

The Mahdiyya in Adamawa Emirate: The poem on the battle of Danki (1892) by Shaykh Hayāt b. Sa‘īd¹

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Abstract

This paper discusses the poem composed by Shaykh Hayāt b. Sa‘īd (d.1898) on the battle of Danki which was fought between him and Lamido Zubairu of Yola in 1892. In order to understand the historical context in which this poem was composed, some background information is provided. The paper describes the *Mahdiyya* under the Sokoto Caliphate and the Adamawa Emirate, as well as the principal protagonists of the battle, Shaykh Hayāt b. Sa‘īd and Lamido Zubairu.

- 1 In a letter dated 28 May 2009, from Dr. Hamidu Bobboyi, the director of the Centre for Regional Integration and Development based at Wuse II, Abuja, which I received on 24 June 2009, I was invited to attend and present a paper at the *International Conference on Adamawa Emirate and its Legacies, 1809-2009*. The Bicentenary committee gave me a broad title within which to write my paper: “The *Mahdiyya* in Adamawa Emirate.” I decided to look at the poem composed by Hayāt b. Sa‘īd on the battle he fought against Lamido Zubairu of Yola in 1892 at Danki. This is because I had already written about the battle of Danki in 2004 and later presented on this subject at the international conference held at Abuja on the bicentenary of the Sokoto Caliphate. See Asmau G. Saeed, “The Sokoto Caliphate and Mahdism: The clash at Danki between shaykh Hayat b. Sa’ id and Lamido Zubairu, 1892,” in H. Bobboyi and A. M. Yakubu (eds), *The Sokoto Caliphate: History and Legacies, 1804-2004*, vol. 1 (Kaduna: Baraka Press and Publishers, 2006), pp. 160-186. The present paper was presented on 18 July, 2009 at the Lamido Zubairu Educational Centre, Yola. The organizers of the conference promised to publish the proceedings but for some reason they have not. I was then contacted by Dr Andrea Brigaglia, the Director of the CCI (Centre for Contemporary Islam), Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, who asked me to contribute a paper to the *Journal for Islamic Studies* and I decided to send this edited version of my paper.

Introduction

The Adamawa Emirate is one of the emirates that were established under the Sokoto Caliphate. It was founded by *Modibbo* Adama (d. 1847) after collecting a flag from Shaykh Usman bin Fodio (locally known as Shehu Dan Fodio or simply Shehu; d. 1817). The Emirate, which was named Adamawa after *Modibbo* Adama, comprised more than forty districts (and more than sixty sub-emirates). In the nineteenth century, it covered an area of between 35,000 and 40,000 square miles, lying south of the Lake Chad basin area and east of Hausaland, within latitudes 6 degrees and 11 degrees north, and longitudes 10 degrees and 14 degrees east. Following the 1893-1894 Conference of Berlin, this large emirate was split between the three spheres of influence of Britain, France and Germany. Today, it is divided between three modern African nation states: the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Republic of Cameroon and the Republic of Chad. Three quarters of the former Adamawa Emirate are now within Cameroon, with less than one quarter in Nigeria.² According to M.S. Njeuma, approximately seven eighths of the former Emirate are now in the territory of Cameroon, while slightly less than one eighth is inside Nigeria.³ Although Yola, the capital of the Emirate,⁴ was included in the Nigerian area, the division led to the loss of power, funds and prestige formerly enjoyed by the *Lamibe* (plural of *Lamido*, “king,” “ruler” or “emir”) of Adamawa. Referring to this loss, Lamido Bobbo Ahmadu (rul. 1901-1909) famously declared that he had been “left with the latrines” of his Emirate.⁵ During the early period of

2 For more information on the history of Adamawa, see A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Adamawa Past and Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958); Sa’ad Abubakar, *The Lamibe of Fombina: A Political History of Adamawa 1809-1901* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1977); Martin Z. Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola (old Adamawa) 1809-1902* (Yaounde: Yaounde Publishing and Production Centre for Teaching and Research, 1978).

3 Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola*, p. 1.

4 The name Yola was derived from *yolde*, meaning a settlement on a hill or plateau (see Sidney J. Hogben and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria: A Preliminary Survey of their Historical Traditions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 434.

5 See Kirk-Greene, *Adamawa Past and Present*, pp. 144-145 and Abubakar, *The Lamibe of Fombina*, pp.151-154.

the colonial rule in Nigeria, the British changed the name of the Emirate from Adamawa to Yola. In 1926, however, the original name Adamawa was restored, both for the Emirate and for the newly established Province of colonial Nigeria.⁶ Both the larger Adamawa Emirate of the nineteenth century and the present Adamawa State of Nigeria,⁷ whose territory was later reduced to about half of the “latrines” of Lamido Bobbo Ahmadu, were affected by the expansion of the Mahdiyya movement.⁸ The term ‘Mahdiyya’ in this paper refers to the movement began by Sayyid Muḥammad Aḥmad b. Sayyid ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī in the Sudan, in 1881. By 1883, the Mahdī had appointed Shaykh Ḥayāt b. Sa‘īd as his *Amil* (deputy, from Ar. *‘amil*) in the western Sudan. Ḥayāt b. Sa‘īd’s paternal grandfather was Muḥammad Bello (*Ballo* in Fulfulde means “helper of religion”), the son and successor of Usman ‘Dan Fodio as the head of the Sokoto Caliphate.

Adamawa Emirate and the Mahdiyya

The Sokoto Jihad had been started and led by intellectuals who were not only teachers and preachers; they had also produced a huge output of books and pamphlets and had composed hundreds of poems in Fulfulde, Hausa and Arabic on different aspects of Islam. Some of their writings mentioned the issue of the *mahdī* (the awaited messianic figure mentioned in the Islamic tradition). For example, Shaykh Usman ‘Dan Fodio wrote a text entitled *al-Khabar al-hādī ilā umūr al-imām al-mahdī* (“The guiding

6 See Hogben and Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, p. 428.

7 The present Adamawa State was created out of the former Gongola State in 1991. It has twenty-one local government areas (LGAs): Demsa, Fufore, Ganeye, Girei, Gombi, Guyuk, Hong, Jada, Jimeta, Lamurde, Madagali, Maiha, Mayo Balwa, Michika, Mubi, Mubi South, Numan, Shelleng, Song, Toungo and Yola.

8 For more on the Mahdiyya in the Sokoto Caliphate, see Muhammad A. Al-Hajj, “The 13th Century in Muslim Eschatology: Mahdist expectations in the Sokoto Caliphate,” *Research Bulletin Centre for Arabic Documentation* (Ibadan RBCAD), 3, 2, 1967, pp. 100-115; Muhammad A. Al-Hajj, *Mahdist Tradition in Northern Nigeria*, PhD thesis (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University, 1973); Asma’u G. Saeed, “The Sokoto Caliphate and Mahdism,” pp. 160-186; Asma’u G. Saeed, *Literary Works of Alhaji Garba Abubakar Sa’idu* (Kano: A.J. Publishers, 2007). Manuscripts in the hands of individual scholars from Adamawa attest to the spread and influence of the Mahdiyya in the region. See, for instance, the Modibbo Fufore manuscript collection housed in Arewa House Centre for Historical Documentation and Research, Kaduna.

information on the issue of the Mahdī”). He also composed many poems on the topic in ‘*ajamī*’ (Arabic script written in) Fulfulde such as *Tanasibuji* (“Similarities”), *Yimre Mahdinkobe* (“The poem on the twelve revivalists”) and *Ba Ngare Mahdi* (“The Importance of the Mahdī”). His principal assistants, his brother Abdullahi and his son Muḥammad Bello, also wrote on the topic. The former composed *Bulaliya* (literally, “The Whip”), which contains valuable information addressed to the Muslim public, including the issue of the Mahdī, while the latter wrote, among others, *Wathīqat li’l-shaykh Ḥāmid fī amr al-mahdiyya* (“A Letter to Shaykh Hamid on the Issue of the Mahdiyya”) and *Tanbīh ifhām ‘alà anna al-Mahdī ‘alayhi al-salām huwa al-khitām* (“Warning to understand that the Mahdī-peace be upon him-is the seal”). Others who have written and composed poems on this issue include some of the Shehu’s daughters and some disciples such as Muḥammad Dikko of Tsangaya from Gaya in Kano.⁹

In addition to this literary background, it is narrated that the Shehu had mentioned that his followers would be the vanguard of the Mahdī, who would appear in the east, and that the Sokoto Jihad would not end by God’s grace until the time of the Mahdī. His son Muḥammad Bello related this information when he was addressing the leaders of Zamfara, Katsina, Kano and Daura Emirates on behalf of the Shehu.¹⁰ Although the Shehu did not decree the time of the emigration to the east that would occur before the end of Time, he mentioned some of the places to be followed. According to his youngest daughter Nana Maryam (d.1885), these were from Bogo, to Muskum, to Sara, to Nouba and then to the Nile.¹⁰ On the theocratic rule of Muhammad Bello, Shaykh Usman wrote in one of his Fulfulde poems, *Nde Anndinami* (“The Spiritual Issues I was Made to Understand”), about the role that Muhammad Bello or his descendants would play when the Mahdī appeared.¹¹

9 For details, see Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Longman, 1967), pp.237-254; Bello Sa’id, *Gudunmawar Masu Jihadi Kan Adabin Hausa, 2 vols.* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello College / Ahmadu Bello University, 1978), pp. 192-215; Saeed, *Literary Works*, pp. 53-76 and 120-151.

10 See Muhammad Bello, *Infāq al-maysūr*. For the English text, see C.E.J. Whitting’s edition (London: Luzac, 1951), pp. 104-105.

11 See Saeed, *Literary Works*, pp.131-132.

Geographically, the Adamawa Emirate was situated in the easternmost part of the Sokoto Caliphate. From the religious point of view the east was and still is a central point of reference for the Muslims of the Central Sudan. Muslims not only face the east five times a day while praying, but also move in that direction; that is, along the Sahelian and Saharan routes to the east, for the pilgrimage to the holy land. Another element of religious dimension was added to the importance of the eastern borders of the Sokoto Caliphate when Muḥammad Bello, in his position as the *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, entrusted *Modibbo* Adama and his successors with the sacred responsibility of keeping the road to the east safe, recommending him to recognize the Mahdī and to pledge the allegiance of the entire Caliphate to him as soon as he appeared. As a result, there was a constant movement of people, literature, correspondence and other exchanges of information between Sokoto (the headquarters of the Caliphate), the Adamawa Emirate, and other Muslim states in the Central Sudan (Baghirmi, Waday, etc.) and in the Eastern Sudan (Darfur, Massalit, etc.). Soon after Bello's death, many scholars, traders and ordinary Muslims from the Sokoto Caliphate migrated to the east by passing through areas within the Adamawa Emirate. The scholars who began to migrate to the east were joined by others on the way; this development alarmed local authorities so much so that even Bello's successor, the Caliph Abubakar Atiku (Abū Bakr al-'Atīq; rul. 1837-1842), had to issue a proclamation declaring that the "time for the exodus has not yet come, since there is still some good remaining among us."¹¹ Nevertheless, this appeal did not stop the *hijra* (emigration) of Muslim scholars to the east. If anything, the movement increased over time, especially as injustice and maladministration became rampant, compounded with the outbreak of natural disasters to create a millenarian atmosphere. Some of the famous scholars who traveled on *hijra* to the east include the following: thus, Muḥammad Dadare, a younger contemporary of the Shehu from Sokoto, traveled to the Sudan in the 1840s; Ibrāhīm Sharīf al-Dīn from Futa Jallon, passed through Adamawa in the 1850s. He was killed in a clash with non-Muslims and subsequently, some of his followers settled in Adamawa while others moved on. *Walijo* Abdullahi from Masina, was killed by

non-Muslims in the 1860s, while on his way to the east. Other individual scholars were Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd from Sokoto, in the late 1870s, and *Liman* Ya-Musa of Gaya (Kano) in the 1880s.¹²

When Muḥammad Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh made his universal proclamation as the *mahdī* in 1881, the Caliphate authorities and most of the scholars who worked for them, both at the headquarters in Sokoto and in the various Emirates, did not recognize him. In spite of that, the Mahdiyya was able to secure followers, who came to be known as the *Anṣār* (helpers). The Adamawa Emirate had the largest number of *Anṣār* of any other Emirate in the Caliphate. The group of people who joined the cause of the Mahdī included those who had migrated to Adamawa from Sokoto (who already nurtured end of time expectations), as well as some of the local people. The *Anṣār* could be found in communities of various sizes within the Nigerian and the Cameroonian areas of the Emirate. Indeed, Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd not only joined the Mahdiyya while he was within the Adamawa area, but established the first Mahdist state there at Balda.¹³

This, however, was not the end of *hijra* to the east. In 1903, after the battle of Bormi in which the army of the Caliphate was defeated by the British, many more migrated to the east. The *hijra* was supported by the many mentions found in the scriptural sources of Islam. The Prophet is reported to have said that, "*hijra* will not cease until repentance ceases, and repentance will not cease until the sun rises in the west."¹⁴

Lamido Muḥammad Abba (1910-1924) is alleged to have written a letter to Sa'īd b. Ḥayāt, the son and successor of Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd in 1920. Although there was no evidence to support such an allegation, the British

12 For more information, see Umar Al-Naqar, *The Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa* (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1972), and J. S. Birks, *Across the Savanna to Mecca: The Overland Pilgrimage Route from West Africa* (London: Hurst, 1978).

13 According to Professor Bawuro M. Barkindo, there is a quarter in Yola known as Modire (probably from *Modibbo*) which was named after Shaykh Ḥayāt.

14 Quoted in Fathi H. El-Masri, Fathi Hasan al-Masri, *A Critical Edition of Dan Fodio's Bayan Wujub al-Hijra 'ala'l-'ibad*, PhD thesis Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 1968, p. 21. Muslims found comfort by making *hijra* from an area in trouble to a peaceful one, especially to the east for its religious importance for those who are able to undertake the journey. For those who were not in a position to undertake the journey, they usually found comfort by avoiding contact with the non-Islamic political order—a kind of spiritual *hijra*.

colonial administration, which was fearful of mahdist influence, punished the Lamido for it.¹⁵

The Protagonists of the Battle of Danki: Lamido Zubairu and Shaykh Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd

The protagonists of the battle of Danki were Lamido Zubairu and Shaykh Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd. Lamido Zubairu (rul. 1890-1901) had succeeded his brother Lamido Umar Sanda (1872-1890) as the *lamido* (emir) of Adamawa. The influence of the family was originally rooted in the appointment by Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio, of Zubairu's father, Modibbo Adama, as the first *lamido* of Fombina (1809-1847).¹⁶ Lamido Zubairu spent his time in office trying to defend the territorial integrity of the Adamawa Emirate. Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd (d. 1898), on the other hand, left Sokoto on *hijra* to the east, at a time when the ideals upon which the Sokoto Caliphate was founded, were declining. In other words, many scholars at the time felt that the "good" among the Muslim community had declined, and that politics had taken hold over religion. When the Mahdiyya started, Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd joined it with the goal of reviving those ideals. For Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd, the fact that the call had reached the Caliphate at its eastern borders of Adamawa, fulfilled earlier predictions made by the Jihad leaders that the polity established by the Sokoto Jihad would be the vanguard of the Mahdi who was to appear in the east.

Zubairu was the eighth of Modibbo Adama's eleven sons. His mother was Jara (Zara), described by the sources as a Marghi¹⁷ concubine given to Modibbo Adama by his wife Mamare. Jara bore him three sons: Zubairu, Aliyu and Bobbo Ahmadu.¹⁸ By the time of his father's death in 1847,

15 For details, see Asma'u G. Saeed, "The Alleged Letter between Sa' id b. Hayat and Emir (*Lamido*) of Yola (Adamawa) Muhammad Abba (1910-1924)," *Journal of African Development Affairs*, 1, 3, June 2010, pp.134-155. This paper was written in honour of Professor Sa'ad Abubakar, April 2009.

16 For a translation of the letter of appointment, see Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola*, pp. 247-249. See also Hamidu Bobboyi and Alkasum Abba (eds.), *Adamawa Emirate 1809-1901: A Documentary Source Book* (Kaduna: M.O. Press and Publishers, 2009), pp. 2-5.

17 Marghi is a language of the Biu-Mandara branch of the Chadic group of Afro-Asiatic family. It is spoken by approximately two hundred thousand people living between southern Borno and northern Adamawa states.

18 See Hogben and Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, p. 437.

according to some sources Zubairu was a teenager.¹⁹ This would mean that he was born in the mid-1830s and that in 1890, when he was appointed as *lamido*, he was at least fifty or sixty years old. According to another source, however, he was born in 1842 and when he was appointed as *lamido*, he was only forty-eight.²⁰ Be that as it may, Zubairu became the fourth *lamido* of Adamawa and during his eleven-year rule, he had to face a number of challenges, both internal and external. First were the succession disputes and the strained relationship with Sokoto, at least in the early period.²¹ To make matters worse, there was the outbreak of the great cattle sickness of 1891; the European (British, French and German) scramble for Adamawa Emirate; and finally, the conflict with the Mahdiyya and Shaykh Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd.²² As indicated earlier, Lamido Zubairu was so preoccupied with preserving the territorial unity and integrity of the Adamawa Emirate, that he spent a great deal of time outside the capital fighting to defend the borders.²³ This may be because of Zubairu's nature and personality as an active and hot tempered leader,²⁴ or as a result of the multiple challenges he faced in office, or both.

Ḥayāt b. Sa'īd was the oldest son of Malam Sa'īd b. Bello.²⁵ His mother was Khadijah, better known as Iya Haddo, the daughter of *Sarkin Rafi* Idrisu, from the family of Waziri Gidado, the Prime Minister of Muḥammad

19 See Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola*, p. 132.

20 See Bobboyi and Abba, *Adamawa Emirate 1809-1901*, p. 17 fn 3.

21 There were attempts to appoint other members of Modibbo Adama's family into office, and he was given a black gown and turban for his coronation instead of the usual white ones given as royal investiture.

22 For details, see Hogben and Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, pp. 441-443; Abubakar, *The Lamibe of Fombina*, pp. 130-138, Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola*, pp. 160-208 and Saeed, "Sokoto Caliphate and Mahdism," pp. 160-186.

23 See M. M. Tukur, "The British Subjugation of Northern Nigeria 1897-1910," unpublished manuscript submitted to the Triumph Publishing Company (Kano) for publication in the early 1980s, pp. 16-17.

24 There was a local belief in Adamawa that Zubairu suffered from fits. See Hogben and Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, p. 437.

25 Mallam Sa'īd was a full brother of the ninth Caliph of Sokoto, Mu'azu (rul. 1877-1881). The two were sons of Muhammad Bello through his wife Aishatu known as Iya Garka, the daughter of Umaru Mo Alkammu, a trusted friend of the Shehu.

Bello.²⁶ Her other child was Mujaylī, Ḥayāt's full brother. Ḥayāt was born in Sokoto, presumably at Kofar Rini where his father resided. This was after the death of his grandfather Muḥammad Bello in 1837. He received his education from his father, who was a renowned scholar, as well as from other scholars in and around Sokoto, and was admired from his youth for his sharp intellect.²⁷ He was also noted from his youth as an earnest student of Islam and an opponent of any relaxation in the application of the sharia.²⁸ Ḥayāt was preoccupied mainly with scholarly pursuits: studying, teaching, writing and composing poems.²⁹ From all indications, Ḥayāt often expressed openly his views and opinions on political issues, including the central government, and participated in the administration of the *ribāt* (fortified frontier garrison) of Gandi. In 1867, after the death of Sultan Ali Karami (rul. 1866-1867), a dispute arose over the succession of Sokoto. The two candidates for the post were the Shehu's son Ahmad al-Rufa'i,³⁰ and Abubakar Atīku, son of Muhammad Bello. While Atīku was known to be pious and stern and was older than Ahmad, Ahmad was noted for his piety and knowledge. Atīku was more popular with the princes and clan heads, while Ahmad was more popular with the learned scholars and laymen. Ḥayāt intervened with the suggestion that Ahmad al-Rufa'i, as a surviving son of Shehu Usman was more qualified. As a result, Rufa'i was eventually appointed as the Caliph from 1867-1873. The new Caliph also made Ḥayāt one of his closest advisers.³¹

Ḥayāt succeeded his father, Malam Sa'idu, as the commander of the *ribāt* of Gandi in the late 1860s. Gandi is about 40 km north of Sokoto, in

26 For more on the family, see Hamidu Alkali, *The Chief Arbiter: Wazir Junaidu and his intellectual contribution* (Kaduna: Baraka Press and Publishers Limited, 2002).

27 See Martin Z. Njeuma, "Adamawa and Mahdism: The Career of Hayatu ibn Sa'id in Adamawa 1878-1898," *Journal of African History*, 12, 1, 1971, p. 64.

28 See Peter M. Holt, "The Sudanese Mahdiyya and the Outside World," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies (BSOAS)*, 21, 1, 1958, p. 285.

29 For a list of some of his works, see Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, p. 250; Mervyn Hiskett, *A History of Hausa Islamic Verse* (London: University of London Press, 1975), pp. 96-97.

30 For a list of some of al-Rufa'i's works, see Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, p. 249.

31 See Hugh A. S. Johnston, *The Fulani Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 202; and Al-Hajj, *Mahdist Tradition in Northern Nigeria*, p. 112.

the region of Burmi. It is one of the *ribāt*-s that were established by *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* Muhammad Bello to protect Sokoto, the headquarters of *dār al-Islām*, from attacks or harassment from the enemies of the state. Ḥayāt ruled Gandi for a few years and returned to Sokoto during the reign of Abubakar Atīku (1873-1877), who had later succeeded his uncle Ahmad al-Rufa'i as the Caliph. One source claims that he was relieved of his post in Gandi because of his support of, and close association with, the previous Caliph.³² Another source claims that the people of Gandi turned against him and drove him out.³³ Both these views are unlikely, as there is no evidence to show that the new caliph Abubakar Atīku had shown Ḥayāt any ill-will for supporting the appointment of Ahmad al-Rufa'i over his own. There is also no evidence to show that the people of Gandi had turned against Ḥayāt. The evidence, however, suggests that due to the nature of its inhabitants and the high number of slaves in the overall population, Gandi was a difficult place to rule, especially for learned scholars who wanted to implement the sharia. The *ribāt* had a large non-Muslim population, in addition to a large number of Caliphal slaves, some of whom had become politically very powerful but had little Islamic education. Of the four commanders who ruled Gandi, (Ibrahim and Sa'idu, both sons of Muhammad Bello; then Ḥayāt and after him, his younger brother Buhari), it was only the first who died in Gandi,³⁴ while the remaining three left it. It must also be remembered that the four were all scholars who were used to the central administrative system practiced in Sokoto. In view of this, it is more likely that Ḥayāt, just like his father before him and his brother after him, left Gandi because he was frustrated by the fact that it had become a place virtually impossible to rule. The powerful slaves created obstacles to the commander in order to retain their own political influence, while the non-Muslim subjects made it difficult on a cultural basis, because they were not used to the central administration. The combination of these factors would certainly be too much to bear for

32 See Al-Hajj, *Mahdist Tradition in Northern Nigeria*, p. 112.

33 See Johnston, *The Fulani Empire*, p. 202.

34 This is why Ibrahim is known as *Mo* Gandi in Fulfulde or *Mai* Gandi in Hausa.

a Muslim scholar of the calibre of Ḥayāt, who wanted to uphold the sharia. It was at Gandi, in fact, that he either composed or completed his famous Hausa poem *Yā għiyāth al-mustaghītīn* (“Oh helper of those who cry for help”), which is a plea for divine help for rescue from a state of difficulty. Therefore, Ḥayāt left Gandi and returned to Sokoto, where he continued to engage in scholarship as well as to express his views on several issues. In the end, the Caliphal slaves (the *Yari*) were left to rule Gandi, and the town is still ruled today by their descendants.

It was from Sokoto, in the late 1870s, that Ḥayāt left on his *hijra* to the east, which would ultimately lead him to join the Mahdiyya. The motive for his *hijra* was questioned by some colonial writers, as well as by later researchers. For example, the German traveller Siegfried Passarge wrote as follows:

[Hayatu] marched through Haussa (*sic*) countries [...] on the pretext of wanting to undertake pilgrimage to Mecca [...]. [I]mpoverished Fulbe in Balda [...] joined him and with them he engaged in highway robbery and raided small villages.³⁵

Among the more recent researchers, Njeuma states the following view:

Hayatu never concealed his disappointment at the election of Muazu in preference to his father [...]. He decided to leave Sokoto and seek his fortune elsewhere. He came to Adamawa about 1878.³⁶

Njeuma also considers Ḥayāt’s reasons for leaving Sokoto as follows:

[His reasons for] leaving Sokoto, and for choosing to go to Adamawa, are not clear-cut. Some sources say he was on

35 See Hermann Jungraithmayr and Wilfried Günther (editors and translators), *Sultan Sa’idu Bi Hayatu Tells the Story of his and his Father’s life* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1978), pp. 40-41 for the German version, and pp. 42-43 for the English translation.

36 Njeuma, “Adamawa and Mahdism,” pp. 64-65.

his way to Mecca on pilgrimage; others that he was going to meet the Mahdi.³⁷

Elsewhere, Njeuma says the following:

Since Atiku his cousin in power in Sokoto, refused to listen to him, he came to Adamawa Emirate in 1878 with a definite agenda. [...] His aim was manifestly to be Sokoto Caliphate's representative to meet the Mahdi whom his great grandfather Dan Fodio had predicted would appear in the East. [...] Consequently he built a substantial and respectable following in the entire Adamawa Emirate in particular, and in the Sokoto Caliphate in general. His efforts to achieve a much wider regional perspective that transcended existing ethno-religious boundaries were crowned with success in 1886 [sic] when he obtained a formal appointment from the Sudanese Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmed, then at the apogee of fame and power, to represent the Sokoto Caliphate in his movement. [...] Whether by coincidence or design, Hayatu's Mahdist exploits in northern Cameroon [...] made Mahdism an instrument in inter-regional reconstruction.³⁸

Njeuma continues:

Hayatu had abandoned his plan to seize power in Adamawa and [...] refused British overtures to become Lamido of Adamawa in Yola (1893).³⁹

37 Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola*, pp. 183-184. What Njeuma failed to consider is that the route to the pilgrimage as well as meeting the Mahdi was the same, towards the east.

38 See Martin Z. Njeuma, "The Establishment of Adamawa Emirate and its Legacies in Northern Cameroon," in Bobboyi and Yakubu, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, pp. 175-176.

39 See Njeuma, "The Establishment of Adamawa Emirate," pp. 176.

According to Sa'ad Abubakar, however:

Hayatu may have become disenchanted with affairs in Sokoto after his father's failure to become Caliph, but his reaction, like that of other scholars before him, was to set out for the East. His determination may have been strengthened by the prophecy current in Sokoto that he was the Shehu's descendant who was destined to meet the Mahdi.⁴⁰

The sources cited above suggest that Ḥayāt left on *hijra* because his father was not elected as Caliph. In other words, he left because of his family interest. These sources, however, fail to show the impact of the declining moral and intellectual standards within the Sokoto Caliphate that was responsible for pushing not only Ḥayāt, but many other scholars, to go on *hijra*. For example, the electors of the Caliph in Sokoto refused to appoint Ḥayāt's father Sa'id b. Muhammad Bello and some other scholars based on the criterion of merit. Sa'id b. Bello was renowned for his piety and knowledge, which were the two most important criteria in the tradition of the Sokoto Caliphate for appointing a leader into office. In addition, he had experience in administration, both in Sokoto and in the *ribāt*.⁴¹

The fact that some of the individuals who were most qualified for the post of Caliph were bypassed by the powerful electors, was an indication that the ideals upon which the Jihad was fought and the Caliphate established, were failing. It should not be surprising, then, that religious-minded people such as Ḥayāt reacted to this development by going on *hijra* to the east and later, by identifying themselves with a new movement such as the Mahdiyya. Indeed, it would have been more surprising for him to act otherwise. Be that as it may, after joining the Mahdiyya, Ḥayāt was described by other scholars with the following words: "a troublesome member of the Sokoto royal family;"⁴² "a rebel to

40 Abubakar, *The Lamibe of Fombina*, p. 131.

41 Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, pp. 98-99 and 122.

42 Holt, "The Sudanese Mahdiyya," p. 285.

the Caliphate authority,”⁴³ and “an adventurer-scholar who wanted to build a political following.”⁴⁴

In this writer’s interpretation, on the contrary, both Ḥayāt b. Sa’īd and Lamido Zubairu were moved by a moral conviction and had good reasons to stand on opposite sides in the battle of Danki. Ḥayāt stood for the revival of Islam and had come to believe that this time, the inspiration was coming from outside the territory of the Caliphate as predicted by the Shehu. In contrast, Zubairu stood for the defense of the territorial integrity of his Emirate, the leadership of which he had been entrusted by his father who had been appointed directly by the Shehu. The two protagonists in this battle believed in what they stood for, and refused to retreat or surrender to one another. This is what led their armies to clash at Danki, in what turned out to be the largest military encounter in the history of the Caliphate, with hundreds of thousands of people involved. The poem discussed in the following section was composed by Ḥayāt b. Sa’īd to celebrate his eventual victory.

The poem

The leaders of the nineteenth-century jihad in Hausaland, and their contemporaries, were scholars who wrote in prose and verse. Poetry was popularised especially in the form of ‘*qjami*’ (Arabic script in) Fulfulde. This poetry was used in preaching and teaching ordinary Muslims who did not understand Arabic. Later scholars continued the tradition of writing in Arabic prose and verse for the consumption of fellow scholars, but also in Fulfulde and Hausa verse for the consumption of the laymen. Ḥayāt b. Sa’īd was one such scholar. He composed a number of poems in his mother tongue Fulfulde, as well as in Hausa and Arabic. His Fulfulde and Hausa poetry bears the mark of his Arabic scholarship and is always blended with Arabic words, especially inasmuch as religious, political and technical lexicon is concerned. The following poem is taken from a book

43 Hiskett, *A History of Hausa Islamic Verse*, p. 96.

44 Bawuro B. Barkindo, *The Sultanate of Mandara to 1902: History of the Evolution, Development and Collapse of a Central Sudanese Kingdom* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989), p. 213.

edited by Jungraithmayr and Günther in 1978.⁴⁵ That book was based on an interview that the German linguist August Klingenberg had with Sa'īd b. Ḥayāt (son of the author of the poem) at his residence in Kano in 1951, when he was still under detention. During the interview, which was in Fulfulde, the poem was read by the interviewee to the interviewer, and the latter wrote it down in his notes. The poem comprises twenty-five verses of equal hemistiches. The text of the poem is first provided, followed by this writer's English translation, which is different from the one provided by Jungraithmayr and Günther. The writer is not a linguist and therefore does not follow the Fulfulde conventions established by the Conference of Bamako. The text, however, was checked by Fulfulde linguists when the writer first presented it in 2009.

Yimre konu Danki

- [1] *Mi yettima Jaumam Cenido Kabiru*
A Lamdo ala kulli shai'in Qadiru
- [2] *A Lamido Arshi a Lamido Kursi*
E sharqu e gharbu yaminun yasaru
- [3] *A jam Kibriya'u a jam Azamatu*
A salake kubbu e niddu Naziru
- [4] *A Bantai a Dod, ai (Doy'ai) Zama a Muridu*
A Halkai a Hisnai mo ngidda Mujiru
- [5] *A Hisni Hayatu e jam'are makko*
A Teddini Dina a toski Zubairu
- [6] *O tadani moituki julirde Mada*
E yimbe Ma'a ngam bural Duniyaru

45 Jungraithmayer and Günther, *Sultan Sa'īdu Bi Hayatu*, pp.18, 20 and 22 (lines 1-7, 8-17 and 18-25 respectively).

- [7] *O adyake Lamu o mobi konuji*
O wi; i min ngare madu ngurte Diyaru
- [8] *O jodi Bogo lebbi ngam nasru meden*
O orani habre ba Sharsun Zahiru
- [9] *O marsi kuri bundugaji e labbe*
E pucci e cuddi e jammul ngafiru
- [10] *Fa ya ajaba! Nyande jumare Danki*
O wardi e mangu o hoti hakiru
- [11] *O fotti e bardejo Mahdi o waili*
Nana o warama nana o asiru
- [12] *O andi o wondi e Allah Cenido*
Kaza e Nulado Bashirun Naziru
- [13] *O wondi e Mahdi o du'nganado fiji*
O tumbi Muhajiri'en Ansaru
- [14] *Toye hujja mada Kaboida e makko*
A halki konuji ma'a dou fujuru
- [15] *A luti datal Baba mada e Lauwal*
E Sanda a tokki datal Kuffaru
- [16] *A bi Adamawa ko wadduma habre*
To bi Shehu Usmau ndare Kafuru
- [17] *A tokkake estoji Salih e Sarde*
Dalil en fuh cakake sumsum Amiru
- [18] *Kaza bibbe Gare mo ye hebi joonde*
Budire wari mabbe wa ne fakiru

[19] *Be don njaha ngarta be don kulna yimbe
Dereji di ruuba di tub tub uzuru*

[20] *Mo wawata kabki e Lamido Yola
Be annda Kalilun yo riwai Kasiru*

[21] *Dubuji Kabai dubuji bo luwai
Dubuji bo don ndari borni hariru*

[22] *Wi'ama to Balda Zubairu daraki
Bolideji go fuka ngarti ngururu*

[23] *Min don tokka fa Bogo min ngata yite
Min don ngetta ne'emaji Allah Shakuru*

[24] *Mo Lamu hakika mo woda Sharika
Mo tokkai oo fuka nasti ngubaruru*

[25] *Salatu mo Makko yo dumo Nulado
E Alo'e Sahbo nane ash'aru*

Translation

[1] I thank you oh God, the Holy, the Great
You are the Almighty King over all things.

[2] You are the King of heavens, You are the king of the
Throne
in the east and the west, in the right and the left.

[3] You are the Lord of Glory, the Lord of Greatness
You are above possessing any partner, opponent or mate.

[4] You raise and You belittle, because
You destroy and You save whom You like, You, the Protector!

- [5] You have saved Hayatu and his people
You have honoured the religion, You have humiliated
Zubairu.
- [6] He endeavoured to destroy Your mosque
and Your people, because of his arrogance.
- [7] He relied on his (earthly) power and mobilized troops.
He gave out the order to support him or to leave the country.
- [8] He stayed in Bogo for months, (mobilizing troops) so as
to defeat us.
He went to war with shining splendour.
- [9] He boasted of his arrow-heads, guns and spears
And horses and quilted horse-armours; he had a large
number of people.
- [10] Oh how astonishing, on that Friday at Danki.
He came with grandeur and left as a downcast
- [11] He met the flag-bearer of the Mahdī, then turned around
and fled.
You hear (he was) killed, you hear he was taken as a captive.
- [12] You know he (Hayatu) was with God, the Holy.
He was with the Messenger of God, the bringer of glad tidings,
the unique.
- [13] He was with the Mahdī, he was given permission to proceed.
He was escorted by the *muhājirūn* and the *aṣṣār*.
- [14] Where is (oh Zubairu) your proof for fighting him?
You have wasted your armies in iniquity.

- [15] You have deviated from the path of your father and Lauwal and Sanda, you have followed the path of ungratefulness.
- [16] You are the son of Modibbo Adama, what brought you to fight With a son of Shehu Usman, what an act of arrogance!
- [17] You followed the persuasion of Salih and Sarde Dalil and his people have dispersed, for fear of the *Amīr* (Zubairu).
- [18] As for the sons of Gare, who got a chance of settling down. As the cloud of war darkened the air, they dared not challenge the poor one (Hayatu).
- [19] They kept going and returning, frightening people By letters of horror, of nothingness and falsehood.
- [20] Who would dare fight with the king of Yola? They do not know that the few would drive out the many.
- [21] Thousands were fighting, thousands were stabbing And thousands were standing and watching, clothed in silk.
- [22] It was said that Zubairu did not stop at Balda. All his speech had turned into a farce.
- [23] We pursued (them) as far as Bogo and we set it on fire. We thanked Allah for His blessings, we are very grateful.
- [24] His is the true authority, He has no partner. Whoever does not obey Him will turn to mere dust.
- [25] May His blessing on His messenger last in eternity As well as on his family and companions.

Conclusion

In this paper, the author has introduced, transliterated and translated the poem composed by Ḥayāt b. Saʿīd to celebrate his victory at the battle of Danki, fought between him and *Lamiđo* Zubairu of Adamawa. In order to allow a better understanding of this Fulfulde text, the author provided some introductory background on the history of the Mahdiyya in the Sokoto Caliphate in general, and in the Adamawa Emirate in particular, along with some biographical information on the two principal leaders of the battle. After the battle, when Adamawa was occupied by the British and *Lamiđo* Zubairu fled from Yola, the latter wrote a letter to the Sultan of Sokoto, re-affirming his allegiance to him, and after him to the Mahdī. This reference, however, should not be taken as a sign of Zubairu's allegiance to the Mahdiyya. Zubairu, like most of the other leaders of the Caliphate, actually continued to reject the claim that Muḥammad Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh was the *mahdī*. Therefore, the reference should be taken as an indication that *Lamiđo* Zubairu and his fellow leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate also employed Mahdism when they were faced by a serious challenge. This is a direct confirmation of the fact that, far from being a belief followed by some extravagant "rebellious" clerics, the expectation of the Mahdī was an integral part of the intellectual and religious legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate.

The text of the letter, as translated by Blackwell, is provided below.

Letter from Lamido Zubairu to Caliph Abdurrahman

From the slave of his master, *Sarkin Kudu*, Zuberu (sic) to his chief, *Sarkin Musulmi* Abderrahaman (sic), son of Atiku, greetings. After greetings to inform you of the terrible trouble which has befallen us. The Christians have brought war on us. We were warned and believed not, but I heard this news last year from Nupe. The man who heard the news had it from the mouth of Mallam Ahmadu a Katsina man in Nupe. But he who told me is with us and after we heard further news, after our affairs were ruined through Christians. Further to tell you that the rule of the Christians has

reached our town Yola, only but not over me as I escaped and those with me, or over our dependent villages. But I have left and now today there are three days between me and Yola, and I am seeking a place to hide from the severity of the earth's dampness, until it dries. You will learn, if Allah wills, of the position between us and the Christians. My allegiance is to you by Allah and the Prophet and after you to the *Imam Mahdi*. I shall not follow the unbelievers even if my towns are captured. The Prophet declared that he who joins his abode with the unbeliever or dwells with them, is among them. But we pray Allah that it may not happen. I have sent you thirty cows by Barua, my present to you. Peace be on him who follows the faith.⁴⁶

46 H. Backwell, *The Occupation of Hausaland: Being a Translation of Arabic Documents found in the House of the Wazir of Sokoto, Bohari in 1903* (Lagos: Government Printers, 1927), pp. 73-74, Letter No. 112.