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Fat'h's-Shakuur

Fee Ma`arifat `Ayaan `Ulama' `t-Takruur

The Inciting of Gratitude

Regarding Acknowledgment of the Notables Among the
Scholars of West Africa

By

**The Gnostic *Shaykh* the Realized Sage known as '*at-Taalib*'
Abu Abdallah Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as-Sideeq
al-Bartuli'l-Wulaati**

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Preface: On Cultural Regeneration, *Tajdeed* and Historical Consciousness

I say, and success is with Allah, that history is the balance principle against which human endeavors are measured, critiqued, revised, and changed. No social reform, social transformation or social regeneration can be had without access to one's authentic history. The struggle for self determination will be futile without first knowing the ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural markers which distinguish a people from those that dominate them. It of this reason, that all nations and religious communities universally acknowledge the advantages of the science of history.

Allah ta`ala says: "*I have created you from a single male and female and made you into nations and ethnic groups so that you may know yourselves and others. The most noble of you with your Lord are those who are most fearfully aware of Him.*" [Quran 49:13] The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace once said: "Learn from your lineage that which will connect you with your family heritage."

Many of the scholars have left for us many wise sayings concerning the necessity of the study of history and the importance that this science has with the other religious sciences. *Shaykh* Hassan ibn Yazid once said: "There is nothing that can help in warding-off the lies of the fabricators more than the science of history." *Shaykh* Muhammad ibn Muhammad Makhluḥ said: "Studying the lives of the grandfathers educates the character of the children and grandchildren in mature excellent wisdom and brilliant discourses." The *Imam* Ibn as-Shaakir said in his *Uyūn at-Tarikh*: "History is among the greatest of the sciences with regard to education and the easiest of the sciences to utilize. Its lights are evident and its pleasantness arises within the hearts." The *Mansa*, of twelfth century Mali, Maghan Kon Fata, advised his son, the great *Mansa*, Sundiata Keita regarding the importance of the oral historian (*belen-tigi*): "From his mouth you will hear the history of your ancestors. You will learn the art of governing Mali according to the principles which our ancestors have bequeathed to us."

Waziri of Sokoto, *Shaykh* Junayd ibn Muhammad al-Bukhari, may Allah be merciful to him once said: "Knowledge is universal and eternal but it has a social and cultural stamp. It also has a purpose and a commitment to a particular worldview. It therefore cannot be neutral." He also cited a poem in his work concerning the lineage of his great grandmother, Nana Asma'u, the daughter of Shehu Uthman Dan Fuduye'; quoting from a 15th century Timbuktu scholar describing the deep psychological harm a people can face when they lack the self-knowledge which history bequeaths. He says:

"Whoever does not inform his children of his grandparents has destroyed his child, marred his descendants, and injured his offspring the day he dies.
Whoever does not make use of his ancestry, has muddled his reason.
Whoever is unconcerned with his lineage, has lost his mind.
Whoever neglects his origin, his stupidity has become critical
Whoever is unaware of his ancestry his incompetence has become immense.
Whoever is ignorant of his roots his intellect has vanished.
Whoever does not know his place of origin, his honor has collapsed."

By definition, the preservation of the cultural identity of any people can only be maintained through history. Thus, its preservation is the function of its people. No one else can tell a people's story except themselves. They must speak for themselves. The great Senegalese intellectual, Cheikh Anta Diop in his seminal work called *Civilization or Barbarism*, later underscored this idea when he said: "The historical conscience, through the feeling of cohesion that it creates, constitutes the safest and the most solid shield of cultural security for a people. The essential thing for a people

is to rediscover the thread that connects them to their most remote ancestral past. In the face of cultural aggression of all sorts, in the face of all disintegrating factors of the outside world, the most efficient cultural weapon with which a people can arm itself is this feeling of historical continuity.” This, statement of Diop, in the context of the struggle for self determination, becomes an axiom and theorem which should be a given for any people striving to preserve, maintain or regain their self-hood. Cultural regeneration, thus is essentially an act of self-determination, and self determination is a required ingredient of one’s authentic culture.

Our ‘Shining Prince’ and the ‘Laughing Lion’ of our struggle, *al-Hajj* Malik El Shabazz, *rahimuhu Allah*, said on the eve of the establishment of the Organization of African American Unity:

“We assert that we Afro-Americans have the right to direct and control our lives, our history, and our future, rather than to have our destinies determined by American racists. We are determined to rediscover our true African culture, which was crushed and hidden for over four hundred years in order to enslave us and keep us enslaved up to today. We, Afro-Americans, enslaved, oppressed, and denied by a society that proclaims itself the citadel of democracy, are determined to rediscover our history, promote the talents that are suppressed by our racist enslavers, renew the culture that was crushed by a slave government and thereby, to again become a free people.”

Thus, the very act of reviving the vital elements of one’s culture is a political act, be it the active utilization of one’s own language, the personal and private practice of one’s religion, or the demarcating of one’s cultural boundaries by dress and attire. Every minuscule expression of one’s own collective uniqueness is a major advancement in the liberation of people dominated by forms of oppression and colonization. Therefore, it must be intergenerational, transmitted from the most remote ancient past in an unbroken chain into the Present Moment. It is not surprising, then that the great Muslim jurist, *Imam* at-Thawri said: “The uninterrupted chain of authority (*al-isnaad*) is the weapon of the believer. For if he has no weapon with him, then with what can he fight?” In other words, the transmitted narrative which is passed from generation to generation in an unbroken fashion constitutes, not only a defensive mechanism, as Diop defined it, but also an offensive weapon. This is in essence the role and function of the historical consciousness, which is not only conscious of the narrative behind history, has its own view of history, but also projects this view and narrative in order to advance the interest of its group. Thus, the historical consciousness is a political tool, and in some sense, an effective political weapon, especially in the face of a decaying oppressive society, which by the nature of its dysfunction dumbs down its citizens in order to maintain its power.

As oppressed groups are obligated to revive and maintain their historical consciousness in the process of becoming and realizing self determination; similarly oppressive groups are forced to lose their historical perspective and become completely alienated from their own past. Historical consciousness provides those who were oppressed with an accurate or positive image of whom they were prior to their encounter with the oppressor; allows them to adjust their present spiritual, social and political realities in accordance with such image, and finally it gives them an accurate picture of the historical role that they played in the formation of the polity under which they are oppressed. The dominant culture on the other hand is left with a limited understanding of the people, and events that shaped their own polity, and when it is known, it is overly simplified, erroneous and marginalizes the importance of those national minorities they oppressed. Drowning in a sea of intellectual apartheid, they then sink into a state of collective historical amnesia, a kind of social

senility, where they can no longer recognize the kith and kin of the core values which gave them their genesis. Being blinded by the 'blood lust' of maintaining their false narrative of superiority they then end up eroding and eventually devouring the very principles that lay at the core of their own history.

The one who has no past, has no future. The one not in control of his past has no control over his future. The one who knows his past but takes no lessons from it, is doomed to replicate it in the future. The one who is trapped in the past will not be prepared for the future. Only the person who knows his past and is an existential example of it in the Present Moment is the master of his future. As Allah ta`ala says: "...no fear on them nor do they grieve"; that is to say they do not fear what is to come nor do they grieve over the past. They are the offspring of their moments (*ibn waqt*), astonishingly present, and in a constant state of astute awareness (*muraqqaba*) of who they were, are and must be. Their mere existence is the Sign that the civilization that repressed them has come to an end. Just as the moon cannot surpass the sun, nor the day outstrip the night; the presence of a cadre within an oppressed group who have historical consciousness is the definitive evidence that the system which subsisted like a succubus off of them is dead. Opposites cannot occupy the same space at the same time. One must succumb and the other must prevail. One is in a state of dynamic continuity and the other in stagnant discontinuity. As the oppressed are strengthened and enhanced by the genesis of their historical consciousness, the oppressors are weakened and debilitated by the severance from the vitality of their false historical narrative. *Shaykh* Abdullahi ibn Fuduye` said it best, in his Tazyeen 'l-Waraqaat:

"Nothing can destroy what the Hand of Allah has constructed,
Nothing can overthrow the Command of Allah when it comes.
Clarify for them that evil customs are worthless,
And that light illuminates our *Sunna*.
The market place for the amusement of youth has this day perished,
While preservation has been established for the bazaar of the righteous.
This day the shadowy influence of the people of this world has shrunk,
And lofty trees cast their cooling shade over our *Sunna*.
The scale of the one who rejects this religion has become light
While the scale of the one who manifest it has become heavy.
The one who helps the religion has become exalted among the people
While the one who rejects it has become humiliated to the elite and common, alike.
Verily the God of the Throne has showered favors
Upon us, he who is grateful is the one who prospers.
Whoever denies blessings and follows passions
For in this world, and in the Judgment, he will perish.
This is because He made the religion clear to us, by a person
Who is related to us, we are elevated by him and ennobled.
If we are receptive to him assisting his teachings
We will succeed, garner his blessings and all will prosper.
However, if we neglect him he will benefit others,
For the misfortunes of one people are the advantages of another."

What *Shaykh* Abdullahi described in this 'victory song' was the decomposition of one social structure and the genesis of another. He depicted the disintegration of the social institutions, the psychological framework and mythical spiritual traditions of the once dominant society as 'youthful'. Not in a vibrant animated sense, but as a childish adolescent society which never came to full growth and development, in spite of its manifold powers. On the other hand he portrayed the emerging Islamic polity as the resurgence of a primordial timeless tradition an Ancient Way which like the Sun, the Moon, and the earth, is natural, biological, tender, pulsating and vibrant, in spite of its lack of imperial power. He gave inference

to the historical consciousness in his poem when he made reference to: 'our *Sunna*'. That is to say, we have become the conscious living heirs of this Way. It is our historical consciousness inherited from generation to generation in a 'dynamic tradition' going back to the well spring of the Living *Sunna* of our master Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

This is the fundamental meaning of the Living *Sunna* (the vital tradition) which is bequeathed to the present generations through the prism of one's own righteous ancestors. For the Absolute Being did not merely speak to our master Muhammad, 14 centuries ago in the historical past. Allah ta`ala always addresses the Muhammadan Reality in the Present Moment, eternally to men and women who embody this sacred tradition generation after generation. It is only when the Living *Sunna* is embodied, and people become the vessels for the Muhammadan Reality that they hear that address and inherit his mission as those before them did, generation after generation, in the Present Moment and in the future. This is the impetus which historical consciousness conveys.

Cultural regeneration, *tajdeed* (social reformation) and historical consciousness are vital elements of the Living *Sunna*. As *Shaykh* Ibn Ajiba said in his commentary upon the al-Hikam of Ibn Ata`illah al-Askandariya, may Allah be merciful to both of them, that gratitude to Allah ta`ala also comprises showing gratitude for the secondary causative factors which Allah ta`ala create in order to convey His countless blessings to us. Thus, gratitude for the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, by adhering to and reviving his *Sunna*, is in effect gratitude to Allah. Gratitude to one's parents by adhering to and reviving the righteous, virtuous and high culture that they bequeathed to us, is in effect gratitude to Allah. Gratitude to one's teachers and the purveyors of one's historical consciousness is in effect gratitude to Allah. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace said: "The most grateful of people to Allah are those who are most grateful to people"; that is to say, those who demonstrate their gratitude by reviving and adhering to the virtuous values they have bequeathed to us.

One of the best means of showing gratitude to Allah ta`ala is by knowing and reviving the legacies of those who embodied and transmitted the upward paths of our Islamic culture. *Shaykh* Mustapha ibn Abdullah has mentioned in the introduction of his Kashif ad-Dhanuun that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace is reported to have said: "Whoever composes a history of a believer is as though he has given life to him." It is for this reason that we, at the Sankore' Institute of Islamic-African Studies present this profound historical narrative appropriately called Fat'h's-Shakuur Fee Ma'arifat `Ayaan `Ulama' `t-Takruur (The Inciting of Gratitude Regarding Acknowledgment of the Notables Among the Scholars of West Africa) by our learned and virtuous forebear *Shaykh* Abu Abdallah Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr as-Sideeq Ahmad ibn Abdallah ibn Muhammad al-Bartuli'l-Wulaati, known as 'at-Taalib' (the student).

The Fat'h's-Shakuur is one of the rarely known texts which discusses the biographies of about two hundred of the learned sages of West Africa who lived between the period of 1056 A.H. to 1215 A.H. (circa 1650 C.E. to 1800 C.E.). In a sense this text should be placed along side the Shajat'n-Nuur az-Zakiyya of *Shaykh* Ibn Makhluaf, the Infaq'l-Maysuur of Muhammad Bello, the renowned Nayl'l-Ibihaaj of *Shaykh* Ahmad Baba at-Tinbukti, the ad-Dibaaj'l-Madh'hab of *Shaykh* Ibn Farhuun, and the Tarteeb'l-Madaarik of *Qadi* `Iyad. *Shaykh* Muhammad al-Wulaati, follows these famous biographical texts by arranging the scholars according to alphabetical order in twenty-two chapters, citing the place, day, and sometimes hour that they were

born. He mentions their major teachers and the sciences and books they learned from them, as well as their chains of authorities; and the students they taught. He also mentioned the journeys that these scholars took in search of knowledge, the names of the books they produced as well as professions and responsibilities they fulfilled in the Islamic societies in which they resided. More importantly, *Shaykh* Muhammad al-Wulaati, took care to mention the spiritual bounties, austerity, righteousness, virtue and the service these two hundred or so sages contributed to the societies in which they lived. In short, the Fat'h's-Shakuur is a brief picture of the kind of super empowered individuals essential for the generation and development of Islamic civilization. One of my teachers often said: "An entire civilization cannot necessarily generate a Man of Allah, but a Man of Allah can generate an entire civilization." The Fat'h's-Shakuur Fee Ma`arifat `Ayaan `Ulama' `t-Takruur paints a picture of the kind of individuals who laid the foundations for the high Islamic civilizations of Takruur, Mali, Songhay, Baghirma, Dia, Messina, Segou, Zaura, Kanem-Bornu, Wodai, Dar Fur, and Sokoto. It was the memories and legacies of such sages which imbued the enslaved African Muslims in the western hemisphere with the powerful historical consciousness required to raise the banner of liberty and freedom in the countless slave insurrections and wars ignited in Bahia, Surinam, Belize, Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti, the Florida Everglades, southern Georgia, the Sea Islands and the French Territories of Louisiana. No doubt, the Fat'h's-Shakuur Fee Ma`arifat `Ayaan `Ulama' `t-Takruur will be the essential element in formulating the identity construct needed by the resurgent indigenous African Muslim communities in the west as they rise from the dust of the present crumbling dominant culture.

A Brief Biography of the Author

It is fitting to momentarily discuss the biography of the author of this great work, the Fat'h's-Shakuur Fee Ma`arifat `Ayaan `Ulama' `t-Takruur. He was Abu Abdallah, Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as-Sideeq Ahmad ibn Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn at-Taalib Ali Banaan al-Burtuli al-Wulaati al-Maaliki. He was famous as *at-Taalib* Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as-Sideeq. He was born in the city of Wulaata, in the year 1140 A.H. (circa 1732 C.E.) to a family famous for its learning and piety. He was a scion of the notables of the spiritually elite. He was a famous *Imam* in knowledge and a proof for the learned of his time. He was a primary traditionist, a prominent researcher and a reliable and well established jurist. He was a discerning *mujtahid* who had composed innumerable unprecedented scholarly works. In addition to this he was extremely fearful of Allah, pure at heart, virtuous, austere in worldly matters, and scrupulously pious. He was a source of *baraka*, humble, and repentant. He was a master of spiritual purification, possessed excellent character, and had attained the rank of *wali* of Allah ta`ala intimately acquainted with Him. In this regard he was unique in his time.

He took the science of *tawheed* from the Knower of Allah *Shaykh* at-Taalib Ahmad in Umar ibn al-Waafi al-Mahdari. He studied the ar-Risaalat of Ibn Abi Zayd from at-Taalib al-Amin ibn at-Taalib al-Habib al-Hurshi. He read the Mukhtasar of Khalil from the jurist as-Sayyid al-Hassan ibn at-Taalib Ahmad ibn Ali Dukaan al-Burtuli. With *Imam* Umar al-Mahjuubi he read the Alfiya of Ibn Malik. He studied with many other of the notables scholars, some who will be mentioned in his Fat'h 's-Shakuur.

He had tremendous love for all of his teachers, and used to honor them and praise them often. With all of these scholars he mastered the science of *Qur'anic*

exegesis, and the science of prophetic traditions which he memorized, authored his own consolidation of, and was a reliable transmitter. He had mastered the foundations of jurisprudence as well as its branches, until he became a professor in these. He also mastered the 'Seven Variants' of the *Qur'an* and the science of recitation. He was a grammarian, and a linguist, deeply rooted in the sciences of poetry, and innumerable scholarly disciplines. He had taken a generous portion of every single science and reveled in every scholarly discipline; whether the intellectual sciences or the transmitted ones.

He became a famous *mufti* whose legal decisions were sought after by the common people and the elite. He possessed high rank with the people was highly respected and obeyed. There was unanimous agreement regarding the high level of his learning, the elevated rank of his righteousness and guidance. The extent of his researches was well organized yet extraordinary. He would never give an explanation of any issue without referring to a text. Once when he was explaining something to one of his disciples, he asked him about the meaning of a word, but he did not answer immediately. He then asked him a second time, and the *Shaykh* replied: "Leave it, because I have not seen it in any of the books."

He was a *Shaykh* of Islam of his time and carried the banner of the *Sunna* and was an eradicator of heretical innovation. He possessed astounding miracles, tokens of uprightness and was the Sword of Allah against heretics. He was the mine of truth, the activator of comprehension, the alchemy of spiritual joy, and the treasure of intellectual advantages, whom Allah had exalted above His creatures with *baraka*. He was steeped in obedience of Allah in all his movements and stillness.

Whenever he would leave the *masjid*, he would not pass people, except they would stop in order to place their hands on his head for the *baraka*. He only prayed the *dhuhr*, *asr*, and *isha* prayers in the *masjid* because of the many disputes the people had about the proper times of *fajr* and *maghrib*. He used to call the *adhaan* for the *masjid* and his call to prayer was always the last one.

Along with possessing unlimited piety, he composed innumerable sublime scholarly works. Among them were his more than three commentaries upon the *as-Sughra* of as-Sunusi. He composed a commentary upon the meanings and secrets of the Names and Attributes of Allah ta`ala. In jurisprudence he composed a commentary upon the *as-Sullam*. Among his works was the *Nasab's-Shurafa* regarding the descendents of Mulay as-Shareef. He composed a work on the science of secrets, as well as innumerable poems; among them being a poem on the advantages of using the tooth brush. Of course, he composed at least three works on history, including the text which is before you, the *Fat'h's-Shakuur Fee Ma`arifat `Ayaan `Ulama' `t-Takruur*.

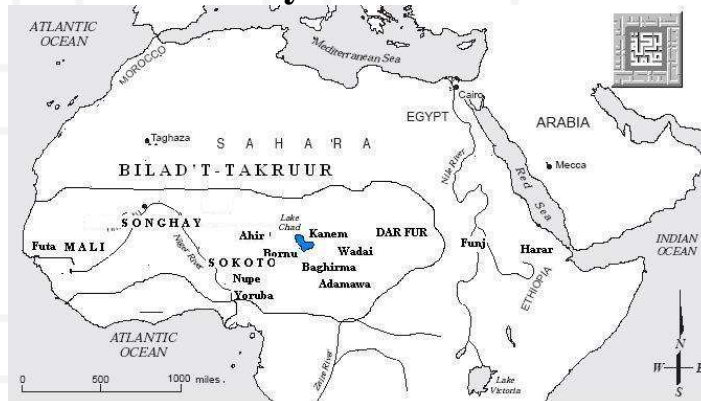
In short, the merits and virtues of *Shaykh* Muhammad al-Wulaati were innumerable. He died on the 23rd of *Dhu'l-Hijjah* in the year 1219 A.H. (circa 1804 C.E.), at the age of 72. May Allah ta`ala forgive him, illuminate his grave, give him to drink from the Seal Nectar, and benefit us by his *baraka* in this world and the Next. Amen.

Shaykh Muhammad Shareef bin Farid
Tuesday, 27th *Safar*, 1432 A.H. (February 01, 2011)
Zunyi, Guizhou, the People's Republic of China

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Fat'h's-Shakuur

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, may Allah bless our master Muhammad, his family, Companions and give them abundant peace

Says, the saintly jurist, the virtuous spiritual wayfarer, the illustrious adherent to the *Sunna*, the *Shaykh* Abu al-Ma`ali, known as ‘the student’, Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as-Sideeq ibn Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn at-Taalib Ali Banaan al-Bartuli’l-Wulaati’l-Maaliki, who was al-Ash`ari in his *`aqeeda*, may Allah ta`ala be merciful to him and benefit us by him and his knowledge, Amen Amen.

All praises are due to Allah who has made the science of history (*`ilm’-taarikh*) beneficial with regard to transmitting exhortations and knowledge, and has made it a means to enhance clarification and to remove anxieties. I bear witness that there is no deity except Allah, who has no partner to Him, the Sole Sovereign, the Sheer Absolute Being. And I bear witness that our master Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace is His servant and truthful and trustworthy Messenger. May the blessings and peace be upon our master Muhammad, the master of the Arabs and non Arabs, who was sent to all the human communities, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, along with nobility and generosity and upon his family, and all his Companions, the Followers and all those who follow them in spiritual excellence until the Day of Judgment.

To continue: Realize, that the one who is ignorant of the science of history is like a blind rider, trampling around dim wittedly, who attributes the narratives of those gone before to those who have come after them, and cannot distinguish between those who are present and those who have passed. Realizing this I saw that our forebears had composed innumerable works in every variety of historical narrative regarding recognition of the scholars. Some of them composed works regarding the grammarians (*nuhaat*) and other than them; and seeing that they did not mention the scholars of West Africa, due to the long distance between them and our scholars; and that recognition of them was a corroboration of what they had cited; or due to the weakness of the chains of authorities connected to them; realizing that the chain of authorities is among the customs specific to this *Umma*; realizing that knowing them is a form of blessing by merely mentioning as it is well known; and other than these from fruitful advantages; I then desired to produce a history of the notables of the scholars of West Africa in order that their true ranks in jurisprudence and the religion can be known.

My spiritual master, the jurist Ahmad ibn Andagh Muhammad said in the beginning of his *al-Futuuh'l-Quyuumiyya*: “When a science is apart of the intelligible sciences (*ma`quul*), there is no need to know who originally developed its theories except as a form of perfection in that science. But when a science is from those transmitted sciences (*manquul*), then it is a responsibility and trust to cite the one who first narrated it. It is also necessary to know its author, and to research his circumstances. This is because whoever takes reliance in what he transmits from someone whose circumstances he does not know, is like the builder who constructs an edifice without a foundation.”

Having said that, I will only cite the most famous of the scholars, because not being thoroughly encompassing is excused, and perhaps I may avoid citing someone who was more famous simply because his land was too remote from my own; or due to my lack of knowledge regarding him. I have arranged it based upon the alphabetical order of the westerners, beginning with what is agreed upon regarding their names and the times of their death before anything else. I will also mention those who entered West Africa from outside and settled here, who became teachers to them and renowned hoping by that to attain their *baraka*. I have named it:

The Inciting of Gratitude

Regarding Acknowledgment of the Notables Among the Scholars of West Africa

Let me first say, defining the boundaries of the land of ‘*Takruur*’ (West Africa), that it is a vast region that stretches to Adghaghu in the east,¹ to the sea of the Banu Zanaaqiyya in the west,² to the Beeta in the south,³ and to Adraar in north.⁴ May Allah make this successful at being correct, for to Him is the final return and destiny. May Allah bless our master Muhammad, his family and Companions and grant them much peace; and: ‘*All praises are due to Allah the Lord of the worlds.*’

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¹ Adghaghu refers to the mountainous regions of Dar Fur, known today as *Jabal Mara*.

² This is a reference to the Atlantic Ocean. The Banu Zanaaqiya are the Banu Hassan Arabs known as the ‘Moors’ who reside along the coastal regions in what is today known as the Spanish Sahara.

³ The Beeta is a reference to the Akan regions in what is known today as Ghana.

⁴ Adraar is the regions just at the upper edge of the *sahel* where the Sahara desert and grasslands meet, in what is today known as southern Algeria. Quoting from the *al-Qamuus*, *Sultan* Bello designated the lands of *Takruur* to include the lands of Dar Fur, Wodai, Birghima, Kano, Katsina, Songhay, Mali and *Takruur* proper. Today, *Takruur*, can be seen to cover the entire region which is known as the *Bilad's-Sudan* and includes the entire Sahel region from the Atlantic to Jabal Marra in Dar Fur.