

The Ballad of Mallam Bello

Note on Praise-Singing

Kirari, or praise-singing, is a time-honored custom of the Hausa people of West Africa. Important people are publicly and loudly praised (*roko*), often in song, accompanied by musicians and sometimes by dancers. Sometimes, the praise is also leavened with some good-humored jest and teasing. It is customary for the subjects of the praise to reward the praise-singer and his entourage by showering them with bank notes as they perform. Supporters of the praised and members of the audience do the same to expression their own appreciation. Hausa praise-singing has been written about by such scholars as M.G. Smith (for northern Nigerian) and Guy Nicolas (for Niger Republic).

Note on Preface to Ballad

The Ballad of Mallam Bello is prefaced by a literal shout-out by Na'oulé, son of Jagga, town crier of Yekuwa. Na'oulé summarizes the ballad by showering praise upon the friends and sponsors of its subject, "the World King of Work, Lawisa's man, Mallam Bello." Na'oulé invokes the names of the various locales Mallam Bello has visited in the vicinity of Yekuwa and Yardaje villages, on both sides of the Niger-Nigeria border.

Transliterated Names

Bello	=	Bill (Professor William Miles)
Lawisa	=	Loïza, wife of Bello
Isma'il/a	=	Samuel, son of Bello and Lawisa
Hariyel	=	Arielle, daughter of Bello and Lawisa

Preface

To he coming from Yardaje and its surroundings

The promise is fulfilled!

For Councilor Awali Abdou, the promise is fulfilled!

A song for Mallam Bello, Lawisa's [Loïza's] man.

The promise is fulfilled!

To Mallam Haruna: All is well.

To Mallam Mansur: you have made a promise on behalf of Kano people.

[Mallam Bello,] You promised the people of Zango.

You promised the people of Yardaje.

From there you promised the people of Tumfafi and Kofai.

You promised the people of Yekuwa - Kofai and Hamada.

Tested and trusted, the father of Isma'il [Samuel].

Then you went forth and promised the people of Danbadada,

And then those of Kwari.

All of them are here because of your work and trustworthiness.

You, the husband of Lawisa [Loïza], the King of Work!

The Ballad

Here come a bride and groom, so sing a song for them (x 2)

Sahura is yours, as well as Zuwaira.

Beat the drums, and we sing a song.

Zango and Daura LGAs [Local Government Authorities] have rewarded us
in so many ways.

Greet Habibu the bridegroom of Ladi, who also came for marriage song.

Here come the newlyweds, let us sing a marriage song.

Let us greet Salisu the Lawyer, who is also coming for a marriage song.

“Eyes of the Motor Car” [nickname], the Praise Singer, husband of Mari -
He has done well.

Here come the bride and groom, let us sing a marriage song.

King of Work Mallam Bello, he too comes for a marriage song.

Here come the bride and groom, let us sing a marriage song.

The husband of Lawisa, Mallam Bello, has also rewarded us
for a marriage song.

An esteemed visitor from Kano, has rewarded us for a marriage song.

Mallam Bello of Yardaje, esteemed visitor, has come for a marriage song.

Bello, visitor from Yekuwa - Kofai and Hamada – has rewarded us for a
marriage song.

The Kwari and Dan Badada visitors also came for marriage song.

Here come the bride and groom, let us sing a marriage song.

Better you stay in your village than going to the city and going wrong.

In the name of God, let us begin the song of our Association.

In the name of His servant, the Prophet [Mohammad].

The song of the Muwadda Association,

The elders arranged it.

For Kureshi [the Koranic verse name after the tribe of
the Prophet Muhammed]

The song of the Muwadda association, the elders arranged it.

Let everyone have an aspiration, be it good or bad.

Our aspiration is a good one.

We greet Mallam Bello, and he rewards us with naira [money, the
currency of Nigeria].

Lawisa's bridegroom, he has rewarded us with naira.

We are greeting Mallam Bello, the father of Isma'il, who has rewarded us.

We are greeting Mansur Dan Bello, who also rewarded us,

We shall return to Yardaje, and there too they shall reward us.

We are greeting Awali Abdou. He too we shall greet.

He too has rewarded us.

We shall not cease! Even girls and young men are rewarding us!

We are enjoying our lives.

We are greeting him, the King of Work, husband of Lawisa,

For we are grateful.

Love, love playing not fighting, we greet Salisu the Lawyer
who has rewarded us.

Let us hail "Eyes of the Motor Car," the Praise Singer [Kwamso].

The bridegroom of Mari, we appreciate the gift.

Where is the chief Praise Singer, who gave to us out of love and trust?

Let the girls shake to greet Nura.

Where is Nura, husband of Aisha? We are grateful for his gift.

We hail Mallam Bello!

We are grateful for his gift.

Lawisa'a husband, the father of Hariyel [Arielle], we are grateful.

Father of Isma'ila we are grateful,

Husband of Lawisa, King of Work.

Today is the wedding day of Mallam Haruna and the bride Tsaiyaba.

We hail Alhaji Mallam Haruna, Tsaiyaba's man.

The middle of his head is unshaved, like a stone.

It can't be shaved, unless it is Allah's will.

[Mallam Bello] is close to the two village chiefs, Aminu and Sulé,
son of Dandaruwa.

Mallam Haruna is the water that washes away all dirt.

He is here for Jagga, the host.

Mallam Bello, husband of Lawisa, King of Work!

On your account the praise singer has been given twenty naira.

Mallam Bello, King of Work, on account of you, husband of Lawisa, money
has been given me.

God is great! Where is the cat?

[taken by Lawisa from Niger through Nigeria to the United States]

Let it be told, husband of Lawisa, King of Work!

You annoyed me, that day that you locked Lawisa in the hut.

We were annoyed, not happy at all.

Even I, the praise singer, I did not like it at all,

I was annoyed!

Thanks to you, Mallam Bello, Mallam Lawan, the master of students,
has given me twenty naira.

I, the praise singer, "Eyes of the Motor Car," I am grateful, I am grateful.

We hail Mansur, son of Bello, who has rewarded us out of love and trust.

He has given us out of love and trust.

The husband of Lawisa has rewarded us out of love and trust.

The father of Isma'il and Hariyel has rewarded us out of love and trust.

The husband of Lawisa, has rewarded us out of love and trust.

Let us dance! We're not ill, are we?

Let us thank Awali Abdou the Councilor

Let us dance. We're not ill, are we?

Let us thank Awali Abdou the Councilor.

He has rewarded us out of love and trust.

We greet the bride and bridegroom, where are they?

The husband of Tsaiyaba? We are grateful for the gift.

The promise between the couple has been fulfilled.

Where is Mallam Haruna the husband of Tsaiyaba?

We are grateful for the gift.

You're lying, you jealous ones. God is with us!

Where is Mallam Bello, the husband of Lawisa?

We are grateful for the gift.

The father of Isma'il, husband of Lawisa.

We are grateful for the gift.

Love, love, playing, not fighting.

The father of Hariyel, Bello, we are hailing.

King of Work, we are grateful for the gift.

Let us kneel together before the elders on account of the visit.

Perhaps they'll give a public beating as a warning,

so that everyone behave.

King of Work, husband of Lawisa, we're grateful.

Be it a gift or loan, he has rewarded us.

Girls, shake to greet Bello!

Where is Mallam Bello, the husband of Lawisa?

We are grateful.

Where is Mallam Haruna, husband of Tsaiyaba?

He too has rewarded us.

Let us greet King of Work Bello, he has rewarded us.

If there was a debt, he has settled it.

We heap thanks on "He who belongs to Lawisa."

We heap thanks on this visitor from Kano who belongs to Lawisa.

We heap thanks on this visitor from Daura who belongs to Lawisa.

We heap thanks on this visitor from Yekuwa, Kofa and Hamada,
who belongs to Lawisa.

Let us dance! We aren't ill, are we?

To the husband of Lawisa: Thank you!

Mallam Bello, King of Work, husband of Lawisa: We thank you!

The promise of the bride and groom has been fulfilled.

To the husband of Tsaiyaba: Thanks for the gift!

Let us dance. We aren't ill, are we?

Let us greet Awali Abdou from Yardaje: Thanks for the gift!

Let us greet the District Head of Yardaje.

District Head, thank you for the gift!

Let us greet Guito [aka Faralu] of Yekuwa.

He too has rewarded us, to honor Mallam Bello who belongs to Lawisa.

Thank you for the gift!

The son of village chiefs, Jamila, has rewarded us,

for the sake of Mallam Bello.

Jamila, we heap thanks on you!

Mallam Bello, husband of Lawisa, thank you for the gift!

Where is Guito, Mallam Bello's man? To whom, too, we extend thanks.

Even if it was a loan, he has retired it.

As we conclude, Kaiga offers his prayer.

That Allah watch over you, that he bring you home safely.

Blessings for a safe journey.

May you return to your family in health and safety.

May God grant us prosperity, food, peace, and grace in the hereafter.

Glory be to God.

Let us add: Look, Dan Kira, Na'oulé's man, is still dancing!

He is joking with you, Mallam Bello!

He says, "Listen up, Mallam Bello.

"This Singer Teacher is from Dunawa.

"He is a guest of Mallam Bello, who belongs to Lawisa.

Tell Mallam Bello: "This Teacher from Dunawa and his Driver friend,
they are as one!"

Here I am, the Praise Singer, Na'oulé, the "Eyes of the Motor Car,"
husband of El Rando.

We are together with drums and drummers.

Father of Isma'ila and Hariyel, husband of Lawisa: King of Work!

The teacher of Dunawa sang for Mallam Bello and his friends.

For Mallam Haruna, Councilor Awali Abdou, Mansur,
and the District Head of Yardaje.

Esteemed visitor, husband of Lawisa, King of Work

Friend to Mallam Haruna and to Faralu-Guito.

Friend to Jagga the host.

To the King of Work, he who belongs to Lawisa.

To Village Chief Alhaji Aminu.

Belonging to Lawisa: King of Work.

Esteemed visitor of Daura, of Zango and Yardaje.

Of Yekuwa-Kofai, and Yekuwa-Hamada.

Esteemed visitor of Dan Badada, of Kwari, of New Station, of Satomawa
and Magaria-Kitari.

Credits

Transcribed from the Hausa by Tidjani El Dan Balé Yékoua [Yekuwa]

First-cut translation from Hausa into English by Lawal Nuhu Yardaje