

## 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,<sup>1</sup> the high-ranking one.
6. He sent His *ruh*<sup>2</sup> to him with revelation  
For guidance to *dār al-salām*.<sup>3</sup>
7. He<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>
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,

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<sup>1</sup> One of the 201 names of Muḥammad.

<sup>2</sup> Literally spirit, but used here for the Angel Gabriel.

<sup>3</sup> Literally, abode of bliss, another name for Paradise.

<sup>4</sup> Muḥammad.

<sup>5</sup> 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;<sup>6</sup>
  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,<sup>7</sup> say up to Segu<sup>8</sup> and Jenne,<sup>9</sup>  
And in Segu they fought the mass.
  35. Regarding Jenne, they went there with an army  
Commandeered by Jahannama,<sup>10</sup> the evil man,
  36. And from Debe<sup>11</sup> to Sanankoro,<sup>12</sup> O audience!<sup>13</sup>  
Likewise to Bambara,<sup>14</sup> the land of food.

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<sup>6</sup> Arab chiefs

<sup>7</sup> Town in middle Niger River valley, Mali.

<sup>8</sup> Town in middle Niger River valley, Mali.

<sup>9</sup> Town in middle Niger River valley, Mali.

<sup>10</sup> Hell.

<sup>11</sup> Town in Mali.

<sup>12</sup> Town in Mali.

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

<sup>14</sup> Town near Mopti, Mali.

37. Then to Yoro,<sup>15</sup> Fūta Jallon<sup>16</sup> and Toro.<sup>17</sup>  
The town of Meou<sup>18</sup> became covered in dust.
38. Then to Chinguetti,<sup>19</sup> Timbuktu,<sup>20</sup> and Tūba,<sup>21</sup>  
As well as Māsina<sup>22</sup>, the land of noblemen.
39. And to Bandiagara,<sup>23</sup> Douentza,<sup>24</sup> as well as Korientze<sup>25</sup>  
And Sarafere,<sup>26</sup> market of culinary salt.
40. They stopped over in Sofara<sup>27</sup> 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 Touma<sup>28</sup> and its surroundings and Dōri,<sup>29</sup>  
And Kouroutibia<sup>30</sup> and Dagaba,<sup>31</sup> the herds.
43. And all across Songhai<sup>32</sup> including Namari,<sup>33</sup>  
Tera<sup>34</sup> and Dargol,<sup>35</sup> lands of proud men.
44. They took possession of all the lands over there,  
Both large and small of the earth.
45. In Holo,<sup>36</sup> the prince took flight in fear,  
To Dakala<sup>37</sup> and Sandire<sup>38</sup> among the masses.
46. From Yagha<sup>39</sup> to Giladji<sup>40</sup> as well as Sorbo(n)<sup>41</sup>  
To Zangori<sup>42</sup> and Say,<sup>43</sup> which are like twins,

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<sup>15</sup> Probably a town near Mopti, Mali.

<sup>16</sup> Precolonial kingdom in highlands of Guinea.

<sup>17</sup> Precolonial kingdom in middle Senegal River valley.

<sup>18</sup> Town near Mopti, Mali, also known as Meou-Foulbe.

<sup>19</sup> Town in the Adrar region of Mauritanian.

<sup>20</sup> Town in Mali.

<sup>21</sup> Town in Mali.

<sup>22</sup> Inland Niger River delta state.

<sup>23</sup> Town near Mopti, Mali.

<sup>24</sup> Town near Mopti, Mali.

<sup>25</sup> Also Korienza and Korienze, town near Mopti, Mali.

<sup>26</sup> Town near Timbuktu, Mali,

<sup>27</sup> Town in Mali.

<sup>28</sup> Town in Mali.

<sup>29</sup> Town in Mali.

<sup>30</sup> Town in Mali.

<sup>31</sup> Town in Mali.

<sup>32</sup> Ethnic group in Niger.

<sup>33</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>34</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>35</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>36</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>37</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>38</sup> Probably town in Niger.

<sup>39</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>40</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>41</sup> Perhaps town in Niger.

<sup>42</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>43</sup> Town in Niger.

47. Kirtachi,<sup>44</sup> Kou(n)fa<sup>45</sup> and Loumbou-Loumbou.<sup>46</sup>  
Likewise Beknou<sup>47</sup> and Nattangou<sup>48</sup> respectively.
48. These are all lands belonging to the Fulani,<sup>49</sup>  
Except few modifications<sup>50</sup> necessitated by our verse.
49. Then we shift to koudougou<sup>51</sup> and Lele,<sup>52</sup>  
And Yadiga,<sup>53</sup> all inhabited by ignoble men.
50. Did you not see that they have planted their flag  
In Bousouma?<sup>54</sup> Then they became like serfs.
51. They stopped over in Wagadugu<sup>55</sup> without a doubt,  
And its barracks are surrounded with security.
52. I could not find any brave men among the Mosi.<sup>56</sup>  
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 faka<sup>57</sup> to them? This is indeed shameful.
55. Have you heard how they stormed Kouna<sup>58</sup>  
With banners, and Sologu,<sup>59</sup> not in peace?<sup>60</sup>
56. It was likewise with Boulsa,<sup>61</sup> and all its inhabitants,  
Lago<sup>62</sup> as well and Kadjateon<sup>63</sup> respectively.
57. Bire(i)<sup>64</sup> and Namori<sup>65</sup> and then Dakon<sup>66</sup> were treated alike  
And Kombisiri<sup>67</sup> which has a wine market.
58. Then Zagou<sup>68</sup> and the people there, say Busanga.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>45</sup> Probably Kourfa in Niger.

<sup>46</sup> Town in Niger.

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

<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Natourgou in Niger.

<sup>49</sup> Also known as Fula and Fulbe..

<sup>50</sup> The poet probably changed the names of some towns for the sake of the meter.

<sup>51</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>52</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>53</sup> Perhaps Yandégen in Burkina Faso.

<sup>54</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>55</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>56</sup> Ethnic group in Burkina Faso.

<sup>57</sup> 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)]

<sup>58</sup> Probably a town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps Sologo in Burkina Faso.

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

<sup>61</sup> Town situated in Burkina Faso.

<sup>62</sup> Perhaps Laogo or Laougou in Burkina Faso.

<sup>63</sup> Perhaps Kadiateon in Burkina Faso.

<sup>64</sup> Town in Burkina Faso (also possibly Bere or Bera both in Niger).

<sup>65</sup> Town in Burkina Faso, close to the Ghanaian border.

<sup>66</sup> Town in Burkina Faso. Could also be Dakou in Benin.

<sup>67</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>68</sup> Probably Ziga in Burkina Faso.

<sup>69</sup> Ethnic group.

- They marched on Koupela<sup>70</sup> on an ominous day.  
 59. As for the land of Gurma<sup>71</sup> 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 illness<sup>72</sup> (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 Bankatatougou<sup>73</sup> they invaded with force,  
 Its chief took flight like a child.  
 67. Then Madouba,<sup>74</sup> Sambalgou,<sup>75</sup> and Botou<sup>76</sup>  
 As well as Pergbalembiro<sup>77</sup> and Tafe<sup>78</sup>, the twin towns,  
 68. Then Sowadoubila,<sup>79</sup> Dagou,<sup>80</sup> and all around,  
 As well as Diakougou,<sup>81</sup> Bendougou<sup>82</sup> respectively.  
 69. Then Karemamma<sup>83</sup> likewise, followed by Tenado,<sup>84</sup>  
 As well as Yalou,<sup>85</sup> land of culinary salt.  
 70. Have you heard how they stormed Kourori<sup>86</sup>  
 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.

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<sup>70</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>71</sup> Ethnic group.

<sup>72</sup> Stating a preference to die on the battlefield rather than to die ill in bed.

<sup>73</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>74</sup> Probably town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>75</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>76</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>77</sup> Probably a town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>78</sup> Town in the Liptougou district of Burkina Faso.

<sup>79</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>80</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>81</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>82</sup> Town in Burkina Faso; also can be read as Bendogo.

<sup>83</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>84</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>85</sup> Town in Benin; or Yelou in Burkina Faso.

<sup>86</sup> 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 Nikki<sup>87</sup> facing no fighting or dispute.  
The chief became docile like a dove.
76. Then followed Djougou,<sup>88</sup> Djangala<sup>89</sup> likewise Kounde<sup>90</sup>  
And add Ouesse<sup>91</sup> and Sinende<sup>92</sup> respectively.
77. And from Gurma<sup>93</sup> and Tam(ar)ou<sup>94</sup> 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)ou<sup>95</sup>, and Woré<sup>96</sup> and Kékélé<sup>97</sup>  
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 Borgou<sup>98</sup> 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 Zabarma<sup>99</sup> land  
To Dosso,<sup>100</sup> as well as Tombokire<sup>101</sup> in the wild.

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<sup>87</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>88</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>89</sup> Shortening of Djangalame or Djangalamne both towns in Benin.

<sup>90</sup> Town situated in Benin; or could be Kouande.

<sup>91</sup> Ouesse or Ouessa and also Ouéssé in Benin.

<sup>92</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>93</sup> Ethnic group in Benin.

<sup>94</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>95</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>96</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>97</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>98</sup> Region in Benin.

<sup>99</sup> Also Zarma, Djerma, ethnic group in Niger.

<sup>100</sup> Town in Niger, capital of the king of the Zabarmawa known as Djermakoye.

<sup>101</sup> Town near Dosso, Niger.

90. Then to Lou'lou<sup>102</sup> and Kanda<sup>103</sup> and Doutchi,<sup>104</sup>  
As well as Giwaye<sup>105</sup> and Doumega,<sup>106</sup> the twin towns.
91. They came to Ismael, the chief of Kebbi,<sup>107</sup>  
Peacefully without combating or fighting him.
92. Yes, then they went towards Tagazar and Azben,<sup>108</sup>  
As well as Salame.<sup>109</sup> 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 Tera<sup>110</sup>, Gobir<sup>111</sup> and Maradi<sup>112</sup>  
As well as Tessawa<sup>113</sup> and Agar<sup>114</sup>, 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 Zinder<sup>115</sup> 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;<sup>116</sup>  
They built a house of marble at its centre.
99. Then to Lagoni, Mandara<sup>117</sup> and Musgu,<sup>118</sup>  
And the lands of Sara<sup>119</sup> respectively.
100. They went to Dikwa<sup>120</sup> to fight Rabeh.<sup>121</sup>  
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

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<sup>102</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>103</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>104</sup> Probably town in Niger.

<sup>105</sup> Probably a town in Nigeria.

<sup>106</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>107</sup> Town in Kebbi state, Nigeria.

<sup>108</sup> Tuareg regions.

<sup>109</sup> Town near Sokoto, Nigeria.

<sup>110</sup> Town in Niger

<sup>111</sup> Town in Nigeria.

<sup>112</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>113</sup> Town near Maradi, Niger.

<sup>114</sup> Town near Maradi, Niger.

<sup>115</sup> Town in Niger.

<sup>116</sup> Town in Nigeria.

<sup>117</sup> Town in Nigeria.

<sup>118</sup> Perhaps Musko in Nigeria.

<sup>119</sup> Perhaps town in Nigeria.

<sup>120</sup> Town in Borno state, Nigeria.

<sup>121</sup> 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 Bābīma<sup>122</sup> and its village of Sikāso,<sup>123</sup>  
Jahannama (the evil one) came there with his hordes.
109. He attacked and quickly defeated them.  
And he conquered Keredougou<sup>124</sup> too, the land of food.
110. Then followed Dawakara,<sup>125</sup> Tera<sup>126</sup> and Gilāso<sup>127</sup>  
And all the way to Lu'be<sup>128</sup> and followed by Dār al-Salām.<sup>129</sup>
111. Then to Bobola<sup>130</sup> as well as the land of Wedi,<sup>131</sup>  
To Warakui,<sup>132</sup> which has a market of wine.
112. Then to Goni,<sup>133</sup> Bitugu<sup>134</sup> and Shibanagu<sup>135</sup> too,  
To Dafi<sup>136</sup> and Wahnābou<sup>137</sup> 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,<sup>138</sup>
117. But his surname also was Samori<sup>139</sup>  
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 –

<sup>122</sup> Perhaps Babilena, a town in Mali.

<sup>123</sup> Town in Mali.

<sup>124</sup> Town in Mali and another situated in Burkina Faso.

<sup>125</sup> Perhaps either Dakoura, Diakora or Dyoukoura; towns in Burkina Faso.

<sup>126</sup> Probably Tiyea in Burkina Faso.

<sup>127</sup> Possibly Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso.

<sup>128</sup> Perhaps Loaba, a town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>129</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>130</sup> Bouboulou is a town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>131</sup> Widi is a town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>132</sup> Town in Burkina Faso, also Warokui and Warokoye.

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

<sup>134</sup> Perhaps Pètogo, a town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>135</sup> Probably Tyébanaga in Burkina Faso.

<sup>136</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>137</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>138</sup> Muslim prayer leader.

<sup>139</sup> 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?<sup>140</sup>  
The Zarma<sup>141</sup> and the Hausa, side by side?
  121. They have ruled over Kassena<sup>142</sup> and Leo<sup>143</sup> and Paga<sup>144</sup>  
As well as Sate,<sup>145</sup> Dablo/Debari,<sup>146</sup> lands of ignoble men;
  122. Likewise Bishe,<sup>147</sup> Mankru<sup>148</sup> and Nyoro<sup>149</sup>  
As well as Wey;<sup>150</sup> it is the land of noble men.
  123. And forget not Walembele<sup>151</sup> and Sakulo,<sup>152</sup>  
And Kaleo,<sup>153</sup> Napali<sup>154</sup> as well as all their lands,
  124. Chanchango,<sup>155</sup> Firatan<sup>156</sup> and Basiasan,<sup>157</sup>  
Up to Nafaru<sup>158</sup> and Gangari<sup>159</sup> 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,<sup>160</sup> and Dagarti,<sup>161</sup>  
Kasem,<sup>162</sup> Kyefarshi<sup>163</sup> and Kanjaga,<sup>164</sup> 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

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<sup>140</sup> Ethnic group in Ghana.

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

<sup>142</sup> Ethnic group in Ghana.

<sup>143</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>144</sup> Town in Ghana.

<sup>145</sup> Sati or Sate, both towns in Burkina Faso.

<sup>146</sup> Town in Burkina Faso; but Debari is in Ghana.

<sup>147</sup> Perhaps Pissie, Pissi, Pisen, all towns in Burkina Faso.

<sup>148</sup> Perhaps Minkiro in Burkina Faso.

<sup>149</sup> Town in Burkina Faso.

<sup>150</sup> Either Wéi, or We, towns in Burkina Faso.

<sup>151</sup> Town in northern Ghana.

<sup>152</sup> Town in northern Ghana.

<sup>153</sup> Town in northern Ghana.

<sup>154</sup> Town in northern Ghana.

<sup>155</sup> Town in northern Ghana.

<sup>156</sup> Perhaps town in northern Ghana.

<sup>157</sup> Town in northern Ghana.

<sup>158</sup> Perhaps Napari, a town in northern Ghana.

<sup>159</sup> Town in northern Ghana.

<sup>160</sup> Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

<sup>161</sup> Or Dagaaba, an ethnic group in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso.

<sup>162</sup> Or Kasena, an ethnic group in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso.

<sup>163</sup> Unknown reference.

<sup>164</sup> Or Balsa, an ethnic group in Ghana.

- No, not even in their wildest dreams.
132. On that day, they took refuge with Dagomba,<sup>165</sup>  
In Wafuri<sup>166</sup> where there is earthen pot market.
133. Was it the forest that deceived Asantes?<sup>167</sup>  
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-Akyemfo<sup>168</sup>  
As far as Accra,<sup>169</sup> 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,<sup>170</sup> Kunda<sup>171</sup> and Agona,<sup>172</sup>  
As well as Awuna and Ayigbe,<sup>173</sup> which are like twins,
140. Likewise Ajashi,<sup>174</sup> Dahomey<sup>175</sup> and all around  
And many numerous lands uncountable,
141. Likewise Ibadan,<sup>176</sup> Abeokuta,<sup>177</sup> the Yoruba<sup>178</sup> lands  
Up to Ilorin<sup>179</sup> as well as Atu<sup>180</sup>, Alufa<sup>181</sup> among the list,
142. And likewise Lafāge<sup>182</sup> and all surrounding lands  
Up to Bunu,<sup>183</sup> lands of barbarians,
143. And some of the lands of Nupe,<sup>184</sup> Lafiya<sup>185</sup> and Adamawa,<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

<sup>166</sup> Likely Wapuli, a town near Yendi in northern Ghana.

<sup>167</sup> 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.

<sup>168</sup> Town in southern Ghana.

<sup>169</sup> Capital city of Ghana.

<sup>170</sup> Town northern Ghana.

<sup>171</sup> Town in northern Ghana.

<sup>172</sup> One of several towns with this name in Ghana.

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

<sup>174</sup> Likely the province around Porto Novo, Benin.

<sup>175</sup> Precolonial kingdom in Benin.

<sup>176</sup> Town in Nigeria.

<sup>177</sup> Town in Nigeria.

<sup>178</sup> Ethnic group in southern Nigeria.

<sup>179</sup> Town in Kwara state, Nigeria.

<sup>180</sup> Town in the Benue state, Nigeria.

<sup>181</sup> Town in Ondo state, Nigeria.

<sup>182</sup> Name for several towns situated in Kwara state, Nigeria.

<sup>183</sup> Probably Buna, a town in Benue state, Nigeria.

<sup>184</sup> Town in Nigeria.

<sup>185</sup> Several towns in Nigeria have this name.

<sup>186</sup> Town in Yobe state, Nigeria.

- As well as Munsu,<sup>187</sup> Kafi,<sup>188</sup> Nasarawa<sup>189</sup> like twins,  
 144. Likewise lands of Yawuri,<sup>190</sup> Busa,<sup>191</sup> and Gombe<sup>192</sup>  
 As far as Ilo,<sup>193</sup> 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?<sup>194</sup>  
 If true, then their aim is to march ahead.  
 147. Did you see how the Dagomba<sup>195</sup> kept wondering,  
 Whether they will come to them in peace?  
 148. The chief of Yendi<sup>196</sup> 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,<sup>197</sup> then Kusasi<sup>198</sup> and Mango;<sup>199</sup>  
 As well as (M)barba,<sup>200</sup> Tassi,<sup>201</sup> Segou<sup>202</sup> in the list.  
 152. Remember Kete,<sup>203</sup> our town, that day how it was occupied  
 As well as Nanumba<sup>204</sup> and Konkomba,<sup>205</sup> the savages,  
 153. And the Basare,<sup>206</sup> the Kabre<sup>207</sup> and all the rest  
 Who used to live in fortresses above hills,  
 154. Likewise Sogode,<sup>208</sup> and Kirkiri<sup>209</sup> and Fasao<sup>210</sup>  
 Including Gafilu<sup>211</sup> and Semeri,<sup>212</sup> which are like twins,

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<sup>187</sup> Hausa name for the Tiv people of Nigeria.

<sup>188</sup> One of several towns with this name in northern Nigeria.

<sup>189</sup> One of several towns with this name in northern Nigeria.

<sup>190</sup> Yawar is in Kano state and Yawuria is Kebbi state, Nigeria.

<sup>191</sup> Town in Katsina state, Nigeria.

<sup>192</sup> Town in Gombe state, Nigeria.

<sup>193</sup> Two towns located in Oyo and Ogun States of Nigeria respectively.

<sup>194</sup> Town in Kebbi state, Nigeria.

<sup>195</sup> Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

<sup>196</sup> Town in northern Ghana, pre-colonial capital of Dagbon.

<sup>197</sup> Town in northern Ghana, pre-colonial capital of Mamprusi royals.

<sup>198</sup> Ethnic group in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso.

<sup>199</sup> Probably Sansane-Mango, a town in Togo.

<sup>200</sup> Possibly a town in northern Benin; could it be Mborko?

<sup>201</sup> Tassi/e, a town in Borgou, Benin.

<sup>202</sup> Town in Borgou, Benin.

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

<sup>204</sup> Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

<sup>205</sup> Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

<sup>206</sup> Ethnic group in northern Ghana.

<sup>207</sup> Ethnic group in Togo.

<sup>208</sup> Town in central Togo.

<sup>209</sup> Town in central Togo.

<sup>210</sup> Fazao, a town in central Togo.

<sup>211</sup> Perhaps town in Togo or Benin.

<sup>212</sup> Town in Benin.

155. And Arju<sup>213</sup> and Salmanga<sup>214</sup> and all its environs;  
The Chief of Soubroukou<sup>215</sup> 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 Boukouro<sup>216</sup>  
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?<sup>217</sup>  
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?<sup>218</sup>  
As well as Gwau<sup>219</sup> and Daforo,<sup>220</sup> 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,<sup>221</sup>  
As well as Agadez<sup>222</sup> which are noble lands.
167. They said their envoy came up to Bauchi<sup>223</sup>  
To beguile them with ornate rhetoric.
168. They also sent Adam to Kano<sup>224</sup> with some funds,  
And men carrying stuff to bribe the lords.
169. I saw that devilish commander, in the wilderness of Rubu<sup>225</sup>  
With lots of loads marching to go beyond.
170. Their landing would be in Zar,<sup>226</sup> 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.

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<sup>213</sup> Perhaps Aledjo, a town in Benin.

<sup>214</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>215</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>216</sup> Town in Benin.

<sup>217</sup> Town in Niger state, Nigeria.

<sup>218</sup> Town in central Nigeria.

<sup>219</sup> Town in Abudja municipality, Nigeria.

<sup>220</sup> Town in Niger state, Nigeria.

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

<sup>222</sup> Town in central Niger.

<sup>223</sup> Town in central Nigeria.

<sup>224</sup> Major city in Northern Nigeria capital of Kano State.

<sup>225</sup> Probably a town in the state of Katsina in Nigeria.

<sup>226</sup> 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 Taurāh<sup>227</sup>  
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?<sup>228</sup>  
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.

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<sup>227</sup> The Tora or Jewish Pentateuch.

<sup>228</sup> 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,<sup>229</sup>  
And by the grace of Jayli,<sup>230</sup> axis of the saints,
207. And by the grace of all the letters of God's books,  
By Ṭāsīn, Yāsīn and Ḥāmīm,<sup>231</sup>
208. And by the chapters of the spider<sup>232</sup> and the running horses,<sup>233</sup>  
And by the grace of Fātiḥa<sup>234</sup> and Alif Lām,<sup>235</sup>
209. By the chapters of Yusuf,<sup>236</sup> Thunder<sup>237</sup> and the Bee,<sup>238</sup>  
And the chapters of Ascension<sup>239</sup> followed by the Sleepers,<sup>240</sup>

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

<sup>230</sup> '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.

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

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

<sup>233</sup> *Sūrah al-'ādiyāt*, the Racers, is the 100<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>234</sup> This is the opening chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>235</sup> This is the second and longest chapter of the Qur'an.

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

<sup>237</sup> The thirteenth chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>238</sup> The sixteenth chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>239</sup> The seventeenth chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>240</sup> *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 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

210. The chapters of the prophets<sup>241</sup> and of Light,<sup>242</sup>  
And the chapters of the pilgrimage<sup>243</sup> and holy month,<sup>244</sup>
211. The chapters of Ṣāfat,<sup>245</sup> Dāwud<sup>246</sup> and Zumar,<sup>247</sup>  
The chapters of Hujurāt<sup>248</sup> and mighty Hashar,<sup>249</sup>
212. The book of Taurāh followed by Injil,<sup>250</sup>  
By the book of Zabūr,<sup>251</sup> and by the Light<sup>252</sup> and the Pens,<sup>253</sup>
213. By the grace of the companions and all the family,<sup>254</sup>  
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 verses<sup>255</sup>  
That is our symbol; and we end our work.
217. But regarding the symbol of its *Hijra*<sup>256</sup> *j.h.y.r.*  
*Sh.q.*<sup>257</sup> is its symbol till the very year.

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<sup>241</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>242</sup> The 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>243</sup> The 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

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

<sup>245</sup> The 37<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

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

<sup>247</sup> The 39<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>248</sup> The 49<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>249</sup> The 59<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>250</sup> These two refer, respectively, to the Pentateuch and the New Testament.

<sup>251</sup> The Psalms of David.

<sup>252</sup> The 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur'an.

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

<sup>254</sup> Referring to Prophet Muḥammad's close relatives.

<sup>255</sup> *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.

<sup>256</sup> Referring to the Islamic calendar dated from the year the Prophet Muḥammad migrated from Makka to Madina.

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