany;
The flesh of others is like flesh of birds.
181. My verses are but for musing and reflection;
Foolishness is not part of poetry.
182. Neither are they meant to seek love from people of the book.
May God forbid us to incline to that.
183. Nor for delight and joy did I my verse compose,
But to express sorrow and grief,
184. And surely we had not heard of a person who intended evil
By corrupting the meaning of words,
185. For corrupting words is not new;
It is something men have done from antiquity.
186. Some men, there were who distorted the Taurāh²²⁷
That the Lord of the throne mentioned it endlessly.
187. Do you know those who seek to lead astray?
They would distort the words we have composed.
188. He would falsely interpret Qur'ānic verses,
And it is God who shall reward humankind appropriately.
189. Who could be more envious than learners?
But though they envy, we will be absolved.
190. And who could be more spiteful than reciters?
But if they spite us we will not be grieved.
191. Have you not heard what has befallen Suyūṭī?²²⁸
May God reward him among the noble ones.
192. His verses too were mixed with jest and jive;
His intent was not that, but to express grief.
193. The chronicling of these lands and towns
Is only meant to warn and rouse the noble-minded.

²²⁷ The Tora or Jewish Pentateuch.

²²⁸ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, a Muslim scholar of the fifteenth century, who wrote numerous works in Islamic theology.

194. It is not as heedless men might think,
To just distract or try to sway the crowd.
195. May God forbid my doing this or that
Until the day I'm interred in the ground.
196. The eloquent are begrudged for their skills
By envious men who envy them their gifts.
197. Our maundering discourse has fulfilled our aim.
We shall conclude it in perfect finale:
198. O, You who answer the captive when he calls,
Or in depths of gloomy night the needy when he hails,
199. Deliver us from what has descended upon us.
Save us to reach our end in peace.
200. We implore you by all the prophets
As well as the sake of saints of lofty rank,
201. For ourselves, our families all at once
Shelter us in your safe bosom, O Lord of Peace,
202. For no harm shall touch those who resort to you
Nor shall they violence see, O Lord of humankind.
203. No worries will he have, nor grief, nor sorrows feel,
The one who stand before you, nor sickness.
204. You always act according to your will.
You rule and judge humans as you like.
205. The signs of pending doom have come to light.
Come all let us beseech men of grace.
206. Let us implore our Lord by the invisible men,²²⁹
And by the grace of Jayli,²³⁰ axis of the saints,
207. And by the grace of all the letters of God's books,
By Ṭāsīn, Yāsīn and Ḥāmīm,²³¹
208. And by the chapters of the spider²³² and the running horses,²³³
And by the grace of Fātiḥa²³⁴ and Alif Lām,²³⁵
209. By the chapters of Yusuf,²³⁶ Thunder²³⁷ and the Bee,²³⁸
And the chapters of Ascension²³⁹ followed by the Sleepers,²⁴⁰

²²⁹ Reference to the forty unseen men whom Sufis seek for their intercession in the fulfilment of worldly needs.

²³⁰ 'Abdul Qādir al-Jilānī (d.1166) was a Persian Muslim scholar and saint who founded the Qādiriyya Sufi order, one of the oldest Sufi brotherhood in Islam.

²³¹ All three names refer to *sūrah*s or chapters of the Qur'an: Ṭāsīn begins the 27th chapter, Yāsīn begins the 36th chapter, and seven chapters begin with Ḥāmīm, chapters 40 to 46.

²³² *Sūrah al-Ankabūt*, the Spider, is the 29th chapter of the Qur'an.

²³³ *Sūrah al-ʿādiyāt*, the Racers, is the 100th chapter of the Qur'an.

²³⁴ This is the opening chapter of the Qur'an.

²³⁵ This is the second and longest chapter of the Qur'an.

²³⁶ The twelfth chapter of the Qur'an is named after the Prophet Yusuf or Joseph.

²³⁷ The thirteenth chapter of the Qur'an.

²³⁸ The sixteenth chapter of the Qur'an.

²³⁹ The seventeenth chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁴⁰ *Ahl al-Kahf* or the people of the Cave is named after people who were believed to have taken refuge in a cave to protect their faith and God made them sleep for more than three hundred years before they were discovered by a subsequent generation. This is the 18th chapter of the Qur'an.

210. The chapters of the prophets²⁴¹ and of Light,²⁴²
And the chapters of the pilgrimage²⁴³ and holy month,²⁴⁴
211. The chapters of Ṣāfat,²⁴⁵ Dāwud²⁴⁶ and Zumar,²⁴⁷
The chapters of Hujurāt²⁴⁸ and mighty Hashar,²⁴⁹
212. The book of Taurāh followed by Injil,²⁵⁰
By the book of Zabūr,²⁵¹ and by the Light²⁵² and the Pens,²⁵³
213. By the grace of the companions and all the family,²⁵⁴
Exalted is the Lord, the Mighty and the Glorious.
214. Upon the best of all creatures on earth and high,
God's blessings be and His peace forever more.
215. All the family and all the companions too,
By all their grace we ask our Lord for good ending.
216. By many ages compute our verses²⁵⁵
That is our symbol; and we end our work.
217. But regarding the symbol of its *Hijra*²⁵⁶ *j.h.y.r.*
*Sh.q.*²⁵⁷ is its symbol till the very year.

²⁴¹ The 21st chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁴² The 24th chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁴³ The 22nd chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁴⁴ Four months in the Islamic calendar are believed to be holy months: *dhū al-Qi'dah*, *dhū al-Hijjah*, *al-Muḥarram* and *Rajab*.

²⁴⁵ The 37th chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁴⁶ Possibly a reference to the 38th chapter, *Sūrah Ṣād*, in which the story of Dawud or David is recounted.

²⁴⁷ The 39th chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁴⁸ The 49th chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁴⁹ The 59th chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁵⁰ These two refer, respectively, to the Pentateuch and the New Testament.

²⁵¹ The Psalms of David.

²⁵² The 24th chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁵³ *Sūrah al-Qalam* is the 68th chapter of the Qur'an.

²⁵⁴ Referring to Prophet Muḥammad's close relatives.

²⁵⁵ *D.h.w.r* symbolically represents the number of verses in Islamic alphabetical computation: d = 4; h = 5; w = 6 and r = 200 totaling 215 verses. The 217 verses herein translated form the composite of the three versions: GNA, IAS.AR8 and IAS.AR.139.

²⁵⁶ Referring to the Islamic calendar dated from the year the Prophet Muḥammad migrated from Makka to Madina.

²⁵⁷ $J = 3$; $h = 5$; $y = 10$; $r = 200$; $Sh = 1000$; $q = 100$; this is equivalent to the year 1318 of the Islamic calendar or approximately 1901.