

A Poem on the British¹

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In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

May blessings be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his family and companions.

In the name of Allah, my intent is to compose a poem

concerning the enemies of Muhammad, the British.

We pray to the Lord, the King of Kings

to help us get away from the British!

People are troubled and some have lost their way.

Most have become supporters of the British.

Study carefully, from the [Quranic] texts to commentary,²

[about] siding with nonbelievers—not to mention the British!

If Allah, You want us to leave,

we shall leave the place to the British.³

If Allah, You wants us to stay,

we pray that You undermine the plans of the British.

As soon as we are able to leave, we shall leave.

We shall abandon this place so that You may take us to Medina, far away from the British!

¹ The title of the poem in Hausa is *Wakar Nasara* which we have translated as "A Poem on the British." In his 1984 analysis of the poem, Mervyn Hiskett translates *Anasara* (from Arabic: *al-Naṣāra*) as "Christian," since the author, Caliph Attahiru, who died at the hands of the British in 1903, was focusing on the distinctions between the British, who identified themselves as Christian, and the Hausa Muslim community. See Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London: Longman, 1984), 268-273. As this was also a political struggle between the British and the Hausa, we have settled on "British" as a translation of the term *Anasara*. Nowadays, the term generally refers to Europeans or Westerners.

² The author uses *nassi* [or *naṣi*], meaning Quranic texts, hadiths, and commentaries of Muslim jurists.

³ The author uses *tashi* (to stand up, to leave, to set out on a journey) to refer to migrating out of Hausaland.

Whether we want to or not, we should leave,

for the British have driven some men away.

It was a prophecy that Shehu [Usman ḍān Fodiyo] made before he left us:

This land shall be ruled by the British!

Please come to our aid! Oh Allah, correct this situation.

[Protect] the mothers, children, and women from the British!

Even if I must go alone, I am not going to stay here.

I swear by Allah I will not obey the British!

Of the two options, one must choose and take one's responsibility:

Either leave [Hausaland] or follow the British.

Emirs have left their towns!

All the more reason for commoners to leave, if they don't want to be British themselves!

Our women have become more courageous than our men.

There are some so pathetic in their failure to make [the necessary] sacrifice.

There is much fear of death and love of life among us.

It is a denial of fate to follow the British!

Wherever we go, they are on the right and left!

Let us get ready so that we can flee.

If you say it is too difficult to get up and leave,

imagine all the harm that will come to those who follow the British!

If it's a question of power that keeps you from getting up and leaving,

where is the [real] power in the kind of power of the British?

If they give you a gift, do not take it.

It is poison that they give you, the poison of the British!

They come teaching us to stop oppression.

Yet they themselves are the actual oppressors, these British!

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There is evil trouble, trickery, and treachery among them

that destroy the religion of Muslims, these British!

Our situation today justifies

breaking with the British.

Stop listening to those saying not to migrate.

How on earth could we live with the British?

Let us turn our faces toward Mecca and let us go to Medina.

In Medina and Mecca there are no British!

It was the Shehu's prophecy that will never be falsified.

It is the era he has told us about, the era of the British!

We intend, if we get the chance,

to draw a boundary and drive away the British!

If they kill us, then we will become martyrs.

We will go to Paradise and with satisfaction.

People before us read about what we are currently witnessing.

Today, we are in the territory of the British!

To seek provisions for a journey is incumbent upon everybody.

Muslims, let us not agree to follow the British.

Let us be steadfast in remembrance of Allah, ask Him to bless the Prophet,

and pray that, in justice, we may overthrow the British!

Peasants and chiefs are all the same before them.

Disgrace is widespread among the British!

It has become impossible for our leaders to exercise authority.

What are we going to do to get rid of the British?

Hypocrites among us are many,

those who support the affairs of the British!

If Allah, the Most High, favors us,

He will send us a reformer so that we can get rid of the British!

Also, those who go to them and listen to them,

are our hypocrites, collaborators of the British!

Muslims who refuse to be cheerful with them,

they have become the targets of the British!

Oh Muslims, when calamity persists,

pray to your Lord to bring hellfire [Hāwuya]⁴ to the British!

If anyone says that what they bring is good,

leave him and count him among the British!

If he is an adulterer, then we consider him a nonbeliever,

and if he does not repent, he is with the British.

If someone takes another person's wealth without justification,

leave him and count him among British!

⁴ *Hāwuya* is the name of a hellfire. In the Quran (101: 9), it is said that *hāwuya* will be the home of those whose good deeds weigh light.

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Likewise, anyone whose gossips cause hatred among relatives,

let him go to the British!

Magician and bandits operating in the roads,

we put them in the same category as the British!

Honor the waiting period and avoid consummating marriage during the waiting period.⁵

Let us be cautious and stop doing the work of the British!

Observing the time of obligatory ritual prayers is compulsory.

We must stop delaying it and stop doing it ahead of time!

Monarchs do not turn subjects into slaves,

enslaving them as the British have done here!

The bodies of the British are white,

but inside they are jet black, the British!

There are some who have hair at their back.

Their black character is the worst among the British!

The Day of Resurrection is very close!

We have seen a sign in the form of the British!

It has been prophesied that Gog and Magog will come with their evil influence.⁶

⁵ The word *Iddah* used here is the waiting period of four months and ten days that a widow or someone who has divorced must observe before remarrying. The Quran says: "And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind, they [the wives, shall] wait four months and ten [days]. And when they fulfilled their term, then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in acceptable manner. And Allah is [fully] acquainted with what you do" (Q 2:234).

⁶ In Hausa, the names for Gog and Magog are the same as in Arabic: *Ya'jij* and *Ma'jij*. In the Quran (18:94), Gog and Magog are ruining the land, spreading corruption. Their eventual return will mark the end time. This is how the poet portrays the British in Hausaland.

They will fill up the world; they are even worse than the British.

We have the cure for that: let us stand fast with Allah.

Let us depend on Him so that we can get rid of the British!

If anyone rejects the idea, I have a convincing argument:

I am relying on my Lord, who is [also] the Lord of the British!

Living in Paradise is not possible for all servants,

and certainly not for those who refuse to acknowledge hellfire!

From Allah, I will seek [Paradise], also from His Messenger [Muhammad],

for he is the one permitted to intercede for our salvation.

Let us die with our faith in Allah.

There are things more fearful than the British:

The day of death and the Day of Resurrection!

With these awaiting human beings, the British are the least of our worries!

Thus, all praises and gratitude belong to Allah. I have completed this song

with the Power of He who created us and created the British!

The End