

Celebrating Almaami Alfaajo¹

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

May God bestow peace and blessings onto our Master, Muhammad.

I share with you the sadness in the land when Alfaa

left this world to the hereafter, the great city!

I share with you how his soul and his body

flew like a bird towards the great city above!

I share with you the shrouds, white as the light,

covering his body on the way to the city above!

May the Lord forgive him and his family,

and may his kin forgive him as he departs for the city above!

May the leaders and elders forgive him.

May the youth forgive the seniors older than them.

May God elevate the best of creation [Muhammad]

along with his family and his eminent companions.

The Seri and Seydi lineages,² who ruled the land

of Fugumba³ came from prestigious lineages.

They were natives who came from one part of the land

¹ The poem is likely a tribute to Almaami Alfaajo (death c. 1751) also known as Karamoko Alfaa, Alfaa Ibrahim, or Ibrahima Musa Sambeghu, the leader who helped to create the first Muslim state of Fuuta Jalon.

² Here the author refers to the *Seri* (*Fode Seri*), ancestor of the *Seriyanke* lineage, and *Seydi* (*Fode Seydi*), the ancestor of the *Seydiyanke* lineage. *Fode Seri* and *Fode Seydi* – collectively known as the *Foduye* siblings/lineage belong the larger *Barry* clan – one of the four dominant clans of Fuuta Jalon. Almaami Alfaajo was a member of the Seriyanke. The other three major Fula clans of Fuuta Jalon are: *Ba* (also spelled *Bah*, *Bâ*), *Jalloh* (also spelled *Diallo*, *Jallow*, *Djallo*), and *So* (also spelled *Sow*).

³ Also spelled *Fougoumba* in French.

to elevate the faith of the best of creation [Muhammad].

They belonged to the lineage of the Foduye known as the Seri

and the Seydi of Timbi.⁴ They were great leaders

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who led wars, spread the word of the favored [Muhammad],

and protected the religion, the best of its kind.

They founded separate states with accepted borders,

paving the way for their descendants to lead the nation.

Timbo was the center of Fuuta Jalon,

and Fugumba, the most erudite city.

After Usman,⁵ the successor of the land

was the son of Alfaa Muhammad,⁶ the exceptional!

He reigned in Fuuta when the country

had tax collectors with the power of chiefs.

God Himself trained him [Alfaajo] as a provincial chief,

showing him how to rule over a province,

from the borders of Timbo to Timbi,

and He granted him success in the hereafter, the city above!

God tamed the land and gave its resources to him,

including the trees and rocks of our great cities,

⁴ Timbi is a region encompassing northwestern Fuuta Jalon.

⁵ There are two strong possibilities for the Usman referred to here. One is Fode Usman of Kourou, who was a Jalunke ally of and provincial leader under Karamoko Alfaa/Almaami Alfaajo, and aided him in expanding Fuuta Jalon's boundaries. Another, perhaps less likely, option is the late 19th century provincial leader Alfaa Usman of Kebali, who ruled that province until the French colonial conquest.

⁶ While the author does not explicitly say so, Alfaa Muhammad most likely refers to Alfaa Mamadou (or Muhammad) Sadio Barry, who ruled the Fugumba Province of Fuuta Jalon.

the people of the world and our world

with its sand dunes as fine as it can be.

They all prostrated to the Lord and obeyed the rulers of the land.

It is God's universe after all, He whose action makes Him the Greatest!

May the Lord forgive his mistakes in matters of governing,

and in collecting and returning funds to those who ask for it.⁷

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Let us follow God's teachings and fulfill our financial obligations,

for it is one of the most valuable provisions for the hereafter.

A heavy load of sin abounds these days,

but in [our] faith, the act of giving cleanses the body.

Accountants who embezzle in complicity with tax collectors

are engaged in deliberate dishonesty that will burn their skin.

The funds will become flames and burning embers,

burning their bodies like a royal torch!

Those who repent and reimburse their victims

will be forgiven, and they will be as if they have always been clean!

May God forgive him and forgive his kin

and his close associates tasked with measurements.⁸

As his soul left [the body] and the procession starts, put him on

⁷ Essentially, the author is asking God to forgive Almaami Alfaajo if he erred or governed unethically. For example, if he collected more taxes from certain individuals than he was supposed to, to which the author adds that he hopes any excess or corruption was returned to the rightful party.

⁸ Most likely this refers to measurements taken for tax purposes, especially since taxes were typically paid with commodities, not cash.

the front row to coveted paradise. Take him there right away!⁹

As the trellis is placed [in his grave], widen the earth around him.

In the darkness of the grave, spare him fear.

During the interrogation in the grave,¹⁰ feed him the answers quickly

about the Oneness of the Lord and the profession of faith.

Speed up the questions in the grave for him

so that he may answer them properly when asked,

and so that he may sleep by the favor of God's forgiveness,

turn over, and head to the Levant¹¹ with ease.

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May he be protected from the furor and the pain of the Levant

and the bitterness of the sun of the hereafter in the city above!

When tallying up his deeds, may his misdeeds be lessened,

and when his report card is released, may he be granted the best luck!

May he cross over above the frightening sea of fire quickly,

and be on his way to the elevated city of heaven!

In the high-rise buildings of heaven,

may he be housed in the highest surrounded by beautiful nature,¹²

built in rows by the words of the Almighty,

⁹ The author is now speaking directly to God on what to do with the corpse of Almaami Alfaajo.

¹⁰ Here the author refers to *Munkar* and *Nakir*, the two angels who interrogate the deceased in their graves.

¹¹ The author uses *Levant* (Arabic: *Shām*) to refer to a region believed to be the gathering place on the Judgment Day.

¹² The "nature" referred to here is to demonstrate that heaven will have everything a person can need—both the beauty and peace of nature, and the modern amenities of urban life.

"Be, and it becomes,"¹³ the divine power par excellence!

May he drink from the fountain of ginger and the Salsabil spring in heaven,

as rewards for having obeyed the Lord!

May he drink from the stream that surpasses all streams, sweeter than

milk and honey flowing from Kawthar,¹⁴ the sweetest!

May he be exposed to scintillating scents, pleasing

like camphor, the sweetest of incenses!

May he be given rams that can immediately become lamb chops as he wishes,

savored with the wine of Kawthar, the most exquisite of wines!

May Al-Buraq [the winged horse] come to him so that he mounts it

for a ride around the heavens, bringing him to his home [in paradise]!

At times [Al-Buraq] would strut to get the crowd's attention,

and other times, it would be hidden to gain more attention later!

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[Al-Buraq] has been well equipped by the will of God.

With gold bars and rapid gaits,

its bridle and the mane are like the moon,

and the bridle is like the moon and the sun!

The voice of the Prophet would be heard to increase the joy

and smiles and to make Al-Buraq even more elegant!

¹³ Here the poem used the phrase *Kun fa yakun* (*Be, and it becomes*). The phrase alludes to the fact that God's method of creation and triggering events has no anthropomorphic equivalence of using a tool, a material or mechanical means. His means is simply put: "Be, and it becomes" as in "Let there be light, and there was light" in the Book of Genesis 1:3.

¹⁴ *Kawthar* literally means abundance. It is the name of a river in paradise.

Lutes would resonate, and it will be permissible to listen!¹⁵

Besides, nothing in comparison could last any longer!

Balafons¹⁶ would resonate, and it will be permissible to listen!

Besides, nothing in comparison could be any sweeter,
neither in variety nor in quality!

Nothing in comparison could be any sweeter than the sounds!

Those who had listened to musical instruments on earth

will not hear the sweet ones in heaven. The words of God, the King, is my witness!

Eternal praise is due to the King!

It is time to face Him and bear witness
that for all the believers, all the prophets,
and all our saints, the most esteemed ones,
pleading with the Lord is an immense favor.

May I be in the company of the most esteemed before God,
and among all the companions of all the prophets,
and among all those who practiced the special prayers¹⁷ of the esteemed!

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[Oh, my Lord] forgive the one who sings these soothing poems,

and place him in their¹⁸ company in heaven, the city up above!

As for my parents, I plead with the King

¹⁵ The author is probably contrasting the *ḥarām* (forbidden/illicit) nature of some type of soothing music for Muslim versus the *ḥalāl* (permitted/licit) ruling for the same musical instrument in the hereafter. The same can be said for alcohol (wine) on earth vs in the hereafter.

¹⁶ Balafon is a West African percussion instrument made of wood, similar to a xylophone.

¹⁷ Here the author used *wird*, special prayers in Sufi orders.

¹⁸ The possessive "their" refers to Almaami Alfaajo and the other notables discussed above.

for a tomorrow spent with the chosen one.

I end the poem here by the grace of the King,

for if I wait longer, an emergency that could delay its conclusion may occur!

Forgive the believers and disciples

who loved [Almaami Alfaa] for who he was: a gift from the Lord!

Bless and grant salvation to the most esteemed [Muhammad]

along with his family and distinguished companions.

Forgive all the male and female believers,

and forgive all those who worship you, You, the Most High!

The poem was completed on a Saturday.

Our Lord, please shower your boundless peace and blessings upon Muhammad.

Our Lord, please forgive me, my parents, and the believers,

both men and women, and Muslims, both men and women,

those living and those deceased,

all of them in their entirety.