

English translation of al-ḥājj ‘Umar Krachi’s elegiac poem: Muḥammad bin ‘Uthmān

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. May God bless our Lord Muḥammad, his family and his disciples; and may He grant him perfect salvation. Praise be to God who establishes love and mercy between his creatures and who sent Muḥammad – May God bless him and grant him salvation – as mercy to the worlds. May God’s perfect blessing and salvation be upon him (Muḥammad) as well as his family. Thereupon, ‘Umar b. Abī Bakr from Kebbi by kinship (*nasban*), and from Kano by birth and resident (*al-Kanawī mawliḍan wa maskanan*), hereby says: I have fraternized with friends and loved ones and associated with students and companions, and socialized with both city and rural folks, and interacted with people both at home and in journey, going back and forth, and kept company with people, both in my town and villages; but I have not found, nor seen, nor known any person more suitable to fraternize with, or better to associate with, or more delightful to socialize with, or more worthy of interaction or more profitable of keeping company with than Ṣāliḥ b. Muḥammad. And in testimony of what I have said, [know that] we became acquainted and interacted with each other for close to ten years or more, while living among people of our times, who are fond of spreading evil on earth more than doing good, but I have not discerned any hostility, or heard any distaste from him towards me or another person – Although I do not know whether he has experienced or heard anything as such coming from me. God knows best. So when we learned of the death of his father, al-Shaikh Muḥammad, we eulogized him with these verses composed in the *kāmil*¹ meter, portending that God would effectuate his mercy upon him in the hereafter, and through these verses which are skillfully introduced – for anyone who can ponder on them – by our saying, “*hal wābilun ...*” (is it a downpour or ...); because our intention is [to pray] for the downpour of mercy to rain on that deceased; and then I composed it in eighty-five verses, analogous to the sum of the letters in the word “*Jannah*”² (paradise), by numeral calculation (*ḥisāb al-jummal*), portending that God would house that deceased in the highest [level] of His vast paradise; and I also sought the favor of blessed people of God and chose to rhyme it in the letter ‘b’ portending that God would open for him the door (*bāb*) of mercy; entitling it “*Sūl al-Rāthī*,” orison for the deceased.

1. Was it a downpour or tears that my eyes have shed?
Or has the raven of departure announced ill-boding to my heart?
2. Or was it the Tigris or Tangiers or its Nile?
Or was it Sayḥūn or Ceyḥūn³ that have flowed on my cheeks?
3. Or was it the specter of the beloved that paid us visit?
Or was my heart aroused with longing and then lamented?
4. Or was it remembrance of my friends that has assailed me?

¹ One of the sixteen prominent meters of classical Arabic poetics that run; *mutafā’ilun*, *mutafā’ilun mutafā’ilun* repeated twice.

² The letters *j n h* add up to 58 by Arabic letter computation: *j* = 3; *n* = 50; *h* = 5.

³ Two rivers in central Asia, also known respectively as Syr Dariya and Amu Dariya, that flow into the Aral Sea.

- Or was it melancholy of longing that has engulfed my heart?
5. Or was it a star that has its sign loomed within my heart?
Or was it the crescent of sorrow that has arisen and failed to set?
 6. Or did I hear the orchard dove tweedling?
A chick, as if the chick got lost within the flock?
 7. How often has a caller hailed without response?
Should I then call my friend? And would there be response?
 8. Cease that and this, and follow the death of perfect shaikh;
Well versed in subject matters, esoteric science and letters.
 9. I have learned that he was an assiduous man.
We have been stunned by the outflow of sorrow at his demise.
 10. We have sapped then, what is bitter than bitterness, O brother of mine,
At the parting of this shaikh. Say, forbearance has become a must.
 11. Were it not for endurance and fortitude, we would
Have wasted away, from sorrow, for, a father has died.
 12. It is our hope that he will join those
Who will proudly rejoice, receiving the mercy of the Most Merciful.
 13. O Lord, fulfil our hopes benevolently;
And be merciful to him, O Lord, for the sake of the hallowed ones.
 14. And for the grace of the virgin Fāṭimah and her spouse.
And the grace of her twin sons, and the one who transcribed the book.
 15. O Lord, drape him in your holy grace;
And bestow upon him high mark of honor and recompense.
 16. By this I am referring to Shaikh Muḥammad,⁴
Grandfather of Salmān b. Ṣāliḥ, without a doubt.
 17. He invoked all the sciences, principles and derivates,
And all its strayed parts answered his call and returned.
 18. Upon the neck of Grammar he set his sandal's sole;
And follows Qur'anic readings, *ḥadīth*⁵ and their occasions.
 19. The sciences of logic and language together responded to him;
Likewise the sciences of rhetoric, inheritance and arithmetic.
 20. O passer by the tomb of Shaikh Muḥammad,
Stop and pray God's favor on his behalf; that is but ethical.
 21. Do not debunk radiances ascribed to him
Ascending from his tomb. O you whom I dread.⁶
 22. This is our hope, yea our auspiciousness in
Those who die in Islam. Yea, it is the ultimate heart desire.

⁴ Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān.

⁵ Collection of reports of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions.

⁶ Possibly referring to God.

23. Alleviate all distress within his tomb, O God!
And spread for him a haven of benediction in great delight.
24. Immerse him in the ocean of beatitude, O Most Merciful.
O, Forgiver of whosoever repents.
25. Forgive him, and be merciful to him, O Lord of humankind.
Grant him absolute pardon, on the Day of Atonement.
26. Provide refreshment and benefaction to Shaikh Muḥammad
In his tomb whenever pages of books are penned,
27. From down pouring rain or continuous rain or torrential rain
Or overflowing or over pouring rain in in divine cascade.
28. There, may God make plants to blossom upon his grave,
From lavender, jasmine or rue,
29. Or roses, sandal or cloves;
Besides other aromatic plants that aromatize the air.
30. May bounteous showers descend without ceasing or limit,
With close compassion, as long as the two abodes subsist,
31. On the day of Resurrection, O Lord, resurrect him
Among those who are resurrected sauntering as they arrive.
32. Shade him in pleasant shades that day, when
No other shade exists except the shade beneath the veil.⁷
33. Boost him with radiance when he thence ascend
Upon the path smoothly by the grace of Idriss⁸,
34. When he arrives at Aḥmad's trough⁹, let him not be
Among those chased away, when skeptics are chased.
35. Lodge him in Paradise in your beatitude,
O you who exalted Aḥmad¹⁰ long ago.
36. This is my plea, O grantor, by the grace of he who
Surpasses all creatures¹¹, non-Arabs as well as Arabs.
37. And by the grace of Ṣiddīq¹², the deputy after him
And by the grace of Fārūq¹³, who ruled the lands
38. And by the grace of Dhū Al-Nūrayni¹⁴ as well as our Alī¹⁵
The lion of the armies, Hashimite¹⁶, the warlord.

⁷ The divine transcendence.

⁸ One of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an traditionally associated with Enoch.

⁹ Muḥammad's trough is the water source from which only his favorites re allowed to drink from on resurrection day.

¹⁰ The Prophet Muḥammad.

¹¹ The Prophet Muḥammad.

¹² The first Muslim Caliph Abū Bakr.

¹³ The second Muslim Caliph 'Umar.

¹⁴ The third Muslim Caliph 'Uthmān.

¹⁵ The fourth Muslim Caliph and the Prophet Muḥammad's son-in-law.

¹⁶ The Prophet Muḥammad's clan.

39. And by the grace of Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr and Sa'ad¹⁷
And then al-Sa'id, those are men who never turned their back.
40. And then 'Ubayd Raḥmān and 'Āṣim, following suite,
And by the grace of 'Ā'ishah¹⁸ as well as the daughter of Ibn al-Khaṭab,¹⁹
41. And then by the grace of Mūsā and 'Īsā²⁰ after him,
And by the grace of our Ka'ba which will not be destroyed.
42. And by the grace of those who respond to the call, circumvent and visit him.²¹
And by the grace of those who narrate hadith and those who write it out;
43. And by the grace of Adam and Ḥawwā'²² who
Gave birth to all people, that is no surprise,
44. And by the grace of Ibrāhīm and his two sons
And by the grace of Ya'qūb who tasted grief
45. And by the grace of Hārūn and Dāwūd, likewise
And by the grace of Salmān²³ who obtained the booty
46. And by the grace of Maryam²⁴ and Āsiyah²⁵ who
Obtained praise of rank from the Lord,²⁶
47. And by the grace of Ḥamzah and then 'Abbās²⁷ whose
Scions²⁸ obtained sovereignty from all angles.
48. Multiply for him, O Pardoner, O only One,
Abundant rewards of honor and magnanimity.
49. Crown him with the crown of splendor, on the day of encounter,²⁹
Among the saved ones, in highest ranks.
50. Answer my prayers, all together, O Creator,
And raise him among the favored ones, the day of return.³⁰
51. By the grace of all the preeminent, from your first will,
Till the day creatures are brought to stand in judgment.
52. And by the grace of Taurah and al-Injīl,³¹
Likewise the Zabūr, the Furqān³² and all holy books,
53. And by the grace of Abū Hurayrah and then Muṣ'ab³³ after him.
And Bilāl,³⁴ and then Bilāl, O Lord answer us!

¹⁷ Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad.

¹⁸ The Prophet Muḥammad's wife.

¹⁹ Ḥafṣah was the daughter of 'Umar whom he gave in marriage to the prophet.

²⁰ Jesus.

²¹ The pilgrims.

²² Eve.

²³ One of the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad.

²⁴ Mary, mother of Jesus.

²⁵ Believed to be the wife of the Pharaoh who adopted Moses.

²⁶ See Qur'an 66: 11 – 12.

²⁷ Paternal uncles of the Prophet Muḥammad.

²⁸ The Abbasid dynasty.

²⁹ Resurrection day.

³⁰ Resurrection day.

³¹ Old and new testaments.

³² The Psalms and the Qur'an.

³³ Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad.

³⁴ African companion of the Prophet Muḥammad who was the first muezzin.

54. And by the grace of Nu'mān and Ahmad Ḥanbal³⁵
And by the grace of Mālīk and then Shāfi'³⁶ the admirable one.
55. And also Khadījah³⁷ and by the grace of Sawdah³⁸, after her
And by the grace of he is the Quṭub among the saints,³⁹
56. As well as Ṣafīyah, Juwayrah and Sakīnah⁴⁰
Together with Ramlah⁴¹ and the Fāṭimahs,⁴² the missive is done.
57. Praise be to God, the Most Merciful and Pardoner,
Lord of all creatures, including animals.
58. Purest of blessing be upon the Prophet Muḥammad,
And the family as well as the companions, whenever clouds pour rain.

³⁵ Founders of the Hanafī and Hanbalī schools of jurisprudence, respectively.

³⁶ Founders of the Malīkī and Shāfi'ī schools of jurisprudence, respectively.

³⁷ First wife of the Prophet Muḥammad.

³⁸ One of the wives of the Prophet Muḥammad.

³⁹ Probably a reference to the Sufi Shaikh Aḥmad al-Tijāni.

⁴⁰ Wives of the Prophet Muḥammad.

⁴¹ A wife of the Prophet Muḥammad, also known as 'Umm Ḥabībah.

⁴² One Fāṭimah probably is the Prophet Muḥammad's daughter.