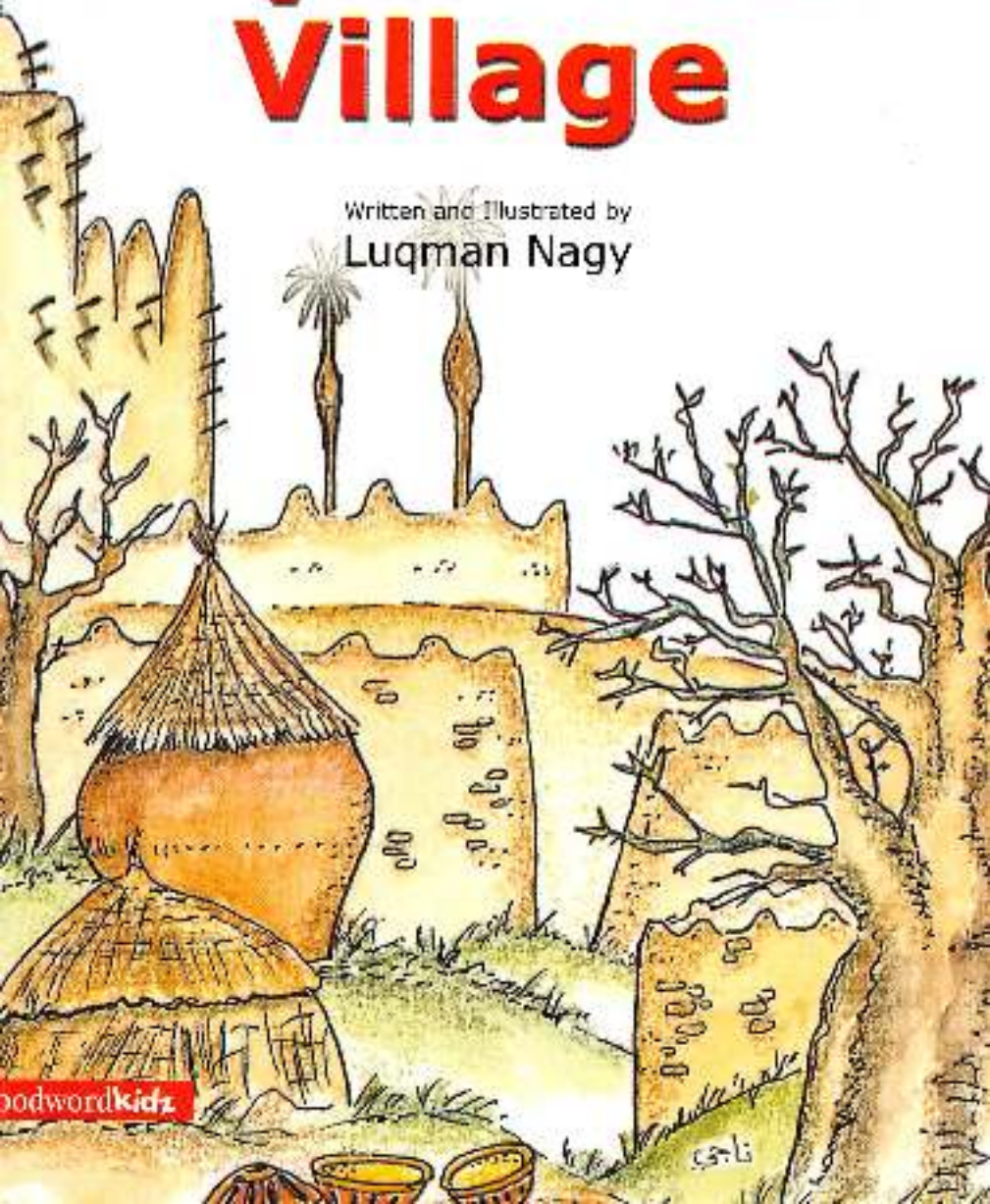


My Islamic Village

My Hausa Village

Written and Illustrated by
Luqman Nagy



My Hausa Village



Written and Illustrated by
Lugman Nagy

Goodword**kidz**

This book is dedicated to my first Nigerian friend,
Dr. Usman Aliyu El-Nafaty.



It is 'eid today! 'Abd al-Khaliq will wear this colourful new *zanna* (embroidered cap) and beautiful *kaftani* (ankle-length shirt) to the *musallacin idi* (open-air prayer ground).

Goodword Books Pvt. Ltd.
1, Nizamuddin West Market, New Delhi 110 013
e-mail: info@goodwordbooks.com, www.goodwordbooks.com
Printed in India
Illustrated by Luqman Nagy
First published in 2003
Reprinted 2005
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Nigeria is a land of many different peoples possessing their own unique languages and culture. The northern part of this vast country is populated mainly by the Hausa, a predominantly Muslim people. Since Islam was first introduced into "Hausaland" in the 15th century CE, a rich indigenous Muslim culture has flourished there. Until very recently, the Hausa language was written using the Arabic alphabet. A beautiful style of Arabic writing found only in Sahel Africa is still taught in many Qur'anic schools throughout northern Nigeria.

The author has visited Hausaland and has relied on many personal experiences gained there to write and illustrate this book.

Giginya village is in sub-Saharan Africa and is, therefore, African in many ways; but because its inhabitants are Muslim, it also has much in common with the rest of *dar al-islam*.

'Abd al-Khaliqu, a Hausa boy from Giginya village, invites all readers of this book to his colourful world where history, tradition, and very creative people welcome you.

To you all my warmest salaams.

King Fahd University
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

Luqman Nagy
Ramadhan 1422 AH
November 2002

*M*y name is 'Abd al-Khaliqu; I am a thirteen year old Muslim boy, *Al-Hamdulillah*. I live in Giginya village which lies in Hausaland, the large Islamic region of northern Nigeria. *Barka da zuwa!* "Welcome", as we say in the Hausa language.

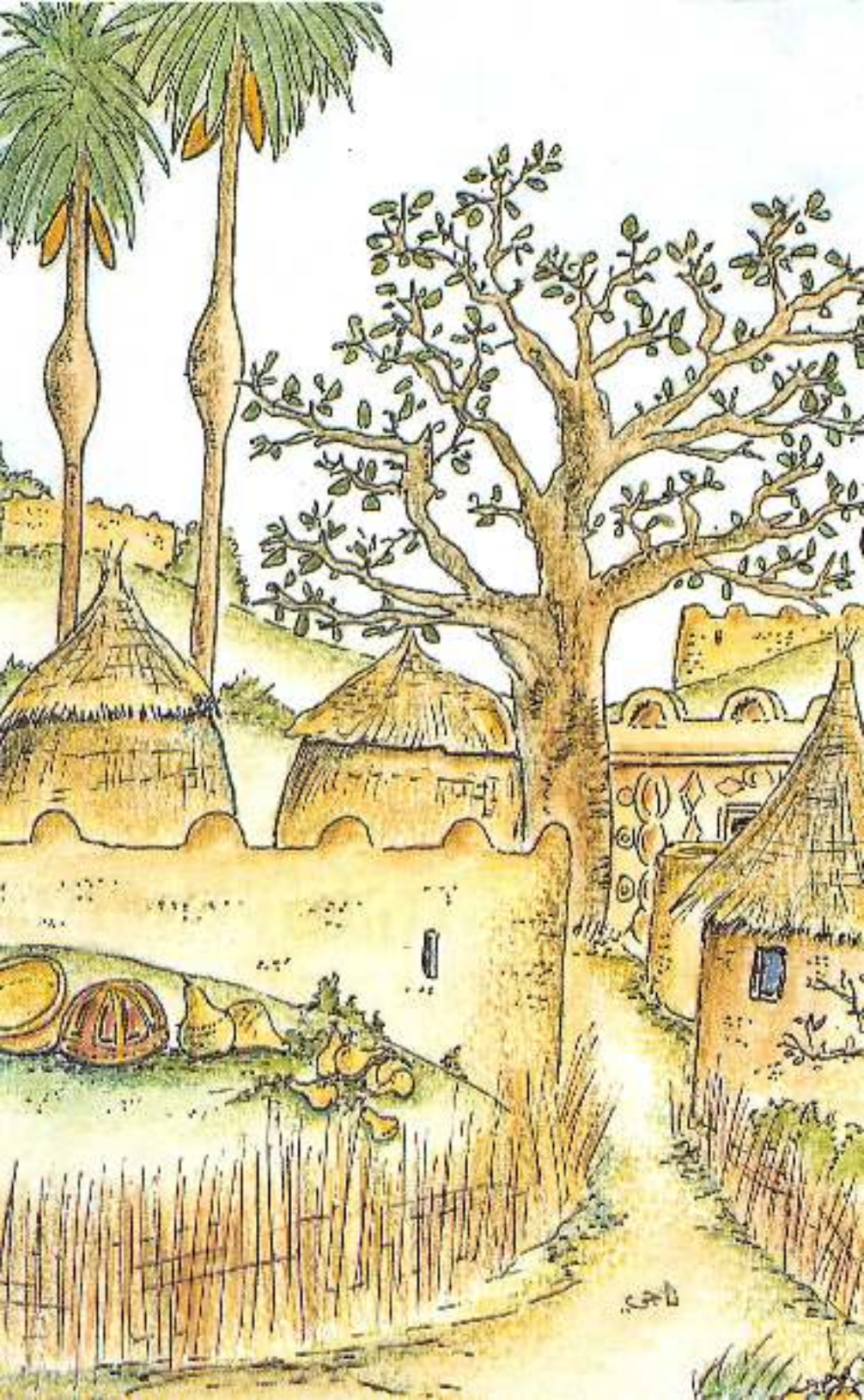
I speak Hausa, a very important language spoken by more than 50 million people all over West Africa. For centuries, my language was written with the Arabic alphabet, but today we use the Latin one. Most Hausa people are Muslims, *Al-Hamdulillah*, and the Hausa language contains many Arabic words.

Giginya village lies in the Sahel (an Arabic word meaning "coastline") or the area to the south of the Sahara Desert. Very old rock paintings have been found in the Sahara Desert. They show that thousands of years ago our region of northern Nigeria was not a semi-desert but a land of forests with rivers and lakes. The name of our village comes from the word for the tall palm trees that grow in Hausaland. The *giginya* tree produces huge fruit that can weigh up to 3 or 4 kilos when ripe. Parents, therefore, always tell their children not to play under the *giginya* trees!

Like most people in Sahel Africa, we make our houses from local materials: corn-stalks, branches, and a mud mortar mixed with straw. Even our beautiful mosque is made of earth.

Can you see the calabash gourds growing on the hillside? My little brother 'Abd al-Karimu looks after them and says he wants to grow the biggest calabash gourd ever!

Our house is just down the lane under the shade of a big *baobab* tree.



This is my house. It was built in the traditional Hausa style by several relatives who also worked with a master builder. Our house is made of mud but the exterior surface is covered with intricate arabesque designs first formed when the mud is wet. A thin covering of cement protects the designs. The windows are small to prevent the dust, harsh heat, and piercing sunlight from entering.

Most Hausa are farmers, artisans, or traders. My father is a groundnut (peanut) farmer and today he is working hard in the fields. I have many uncles in Giginya village. Some are farmers like my father, but others cure red goatskins that are still sent to Morocco by camel caravan. I also have an uncle who carves wonderful calabash gourds. Some of them are drying right now in the front of our house.

My mother cooks all our meals outside the house in a large cooking pot placed on three rocks. Hausa food is spicy. Today my mother will prepare a peppery vegetable stew, fried yam chips, and a delicious groundnut sauce.

A large baobab tree provides shade when we work outside of the house. *Masha Allah*, what an amazingly useful tree! Baobabs are some of the largest trees in the world; some baobab trunks, which store large amounts of water, are 9 metres in diameter! Some people think this tree is upside-down with its roots sticking up into the air! Baobabs are ancient trees that can live for more than a thousand years! The tree's bark also provides a strong fibre used for making rope and string.

The circular mud hut behind our house is a *rumbu*, or storehouse. Here my father keeps bundles of millet, guinea corn, and groundnuts.

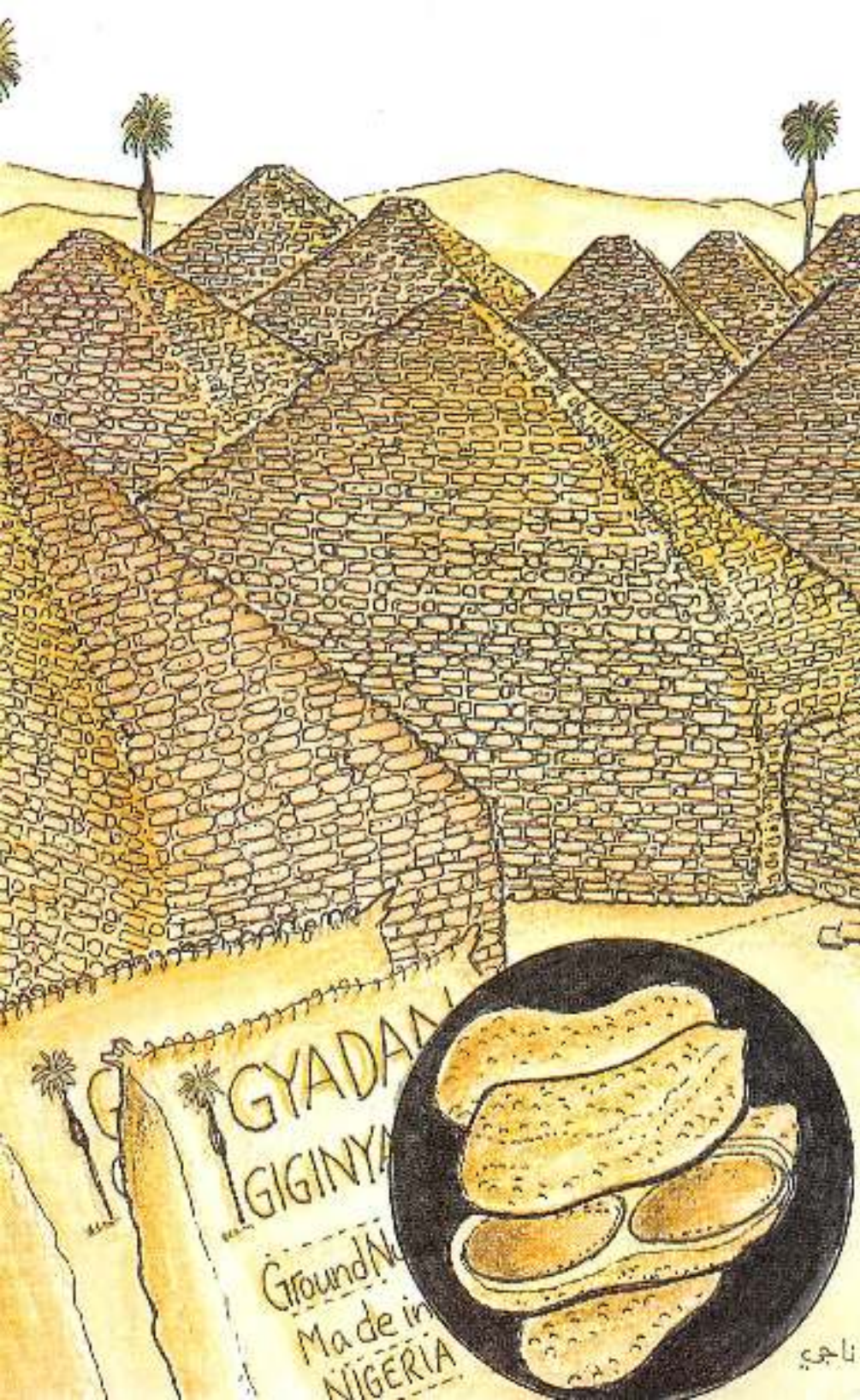


The weather here in Hausaland is harsh; there are two main seasons: the dry season and the wet season. From the middle of October to the end of January, a cold, dry and dusty wind called the *harmattan* blows down from the Sahara Desert. Sometimes it blocks out the sun for weeks! The dry season (from February to April) ends with welcome rains that help irrigate fields where millet, maize, and groundnuts are grown. It is at this time that the famous calabash gourds are also planted even though many grow naturally in the wild.

Hausaland, the northern part of Nigeria, is one of the world's largest producers of groundnuts. This crop is also a very important basic food for the local people. Our family has been growing groundnuts for generations. Many villagers like my father work in the fields. The work is hard, but the results of our efforts are many, *Al-Hamdulillah*.

During the hot season, cow dung and the ash of burnt shrubs are placed on the fields as a fertilizer. The groundnuts grow to maturity in the rainy season. The groundnut harvest is a time of great excitement. Everyone helps out in the fields. All farmers place their unshelled nuts in hemp sacks. Eventually, these sacks are all transported to Kano, the largest city in Hausaland. Here the sacks of Giginya groundnuts and those from other farms are piled high into pyramids. Some of the nuts will be shipped south by train to factories where they will be processed into margarine and cooking oil. The rest will be exported. My father told me that there are about nine thousand sacks of groundnuts in each pyramid!

After each successful harvest, my father and other farmers in the village, meet in our mosque and give thanks to Allah, for He truly is *Al-Razzaq*, the All-Provider, *Al-Mugit*, the Sustainer, and *Al-Waall*, the Protector.



All over West Africa, the calabash gourd is grown for its many practical uses. The word calabash comes from the Arabic for "dry gourd". We call it *kwarya* in Hausa.

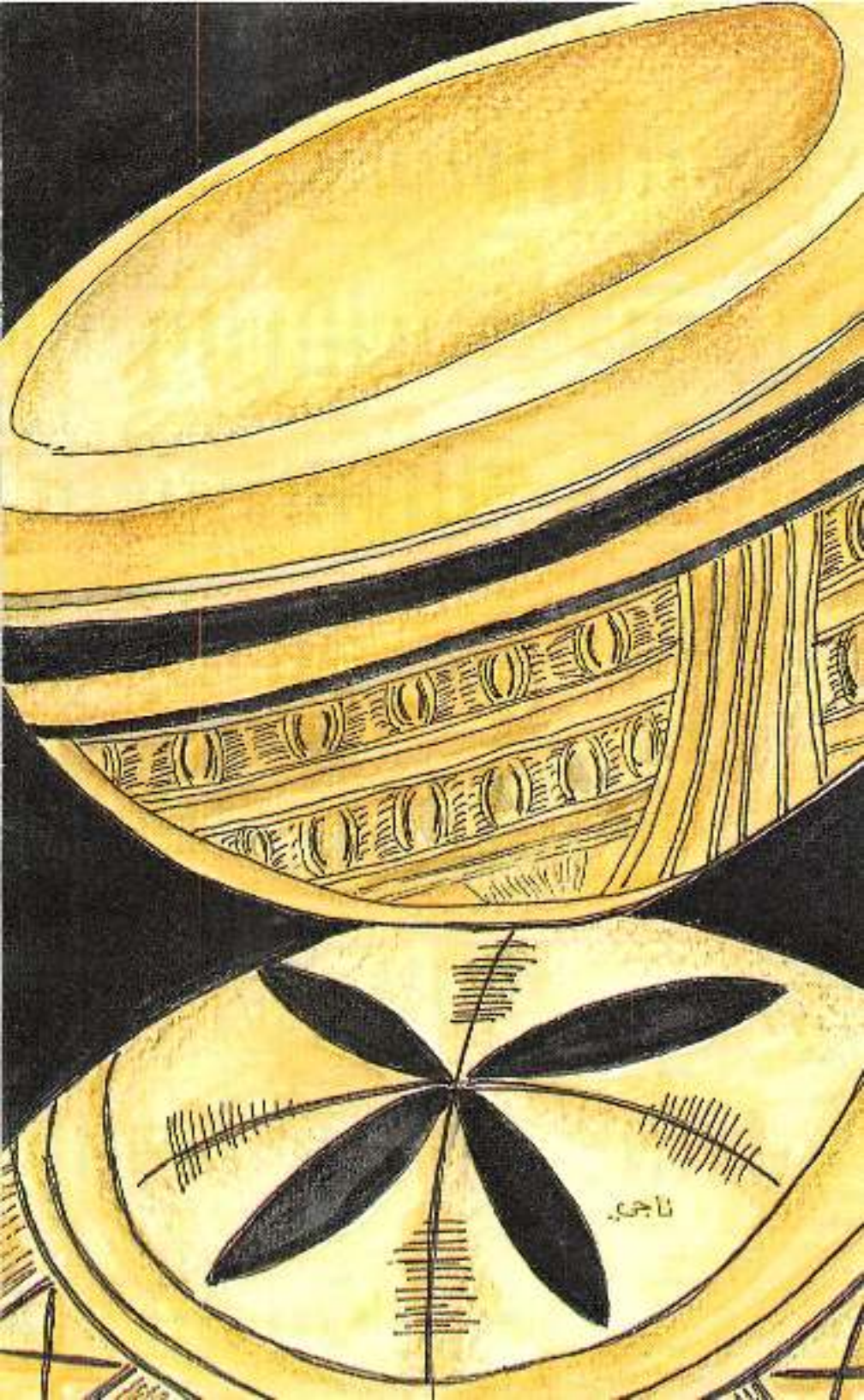
Calabash gourds can be grown as a vegetable. However, here in Gliginya village, every household owns many calabashes, both big and small, that are artistically carved and painted. The dry gourd shells are often made into many practical utensils like bowls, jugs and ladles. Bowls are made by cutting horizontally around the widest part of a mature gourd; small gourds with long necks make ideal ladles by cutting them in half from top to bottom. The hot Nigerian sun quickly dries and hardens the inside of the gourds.

My uncle is a master calabash maker. He first draws an original geometric design on the shell of the dry gourd by using a stick dipped in charcoal. With a heated knife blade, my uncle then burns the design into the hard gourd shell. These are two of his beautiful calabashes that he has made for us.

Calabashes last a very long time. My mother uses them as containers for dry goods as well as for hot soups and stews. In nearby villages, Fulani cattle herders use calabashes to transport their cow's milk to market.

Although practical and sturdy, calabashes can be broken. *Masha Allah*, as Muslims we know that *israf* (being wasteful) is *haram*. When anyone in our village breaks a calabash, it is taken to my uncle for repair. He uses fine rivets made of gourd fibre and a strong natural glue for this purpose.

The longer the calabash remains growing in the garden, the larger it becomes. My uncle holds the record for growing and carving the largest calabash in Hausaland. This "super calabash" is almost 60 cm wide and 5 cm thick! My uncle keeps it displayed on the wall of his house and only uses it during the two 'eids when he fills it with nuts to offer his guests.



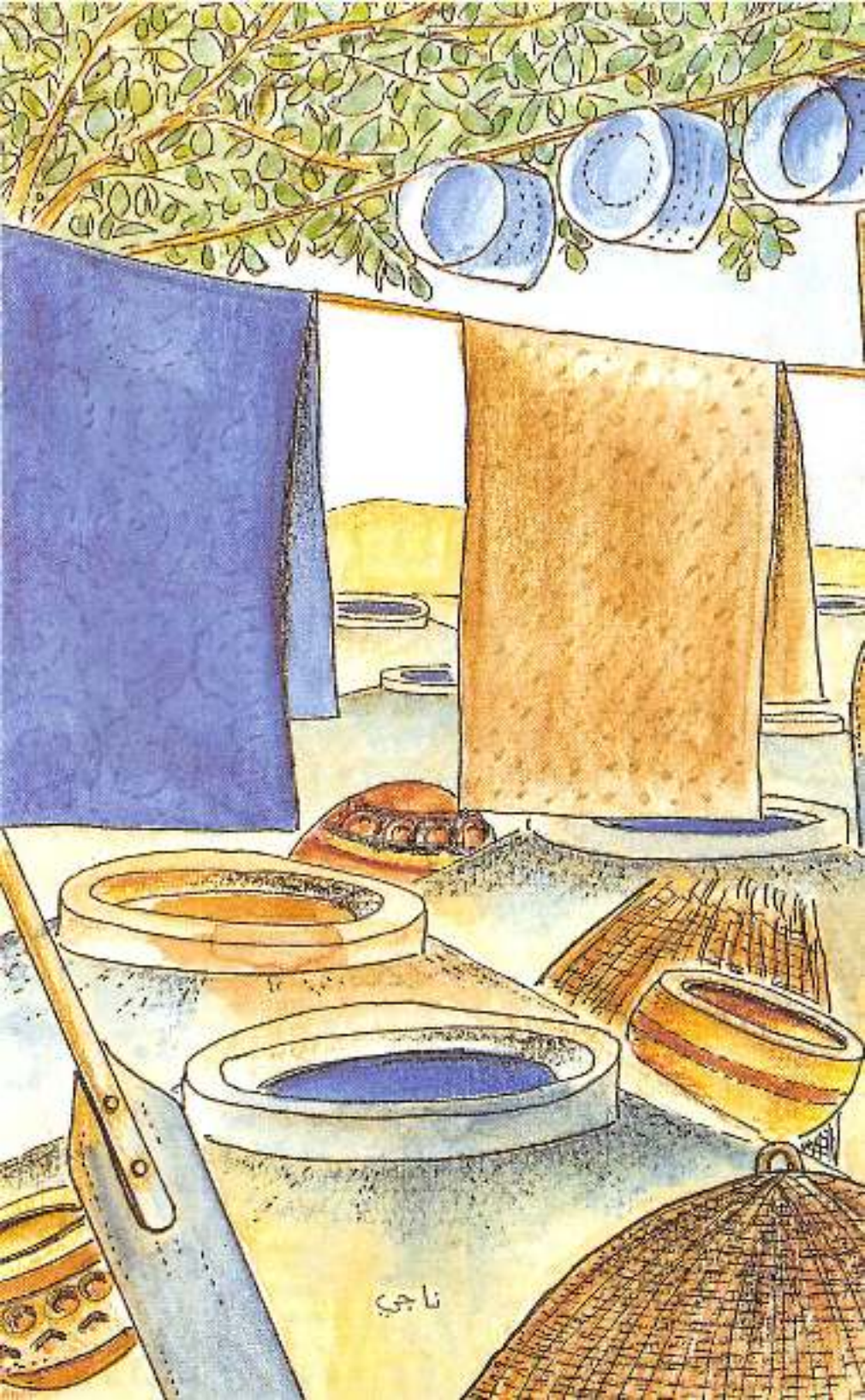
Here in Giginya village we are all Muslims, *Al-Hamdulillah*. Both men and women enjoy wearing loose-fitting gowns and robes and Islamic head coverings. Such modest clothing is not only *sunnah*, but is also a practical and healthy response to the semi-desert climate of Hausaland.

For centuries, the people of Hausaland have produced their own textiles which have been dyed in deep vats. Fabric dyeing has traditionally been done by men. On the outskirts of Giginya village, there are many dye-pits in which long pieces of cloth are still dyed using the old tie-and-dye method.

The dye-pits are dug to a depth of 2-3 metres. The sides and bottom of the pit are coated with a cement-like substance which prevents the dye from seeping into the ground. Indigo plants are used for the dyeing. These plants are cut up and dumped into the dye-pits full of clean pond or well water. Baskets of ash are then stirred in.

Designs are first stitched into the cloth. Next, the fabric is dipped into the solution that colours all but the covered areas of the cloth. The dyed cloth is beaten with wooden bats and then passed over a tree trunk roller. This gives the blue-black cloth the high sheen that the Hausa people value. The natural indigo dyes supplies two colours. Cloth left in the dye-pits for too long, turns black, but cloth left for a short time turns a wonderful blue. Cola nuts are used to make the reddish brown dyes.

Dyers in Giginya village sell much of their dyed cloth to the nomadic Tuareg Berbers who continue to wear indigo-dyed robes and turbans. These are the famous "blue men" of the Sahara Desert whose skin is often tinted blue from wearing this material.



ناجي

*H*ausa children, like Muslim children everywhere, eagerly await the two annual Islamic festivals: the 'eid al-fitr and the 'eid al-kabir. During these celebrations, all towns and villages of Hausaland partake in an extremely colourful traditional celebration called the *durbar*.

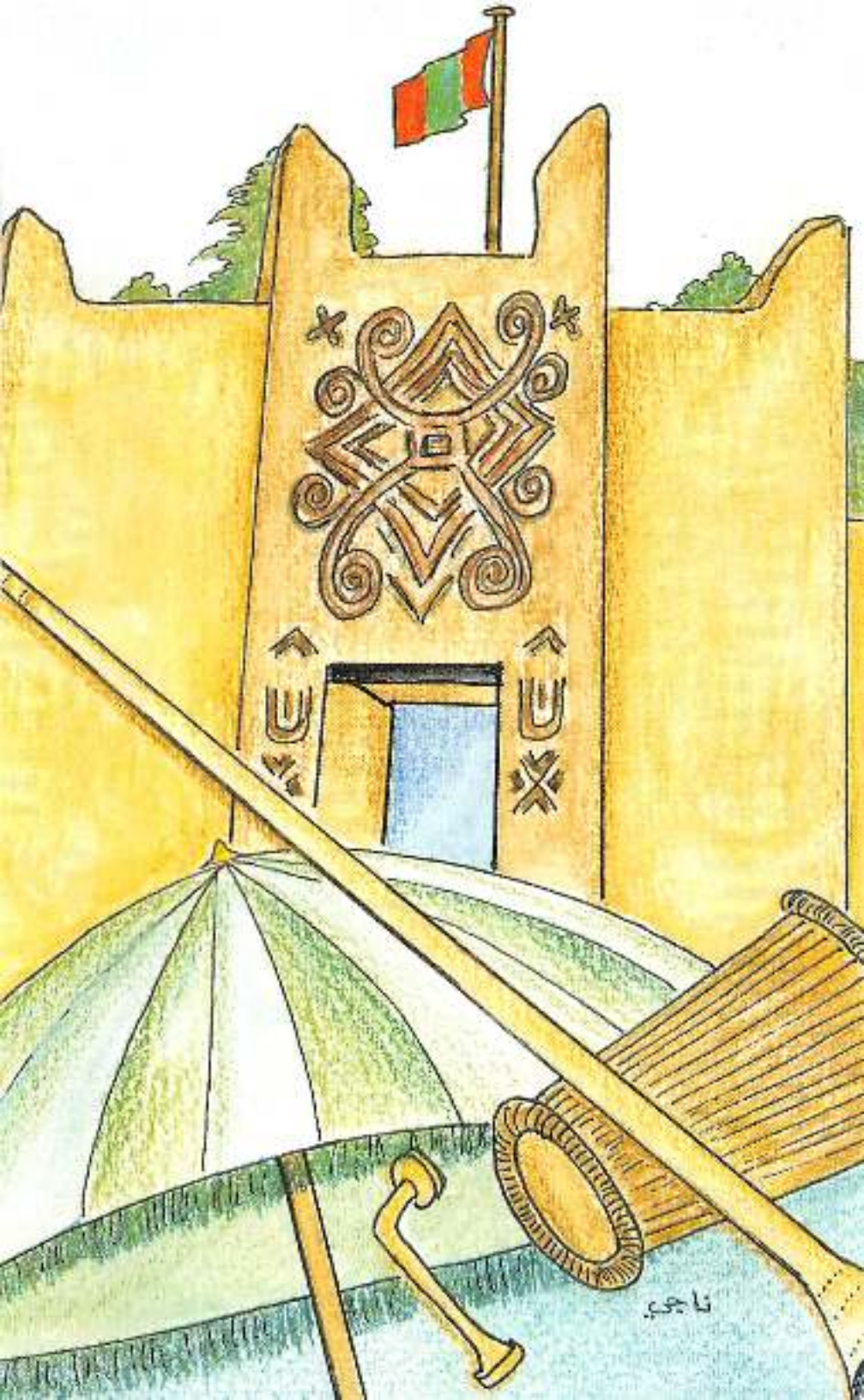
The largest city near to Giginya village is Kano where the *emir* or ruler has his palace. Most families from my village travel to Kano for the 'eid celebrations. It has always been customary for an Islamic ruler to attend the *salat al-'eid*. In Hausaland, we pray *salat al-'eid* in large open-air prayer grounds called *musallacin idi*, usually located on the outskirts of town. After the morning prayers, everyone proceeds to the prayer ground. District heads and village chiefs along with their guards ride on beautifully decorated horses. The last to arrive on horseback at the *musallacin idi* is the Emir of Kano. A large white and pale green embroidered silk umbrella shades the Emir and rises above the heads of his many black turbaned bodyguards.

After 'eid prayers are over, it is the custom to follow a festive procession of district and village leaders, their courtiers and servants, to the courtyard of the Emir's palace. When he is at home, the Emir's flag flies high above the entrance gate. The *durbar* ceremony now begins! Thousands of people in their best 'eid clothes fill the streets and all converge on the Emir's palace. Upon entering the open sandy courtyard, horsemen gallop towards the Emir's viewing stand where they offer *jahi*, or salutations of allegiance.

Drumming and the sounds of *kakaki*, or long ceremonial silver trumpets, add to the colourful atmosphere. Finally, the Emir still mounted on his white stallion delivers his annual address in the Hausa language:

As-salaam aleykum! Barka da sallah! A very blessed 'eid to you all! Al-Hamdulillah, Thanks to Allah the Almighty for showing us yet another 'eid and for giving us a blessed, prosperous year of good health. Barka da sallah! Wa as-salaam aleykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu!

The 'eid holiday now officially begins with everyone going his separate way. Most return home to their villages to enjoy special sweet dishes and to meet and greet neighbours and relatives. Children visit houses to receive small gifts; they also are given cola nuts and sweets from people they meet on the street.



ناجي

This is our mosque which like our houses is made from mud. As Muslims we have a deep connection with the earth. Allah reminds us several times in the Holy Qur'an about our origins. In *surah al-mu'minun, ayah 12*, Allah says: *Wa la qad khalagna al-insana min sulalatin min teen.* "And indeed We created man (Adam) out of an extract of clay (water and earth)."

For centuries we have been using the traditional building materials found in our environment (earth, straw and wood) to construct attractive mosques, schools and houses. *Al-Hamdulillah*, we are still able to shape all our dwellings from earth.

The Berber dynasties of Morocco developed new techniques for building with mud a thousand years ago. These secrets were carried to the lands of the Sahel (including Hausaland) with the spread of Islam. The same building techniques were then passed on to the Muslims of Al-Andalus (Spain) and from there were taken to the new world by the Spaniards.

All Giginya villagers know how to make adobe or mud bricks. Earth and straw are mixed very carefully. No stones or pebbles can be in the earth or the bricks will crack. The mud mixture is placed in moulds; once the bricks are removed, they are dried in the sun. After several days in the sun, they are turned on their sides and the air and sun continue to bake them.

Earth buildings are made to last a long time, but they must be cared for. Each year, walls of mosques and houses are re-mudded by hand and the buildings are thus reborn. The re-mudding of our mosque in Giginya village is a very happy time. Everybody in the village helps out, even small children who especially like to mix the mud! We use the protruding wooden beams (*torons*) as ladders. Last year, my brother Ahmadu, climbed to the top of one of the towers of the mosque where he replaced a broken ostrich egg with a new one. The ostrich egg is a symbol of purity, but it also protects the edges of earth buildings when the heavy rains come.

Our mosque has a high mud terrace that prevents any flood waters from destroying its foundation. Long water spouts carry the run-off away from the walls. Can you see the calabash gourds that are growing beneath the water spout?



ناجی

According to tradition, Islam first came to Hausaland in the 15th century CE by merchants from Mali, a neighbouring state to the west. Knowledgeable, Allah-fearing Muslims have always been helpful in spreading the message of *al-din al-haq al-islam*. *Al-Hamdulillah*, my people were attracted to Islam because of the sincere and honest practicing Muslims they met.

During the reign of the Hausa *sarki* (king) Muhammadu Rumfa, (1463-1499), Islam became the official religion of Hausaland. This period was a golden age during which Islamic schools attracted scholars from as far away as Morocco and Egypt. Muhammadu Rumfa even asked such a scholar to write a book for him on how to rule a country according to the principles of Islam.

Kano and other great towns of Hausaland became centres of Islamic learning. Scholars would travel from one mosque or *madrassah* to the next conveying the knowledge they had to students.

My grandfather remembers meeting important *malams* (scholars) passing through our village years ago. They had left Kano and were on their way to Sokoto. These Islamic teachers sometimes stayed in our village mosque for several days. Everyone would try to attend the lessons that were given there.

This is the inside of our beautiful mosque in Giginya village. The heavy roof is supported by huge arched palm trunks plastered with mud. Traditional Hausa designs were added when the mud was wet. Our mosque has thick walls and narrow windows so it is wonderfully cool inside during the hot, dry season. I read Qur'an here with my *malam* each morning. He told me that two hundred years ago the great *mujaddid* Shehu Usman dan Fodio visited our village. After his visit, sitting in this very mosque, he prayed that *nur al-iman*, the "light of faith" might always shine in the hearts of the Muslims of Giginya village.



This is a beautiful handwritten page from a copy of the Qur'an my father bought for me in Sokoto last summer. It shows the opening *surah*, *surat al-fatihah*. Sokoto is the spiritual heart of Hausaland because it was from here that our beloved ancestor Shehu Usman dan Fodio (ʿUthman ibn Fudī) established his caliphate or Islamic state.

Usman dan Fodio is one of the most important figures in the history of Hausaland. We study his life and read his books at school. He was a Muslim who really changed his world for the better.

Usman dan Fodio was born in Hausaland in 1754. At that time, many of the Muslim leaders and their peoples were ignorant of the true teachings of Islam. As a child, Usman studied Islam with his father and other Islamic *malams* (teachers). He soon became a powerful preacher.

Usman dan Fodio travelled all over sub-Saharan Africa calling people to the religion of Allah. He wrote beautiful *qasidahs* or poems to attract people to *din al-haq*. He wrote more than one hundred books in Arabic, Hausa, and the Fulfulde languages. He always wrote like a *malam* instructing his people on topics like the proper performance of ablution and ritual prayers.

During his lifetime, Usman dan Fodio tried hard to revive the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. First and foremost, he was an educator. He went directly to princes and kings and taught them the true message of Islam and then invited them all to practice it. Once he refused a large bribe of gold and demanded freedom and justice for Muslims to practice and preach Islam.

Many leaders in Hausaland prevented girls from receiving any education. Usman dan Fodio, however, strongly encouraged and supported the education of women. He always reminded his followers what the Prophet ﷺ had said: "Seeking knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim, male or female."

Usman dan Fodio's *jihad* against *kufr* was successful, *Al-Hamdulillah*. In 1817, Usman dan Fodio (*rahmatu Allahi 'aleyh*) died in Sokoto where even today the spirit of his *jihad* is still alive in the hearts of Muslims.

سُورَةُ قَاتَةِ الْكِتَابِ مَكِّيَّةٌ
وَهِيَ سَبْعٌ آيَاتٍ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ الرَّحْمَنِ
الرَّحِيمِ مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ آيَاتُكَ
تَعْبُدُ آيَاتُكَ فَتَسْتَعِينُ أَهْدِنَا
الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ
الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ
الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ
وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

سورة قاتة الكتاب



سورة

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In Hausaland, we begin to study the Qur'an at an early age. For centuries, there have been important centres of Islamic and Qur'anic studies in the Sahel region of Africa. In Giginya village all children try to memorize as much Qur'an as they can.

My older brother Ahmadu taught me the Arabic script before I started Qur'an school. When I was four years old, I began my serious study of the Qur'an. My *malam* (teacher) taught me to read the first ten *surahs* of the Qur'an. After memorizing these correctly, I was given my first *allo* or wooden writing tablet.

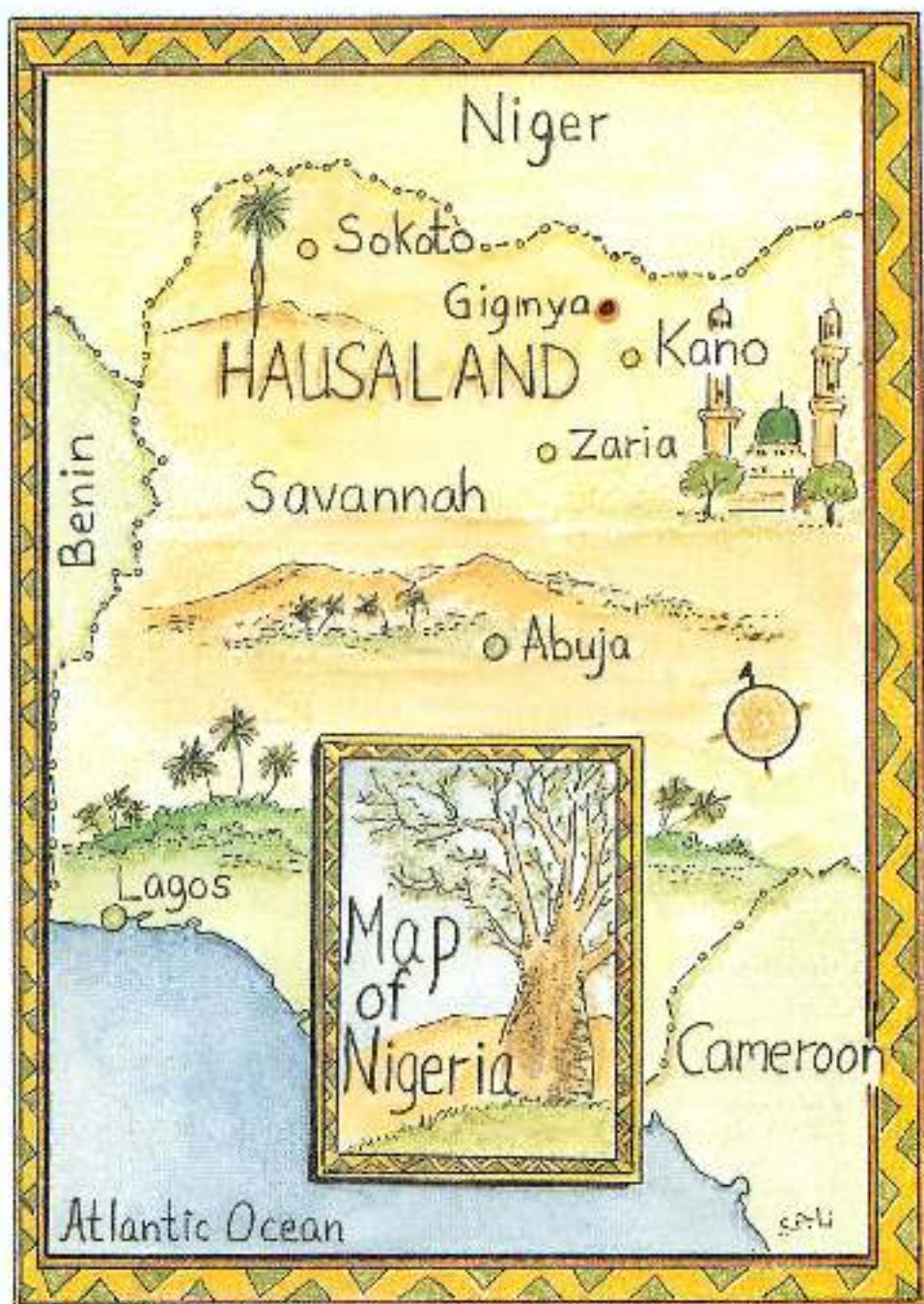
I would use a simple reed pen and a special ink prepared by my *malam* to write the *surahs* on my tablet. I could not wash off my board until I had memorized all that I had written on it. *Al-Hamdulillah*, I was a good student and after I had learned to write and memorize the first *juz* of the Qur'an, my mother and father were of course very pleased. My mother made some very tasty bean cakes which she gave as *sadaqah* to the poor people of our village.

You can see my *allo*; it is the one in front with some writing on it. *Al-Hamdulillah*, after years of practice, I am now able to write Arabic well. My *malam* says I have the best handwriting of all the children in Giginya village! We use the Sudani form of the Maghrabi script to write the Qur'an .

Last year, my brother Ahmadu, graduated from Qur'anic school, *Al-Hamdulillah*. Many *malams*, pupils, friends, and relatives were invited to our house to give thanks to Allah. As is the custom, Ahmadu's *malam* had written the first eighth part of *surah al-baqarah* on one side of his *allo*. On the other side, he had drawn a beautiful design using colourful inks. In a special ceremony, Ahmadu read a portion of the Qur'an on his board and then received a special prayer from his *malam*. Following this, we all ate a delicious meal my mother and aunt had prepared. Everyone present congratulated Ahmadu and all the younger boys, including myself, prayed that we too, *Insha Allah*, might be successful in memorizing the entire Qur'an and living our lives under its shade and protection.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ يَرِافِقُوا
إِذَا تَدَايَنْتُمْ
بِدَيْرِ السَّيِّ



My Islamic Village

Also in this series:

My Turkish Village
My Yemeni Village
My Moroccan Village

Dear Children: This book is for you. In it you will read all about 'Abd al-Khaliq's beautiful village in Hausaland, Northern Nigeria. The Muslims of Giginya village are very hard working, creative people. You will learn many things about their interesting lives.

'Abd al-Khaliq speaks the beautiful Hausa language which has a very rich oral tradition. The language is still full of hundreds of clever proverbs that enliven conversations. One such proverb is the following:

Inuwar giginya na nesa ke sha.

"Those farther away are most likely to enjoy the shade of a giginya [palm] tree."

Do you see the wisdom in this proverb?



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ISBN 81-7898-198-X



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