

INSIGHT INTO THE STYLISTIC AND THEMATIC FEATURES OF THE ARABIC LITERARY WRITINGS OF NIGERIAN PROVENANCE

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Abstract. Arabic writing in Nigeria is not novel. Novelty, however, is found in the variations of styles adopted by authors of different cultural and ideological backgrounds. This paper examined the main features of Arabic literature by non-Arabs in sub-Saharan Africa with specific reference to Nigeria. It employed historical and contextual methods to assess and appraise the common stylistic and thematic features of the Arabic works of the Arabic literati of Nigerian provenance, whose propensity for religiosity influenced their texts. The prologues and epilogues of the writings feature religious doxologies which strongly contrast with the early Arabic writings of the classical period in Arab history. The prevalence of Islamic writings in the curricula of traditional Arabic settings may be a contributing element. Arabic works of these scholars exhibit a strong predilection and preference for styles that are embedded in Islamic religious tradition, law and lore. This paper attempted an examination of the predisposing factors as well as the extent of the religious influence. The religious background of these writers influenced their styles and themes as reflected in the language, content and context of their texts. The common themes, especially of the traditional Arabic works by Nigerian authors are threnody, panegyric, historiography, epistolography, distress appeal, invective poetry, occasional poems and didacticism. Despite that Arabic writings are not linguistically accessible to a large number of audiences except those who understand Arabic language; critics' efforts, especially through the medium of English, in the past and in the recent time have been making Arabic writings accessible for the understanding of their core features.

Keywords: Arabic literature, *Maghribī* scripts, Nigeria, styles, themes, 'Ulamā', Yorubaland

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1. Introduction

This paper examines the genres and motifs of the traditional Arabic literary works of Nigerian authors. It offers an insight into the significant contributions of these Arabic literary writings to overall literary landscape of Nigeria. In Nigeria, as well as in West Africa, Arabic literature and language predate English. Arabic's influence on native speakers of Nigerian languages, including Hausa, Fulfulde and Yoruba, has been noted in the works of native West African Arabic authors and in the original language written in Arabic script. (Malik, 1980, p. 32)

This paper examines the stylistic as well as the thematic features of the Arabic writing showing their peculiarities in comparison to literary writings in English language in some cases. The predominant style of the traditional Arabic writings in Nigeria is the writer's propensity for religiosity. Their writings exhibit a strong predilection and preference for styles that are embedded in Islamic religious tradition, law and lore. The prologues and epilogues of the writings feature religious doxologies which strongly contrast with the early Arabic writings of the classical period in Arab history. Here, we wish to expound on this by looking at the opening styles of poetry as well as the prose works of these scholars.

Maghribī is a system of writing adopted in the traditional Arabic works of Nigerian provenance. Main features of this system and their application in the writings are examined. This paper also examines other features of the writings such as display of humility through the expression of self-abnegation, description of vowels and application of chronogram, due acknowledgement of sources based on the traditional system of citation of references and usage of Arabic language. There is also a focus on contents and forms of their writings such as threnody, panegyric, historiography, distress appeal, invective poetry and occasional poems as well as didacticism.

2. Methodology

The paper employed both historical and contextual methods in examining the common stylistic and thematic features of the Arabic works of the Arabic writers of Nigerian provenance. Purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the reviewed specimens of their writings to support our submissions. It is remarkable that text evidence was not provided for all identified genres and motifs for the factor of space and avoidance of digression from the main focus of our discussion. The paper examined the predisposing factors for the observed thematic and stylistic features in these writings. The study derived information primarily from consultation of relevant literature. This method was adopted because of its reliance on extant sound submissions, which served as background to our analyses in this paper. The method is not empirical, it requires no instruments for data collection and it is not such that is verifiable by means of scientific experimentation. For the reliability and validity of the sources, we ensured the authenticity of every literature consulted.

3. Style

It should be remarked that there will be as many distinct styles as there are writers, as rightly noted by Abdul-Rahmon (1995, p.315). The freedom of each writer to select his own style and mode of expression is equally true. According to Cuddon (1979, p.191), style is the way words are arranged to effectively convey the author's uniqueness as well as the concept and intention he has in mind. It is the process of adapting one's language to one's concept. In the sense that personality is expressed through style. Here, an analysis of the prevalent styles used in the Arabic writings Nigerian provenance, especially the traditional ones is attempted.

3.1. *Maghribī Script*

Traditional Arabic writings in Nigeria are of the *Maghribī* scripts, the earliest variety of *Naskhī*. It was originally known as *Qayrawānī*, named after the city of Qayrawān. This style of Arabic writing originated towards the second century of *Hijra* (Imamudeen, 1983, p. 13). As previously mentioned, the *Maghribī* script is regarded as the oldest form of *Naskhī*, however it is not included in *Aqlām 'al-sittah* (the six scripts), which include *Naskh*, *Thuluth*, *Muhaqqaq*, *Rayhānī*, *Ruq'ah*, and *Tawqī'i*. Our analysis demonstrates that *Kūfī*, the original offshoot of *Naskhī*, is the direct source of *Maghribī*. (Imamudeen, 1983, p. 13). This *Kūfī* script is derived from *Kūfah*, the Umayyad main centre of Arabo-Islamic cultural activities in Iraq.

Though *Maghribī* style is partly *Naskhī*, it is similar to *Kūfā* and it preserves the punctuation of the second century *Kūfī* writings. Paragraphs are indicated with rubric and the writer may not necessarily go to start this on a fresh line. In English, spectacular words are written in italics but in Arabic *Maghribī* scripts, these are given another colour or vowels different from the other words within the sentence. The same style is applicable to topics.

If *hamzah* (an Arabic tonal sign which guides proper identification and pronunciation of a word) comes within a word, it is written like a big dot or it is left out completely while its space is also vacant in such word. Where a word starts with elongated *alif* (Arabic tonal sign which guides proper identification and pronunciation of a word), an *hamzah* is written as a prefix to that *alif*. In addition, *alif* of elongation after *fathah* (an Arabic tonal sign which guides proper identification and pronunciation of a word) is written as a small diagonal *alif* hanging in the air. Furthermore, comments are made on the margin of the manuscripts, possibly to explain strange terms or words. This style is however, not peculiar to the traditional Arabic works of Nigerian authors; it is a common feature of Arabic manuscripts over the ages.

As opposed to English language where there are punctuation marks, there are no punctuation marks in *Maghribī* script. Full stop is indicated by (.:) which means – “therefore” in English interpretation. Also, it is indicated by the words like ‘*tammāt*’ or ‘*intahā*’ both meaning ‘*it is finished*’. Other punctuation marks like comma, colon, semi-colon, inverted-comma and so on, are left un-represented in their writings.

In English, spectacular words are given in italics but in *Maghribī* style, such words are produced in another colour while comments on such words are provided at the margin of the text. Such comments are sometimes many that they tend to distract reader from the main thrust of discussions. Modern page-numbering is not adopted in *Maghribī* scripts but the method known as *Matashi*. Folorunsho (1995, p.36) describes *Matashi* as a terminology connoting that the first word of succeeding page is put at the bottom left corner of the preceding page and this is meant to serve the purpose of page-numbering.

3.2. *Nasīb (Preamble)*

An amatory preface known as a *nasīb* plays a crucial role in classical Arab-Islamic poetry. "The classic amatory preface, and elegiac memory of love in which the poet conveys his gloomy and wistful meditation over the remains of the deserted encampment of the beloved," is how Badawi (1975, p.3) defines *Nasīb*. Subsequent poets in the ensuing periods of Arab-Islamic history adopted this technique. Later, as a result of Islam's influence, poets began using this kind of introduction differently. In contrast to the literary productions' openings, which were characterised by an appeal to weep for the remnants and evidence of the beloved one's dwelling, it focused on piqueing their audience's curiosity with a more rational start. Abdul-Rahmon (1989, p.15) observes that the traditional Arabic writers of

Nigerian extraction also substituted the traditional *Nasīb* for doxology with a view to erasing the un-Islamic elements in the preamble.

It has been determined that one significant element that is typically evident in the literary works of Nigerian 'Ulamā' such as Uthman dan Fodio, Wazir Gidado of Sokoto, Abdullah bin Fūdī and other prominent scholars of Nigerian extraction, is religion, especially Islamic influence. A contributing reason to this influence is the literature's motif. The majority of Nigerian-produced Arabic prose and poetry mostly address Islamic topics (Sirajudeen, 2009, p.230). The main purpose of this body of writing was to instruct readers in Islam. The prevalence of Islamic writings in the curricula of traditional Arabic settings may also be a contributing element. The following is how Raji (1994) explains this observation:

Since Arabic poetry among the Arab Muslims cannot completely free itself from religious tradition, no substantial degree of modernization of it may be expected from the non-Arab Muslims among whom it has remained from time, and integral part of Islamic scholarship tradition.(89)

It is, therefore, not uncommon that the writings of Nigerian 'Ulamā' exhibit religious traits as can be seen in the Arabic writings of the other parts of the world over the ages. Furthermore, it is apposite to note that this propensity for religiosity is not peculiar to literary productions in Arabic as it is a general feature in poetry. Stressing this, Ridler (1963, p.273) observes that we might anticipate a close relationship between the religious and poetic impulses as human emotions are constantly expressed in some type of rhythm. But if we go back to the earliest days of any race, we can find that poetry begins with a utilitarian goal that may be categorised as religious, whether it be incantation, praise, or propitiation.

Ridler's view (Ridler, 1963, p.273) is consistent with Abdul-Azeez's (2016, p.406) observation that for Nigerian traditional Arabic writers, the Arabic language holds a special place in their hearts since they consider themselves to be scholars of Islam first and foremost. Their writing is therefore influenced by religion. The preface is a section of the text that Nigerian Arabic writers use to include religious doxology, self-abnegation or humility statements, and the writer's affiliation (to his tribe, instructor, school of thought, or association).

All of these are meant to take the place of the classical preamble's un-Islamic contents. The manner in which the theme, compositional goal, and author are introduced is another element of the beginning. In a classical setting, a poet may not even introduce himself and rarely explains the reason behind his compositions. The narrators or viewers of the sequence, particularly the themes, were left to spread this knowledge (Khani, 1985, p.51). It must be stressed that these features of *Nasīb* are applicable to all classifications of their writings, poetry as well as prose.

Their openings were either in prose or in verse. Titles were also fashioned out in rhymes and musical renditions. They used long introductions, which include *Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* and seeking of peace and blessings for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). After these, the author would employ onomastics by referring to himself with an epithet such as '*Al-faqīr 'ilā Allah*, (the-poor creature who needs Allah's assistance) or '*Al-murtajī rahmah rabbihi*(he who wants his Lord's blessings) and so on. He would then associate himself with his town, tribe, teacher or school. The following descriptions are noted in their writings: *As-Saktawi*(meaning a native of Sokoto), *Al-Fulani* (meaning of Fulani tribe), *Al-Maliki* (a disciple of Malik School of Islamic Jurisprudence), *Al-Markazi*(an alumnus of *Markaz*) and so on. These are common in the writings of Uthman dan Fodio, Wazir Gidado of Sokoto, Abdullah bin Fūdī and other prominent scholars of Nigerian extraction.

One significant aspect of the opening, one should note, is its connection to the main theme of the write-up. The substance or significant sections of the write-up are stated in some of the openings and this undoubtedly serves the purpose of modern table of contents. An example of their openings is cited by Khani(1985) as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Prayer and peace be upon Muhammad. The poor servant who is in need of the mercy of his Lord, Uthman b. Muhammad b. Salih, known as Ibn Fudi, May Allah have mercy on them, Amin, Praise be to Allah who favoured us with the blessings of faith and Islam and guide us through our Master Muhammad, may the most perfect blessing and peace of Allah be on him. Next, this book is called *Najm al-Ikhwān*, so that they (the brothers) might be guided by it (in dealing) with contemporary affairs. I included in it an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion and it is useful for the one who depends on it (51).

An example of their *Nasīb* (Preamble) earlier cited by Folorunsho (2022, p.58) , includes the following:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم, الحمد لله الذى يحيى ويميت وهو على كل شئ قدير والصلاة والسلام
على سائر الانبياء والمرسلين وعلى امهم اجمعين. وبعد, فقد قدمت هذه الكر اسة الصغيرة
لتقف على خلاصة تاريخ الحاج يعقوب

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful Praise be to Allah Who gives and takes life, He is Powerful on all things. May the peace and blessing (of Allah) be upon the Prophets and messengers (of Allah) and their entire followers. I am presenting to you – my dear reader- this small pamphlet for you to be acquainted with a summary of the biography of late Alhaj Ya‘qūb... (Extracted from a manuscript entitled *‘Arā ‘l-mawt*)

3.3 Features of Epilogues of their Writings

As recorded in the beginning of either their prose or verse writings, Abdul-Rahmon(1995, p.325)notes that doxology used to take a significant portion of their closings. The poems are closed with not only the doxology but the number of lines in the composition as well as the poetic metre adopted probably, because the Qur’ān specially enjoins believers to seek blessings for the Prophet of God and to offer thanks to Allah. The tradition of Prophet Muhammad himself advises Muslims to begin and end activities by seeking blessings for him and emphasizes the magnificent of the rewards that await those who do so. Humility and modesty are conspicuously shown as they conclude their works admitting their weakness and imperfection and at times they would ask for pardon for whatever mistakes that may be found in such works. A specimen of the epilogue from *Nūniyyah* of Muhammad ‘al-Sa‘īd Muhammad al-Jāmi‘ is cited below

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم الحمد لله الذى زين السماء بالشهب وأنزل الماء من السحب والصلاة والسلام على
سيدنا محمد

الكمال وعلى آله وأصحابه العداو وغفرا ورحما لعبد العزيز فايّ وأسأل عونا لشيخى أحمد اللبيب الرين
وبعد، فهذه القصيدة

نظمها إبنكم خادم العلم المفتقر إلى رحمة الله تعالى محمد السعيد محمد الجامع لإظهار الشكر على صنائع
الله وعلى حفلة

الإستجازة وإفتتاح تفسير القرآن الكريم الواقعة بمشيئته تعالى يوم الأربعاء. بتاريخ ٢٢ ٢٠٠٠

3.3. Meaning

In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful. Thanks to Allah Who beautified the sky with stars and brought downpour from cloud. May the blessing and peace be on our perfect leader -Muhammad and his just household and companions. May the forgiveness and blessing of Allah be on ‘Abdul-‘Azīz Faya. I seek for succour from (Allah) for Ahmad my intelligent and handsome teacher. This ode was composed by your son, servant of knowledge (who is) in need of the blessing of the Almighty Allah, Muhammad ‘al-Sa‘īd Muhammad ‘al-Jāmi‘, to thank Allah on His deeds. Also on the graduation ceremony and commencement of the studying of Qur’ānic exegesis holding by Allah’s wish on Wednesday 22/3/2000,

3.4. Expression of Humility

Expressions of self-abnegation, such as *Al-‘abd’al-faqīr* (the poor servant) and so on, feature prominently on the pages of their writings. Their teachers are also mentioned by their first names in some cases, instead of their own (writers’) names, leaving one in confusion of identifying the author in case of two teachers sharing similar first name or a teacher with many students. Considering the level of this humility, one may be tempted to accuse them of the lack of confidence and the need to justify their shortcomings. However, an assessment of some of their works proves that some, if not all of them, are mystics and this mysticism which demands for humility as an attribute of its votaries definitely has its own dominant effects on their writings.

3.5. Description of Vowels

It is significant to note that not all of their writings make proper use of vowels. In an attempt to guard against wrong use of vowels, the writers describe them (the vowels) by telling the reader which vowel is to be on a letter. This is applicable to names of towns and personalities. It should be noted that their aim is based on the assumption that they are writing for readers beyond their localities and not for local consumption (Quadri, 1986, p.56).

One, however, feels that these vowels could have better been placed on the letters without any instruction to the reader because it tends to disturb the attention of the reader from following the main discussion in sequence.

3.6. Application of *Abjadiyyah* (Chronogram)

Roman and English alphabets or figures are used for sub-numbering. Arabic letters are given arithmetical values in Maghribī scripts and are utilised in *Abjadiyyah*, a dating or numbering system. The main function of *abjadiyyah* in standard Arabic is to sub-number or list the Roman characters or alphabets used in English writing. During the period of decadence (1258-1798 C.E.), it grew to become another method of numbering and was thus adopted in *Maghribī* scripts. According to Folorunsho (2020, p.53), *Abjadiyyah* is one of the common features of the Arabic writings of Nigerian ‘*Ulamā*’, including Uthman dan Fodio, Wazir Gidado of Sokoto, Abdullah bin Fūdī and other prominent scholars of Nigerian extraction. Providing the names of specific ‘*Ulamā*’ here could lead to unnecessary elongation of our discussion. It suffices to state *Abjadiyyah* is commonly found in the Arabic texts of Nigerian provenance. Sanni (2017, p.42) discusses the propensity for the tradition of using *Abjadiyyah* in the Sudanic African literary productions and indeed by Yoruba authors in Arabic, some of whom we have mentioned with their sampled works in this paper, in line with our submission.

What is more puzzling about these formulae, according to Gwarzo (1976, p.116), is that there are two ways of deciphering them - “Western” and “Eastern” methods. The puzzle arises when one considers the fact that in the two methods, Arabic letters are not assigned similar numbers and it becomes impossible at times knowing which of the two methods is adopted in a particular work. In the chronogram, all Arabic letters are assigned similar arithmetical values except in six of these numbers where different letters are given to represent them. These are:

Numbers	Eastern method	Western method
60	س	ص
90	ص	ض
300	ش	س
800	ض	ظ
900	ظ	غ
1,000	غ	ش

3.7. Acknowledgement of Sources

In his work titled *A Critical Study of Selected Arabic Works of Osogbo 'Ulamā'*, Folorunsho (1994, p.84) observes the dominance of Arabic writings by quotations from other writings while their own words are proportionally small to the quotations. They also hardly acknowledge their sources. This is a serious defect in their writings. On the other hand, authors are mentioned in some places with no reference to the book of such authors from which views are borrowed. Books are mentioned in some places without the names of their authors or pages consulted. Some views are even borrowed with no reference at all to where they could be found or those who expressed them. As for the Qur'ānic quotations or the sayings of the Prophet (Hadith), references are sparingly cited. In some instances, copying from other sources is indicated by expression like: “they are of the opinion...” (Who are they?) “Ibn Battuta says ...” (where?), “in so and so book, it recorded that...” (who is the author?). In some cases, ideas or facts lifted are just incorporated into their writings thus leaving the reader to assume that they are totally responsible for all their submissions.

Defending their writings against the accusation of plagiarism, however, Abdul-Rahmon (1989, p.11) says:

The features and styles of their works show some of the characteristics of *'Asral-'inhitāt* writings when it was believed that nothing new could be added to the ideas of the classical writers. They adopted the traits not because they meant to plagiarize but basically to make available to their students and colleagues ideas and materials needed for learning which are contained in the books of the decadent period and which are scarce to obtain owing to communication problem.

The inference from Abdul-Rahmon's view is that supporting one's point with quotations from accepted authorities strengthens one's point of argument provided such authorities are adequately acknowledged. The submission may not be accorded the weight it deserves if the sources are not acknowledged. Few of them, however, acknowledge their sources though such acknowledgements are always contrary to the modern days' mode of reference-making. For instance, 'Ibn Fūdī was quoted by Khani (1985, p.50) as saying that 'everything I have explained to you is entirely mine. To draw your attention to what the classic scholars have said, I am merely following their lead; I have never mentioned anything without giving credit to the original author. You can check up any book I've copied if you'd like'

It is significant to note that the defects noted here are observable in the traditional, the old writings which are still currently available in manuscripts, when the authors lacked the essential knowledge of reference-making. The modern Arabic writings in Nigeria most of which are published in various reputable outlets comply with the modern days' mode of reference-making

3.8. Compliance with Grammatical / Metric Rules

The effect of the native languages of the writers is found in their writings. In this regard, some metric mistakes and grammatical defects are noted where some works are forced to rhyme inaccurately. One may, however excuse them for this knowing that mastery and proficiency in any language can be effective in the environment where such language is spoken as the mother-tongue (Folorunsho, 1995, p.38)

Concentration on prose more than poem is equally noted. This is due to the metrical constraint in poetry which prose writing would not present. Abdul-Rahmon (1989, p.12) observes that the type of the system adopted in their educational pursuit could not have induced standard compositions be it in verse or prose. Most of the available texts are on religious observance and the few ones available on language are not enough to equip the writers for voluminous original compositions. This accounts for the availability of errors in their inputs.

An assessment of some of their writings shows that neither their prose nor their verses are totally free from errors. Some of their poems do not fit into the traditional sixteen metres of Arabic poetry as they adopt free verse. Though we sincerely recognize the richness of their vocabularies, the smoothness of their expressions, as well as their commendable discursive ability, yet it remains a fact that the works are not totally error-free.

Folorunsho (1995, p.38) has observed that this evidence of the dynamic, adaptive nature of Arabic as a scholarly lingua franca in a non-native context in language skill should be understood in view of the ill-organized system and one-sidedness of their syntax and discourse in which attention was not given to the proficiency in spoken and written Arabic. Arabic was studied only from religious point of view and so, no serious attention was given to the aspects of its grammar. Giving a true picture of the situation with regards to Nigerian traditional Arabic writers in general and assessing the Arabic writings of the 'Ulamā' of Ibadan, Abdul Rahmon (1989) says :

The 'Ulamā' concentrated more on prose than poems. This was due to the metrical constraints in poetry which prose writing would not present. Also the types of the system adopted in their educational pursuit could not have induced standard composition be it verse or prose. Most of the textbooks studied were on religious observance...the few works studied on language

were not primary meant to equip them for voluminous or
iginal compositions (3).

The styles reviewed above are relevant to the early Arabic writings in Nigeria. Modern writings in Nigeria are free to a large extent from these styles as they now appear in the same forms with the ones written even by the native-speakers of the language. Though in some cases, total divorce seems impossible yet it is remarkable that nothing marks the Arabic works of Nigerian authors different from the ones available from the other parts of the world today.

4. Thematic Features

There will be as many distinct motifs or themes as there are writers, for the liberty of each writer to determine the focus of his writing. Here, an insight is provided on the prevalent themes used in the Arabic writings Nigerian provenance, especially the traditional ones is attempted.

4.1. *Dīnī* (Religious) Themes

Because teaching the worth of Islam, their faith, is a fundamental requirement for these writings, an analysis of Nigerian authors' traditional Arabic works demonstrates that religious themes become more prevalent in their works. An exploratory analysis of the themes of the Arabic writings of Nigerian authors in general, and the Yoruba writers of Arabic in particular, reveals that religious themes gain prominence in their literary works, as the basic necessity for these writings is to teach the value of Islam, their religion. Their works, whether in prose or verse, cover such purely religious and pietistic themes as *Wa'z* (exhortation), *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), *Hikmah* (gnomic), *Tawhīd* (theology) or *Ta'lim* (instruction), composed to teach an aspect or more of the religion of Islam (Folorunsho, 2022, p.54). Prominent cultivators of these themes include Uthman dan Fodio, Wazir Gidado of Sokoto, Abdullah bin Fūdī, Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilūrī, Shaykh Mustafa Zughlūl As-Sunūsī and other prominent Arabic writers of Nigerian origin. Factors of space and avoidance of digression from the main thrust of this study would prevent us from bringing samples from their voluminous writings.

4.2. *Tārīkhī* (Historical) Writings

The contribution of Arabic works to the documentation of Nigeria history in particular and West African in general cannot be underestimated. It has been observed that by the sixteenth century of the Christian era, Arabic was used in Bornu as a vehicle of historical documentation. Thus, in Bornu as in so many parts of the Western Sudan, the only historical records prior to those of the nineteenth century European travellers were written in Arabic by pious scholars, royal chroniclers, travellers, merchants, and the like. It was through this language that it was possible to hold together large states for long periods for it provided the medium for writing dispatches and orders for summoning military aid and for issuing administrative directives to provincial governors (Malik, 1980, p. 17).

4.3. *Murāsalaḥ* (Epistolography)

Correspondence notes or poems form the bulk of traditional Arabic writings in Nigeria. Such writings demonstrate the level of relationship between the writers and the addressees as they deal primarily with interpersonal relationship. Since such notes or poems require secrecy and confidentiality in some cases, they are not normally published for public consumption. While describing the catalyst for epistolography in the traditional setting, Oseni (2002, p.7) states that Arabic literacy spread widely throughout Nigeria during the Turkish Period (1258–1798 CE), which was marked by ostentatious and occasionally dull elaborate compositions and a preference for form over meaning. As a result, early Arabic-speaking Nigerian writers tended to view verbal juggling and excessive use of literacy artifices as a sign of superiority,

erudition, and wisdom. Between Muslim kings and non-Muslim rulers, there were epistolary interactions.

4.4. *Shi'r 'Al-Munāsabāt (Occasional Poems)*

Haywood (1971, p.87) describes occasional poems as the verses composed to celebrate particular occasions of public interest. A more recent genre introduced into the literary enterprise in Nigeria is *Shi'r al-munāsabāt* (occasional poetry). The genre was not significantly patronised in the traditional setting. There is hardly any Islamic event that will not attract the literary attention of our '*Ulamā*'. It has further been observed that 'a wide range of Islamic events now involves the recitation of Arabic poems. Folorunsho (2020, p.51) quotes Abubakre and Reichmuth(1997, p.191) as observing that poems of 'salutation' (*Tarhīb*) or congratulation' (*Tahni'ah*) sometimes even printed and distributed for the occasion have become common elements in religious celebrations in Nigeria

4.5. *Rithā' (Elegy, Threnody)*

Elegy is intended to bewail the death of the loved ones. It also serves as a kind of eye-opener for a comprehensive study on the deceased. In fact, it preserves the memory of the deceased for generations to come. Folorunsho(2020, p.50) observes that *Rithā'* is not only a means by which the memories of the deceased are recollected, it is also a medium of extolling the virtues of the deceased, which had ceased with his demise. From these definitions, it can be deduced that elegiac elements are often mixed with praise singing and this feature is observable in Arabic elegies over the ages. This assertion is attested to by Farrūkh (1969, p.83)attests to this with his submission that "elegy is a song of praise for the dead".

Furthermore, Abdullah(2004, p.380) quotes Ibn Rashiḳ Al-Qayrawānī as stating that

"there is no difference between elegy and praise, except that elegy indicates it is intended for a dead person by using 'was' or 'with his death we lost so and so', and similar expression to make it known (that) the person is dead"

In the classical milieu, a typical elegy would bewail and lament the death of the deceased and even call for his vengeance if he was killed (Arberry,1966, p.5).

4.6. *Madīh (Panegyric/Encomium)*

Panegyric embraces the celebration of the sterling qualities – such as scholarly erudition of a man, his generosity, religiosity, impeccability of character, humility and activities on Islamic propagation. It is a theme under the lyrical classification cultivated by our traditional '*Ulamā*'. This theme also embraces *Madā'ih 'Al-rasūl* – eulogy on Prophet Muhammad and eulogy on traditional rulers and distinguished personalities in some cases. The theme was highly cultivated by the traditional Nigerian Arabic literati; however, it is sometimes mixed up with elegy in their writings. *Madhur-rasūl* specifically connotes the panegyric verses composed in praise of Prophet Muhammad, both in his life time and after his death. Folorunsho (2020, p.50) draws our attention to the fact that these verses in the anthology of the Arabic poetry of Nigerian '*Ulamā*' are not meant to earn the poets a living or help them to acquire wealth, but to celebrate the sterling qualities in the eulogized personalities. Hiskett (1975, p.43) informs us that the origin of *Madhur-rasūl* can be traced to the days of the Prophet himself. Writing in the same vein, Yahya (1997, p.12) states that though the origin of panegyric on Prophet Muhammad dates back to the days of the Prophet himself, it did not develop into an independent genre of Arabic literature with its own motifs and class of exponents, until about seven centuries later.

A specimen of *Madhur-rasūl* is *Madhul-'asghar* , an encomiastic poem of 53 lines devoted to the eulogy of the Prophet Muhammad. It is the longest in the anthology of Shaykh Luqmān Salāhud-dīn. The composer, Shaykh Luqmān Salāhud-dīn, a budding Arabist of Ilorin extraction belongs to a family with long history of active participation in Islamic proselitization and diffusion of Arabic scholarship in Yorubaland. avoiiTextual evidence of this poem will not be cited here to safe the space and avoid digression from the main thrust of this papaer

4.7. *Istighāthah* (Distress Appeal)

Folorunsho (2018, p.24) describes *Istighāthah*, poems of appeal for relief and assistance during distress as the verses composed to ‘seek divine favour or protection. This genre is not always treated in isolation by Nigerian traditional Arabic verse makers. It features commonly as adjunct to other themes, notably elegy and eulogy. In fact, it usually occupies a significant portion in their elegies as they employ the medium to seek the forgiveness and mercy of the Almighty Allah for the departed souls.’

Sample of *Istighāthah* from their literary productions could be found in lines 82 to 89 of '*Al-qasīdah 'al-mīmiyyah fī rithā' 'al-khattāb 'al-dā'iyyah*, published in the *Handy Harvests* of Mustafa Adewale(2000). The lines bring a new dimension into elegy as supplication was not a familiar motif of dirges in the classical compositions as far as we know. It is one of the features of Arabic elegies in Nigeria. The unit is rounded up with a statement on the desire of the composer- to get relief from grief and remain blessed throughout his lifetime

فوكب به عبداً تقياً فإنه	٨٢
إلهي عظيم المنّ هل لك فندق	٨٣
فنزل به شيخاً نصيفاً فإنه	٨٤
ومرّ به الأخيار طه زعيمهم	٨٥
وصفّ له العلياء من كلّ أمة	٨٦
فيا ربّ أماناً إنّ أمانك ثابت	٨٧
وداعاً وداعاً من صميم قلوبنا	٨٨
رثيتك كيما أسلي وإنتي	٨٩
# لكسب مكان العز نجواه أدوم	
# تنزّله الإنسان مسعاه يكرم	
# لنيل مقام القرب في الزهد أدهم	
# وهزّ إليه الجند جبريل يزعم	
# وحفّ به الولدان والجوّ يبسم	
# لمن خاف في الدنيا وما كان يجرم	
# وبعد نساء العمر فالكلّ يقدم	
# متى دبّت الأنفاس قد أترّحم	

Translation

82. Please send the entourage to a pious servant, for him to get a worthy position shows the acceptance of his prayer

83. My Lord, the Best in offering rewards, do you have a guest house, where men with commendable deeds are hosted

84. Please lodge therein a Shaykh who has worked for this (exalted) place by his asceticism, like 'Adham

85. Parade before him the best of your servants headed by Tāhā (Muhammed S A W), detach angelss of honour to him under the leadership of Jibrīl

86. Line up for him the heads of nation, surround him with children whose refuge is like orphanage - under a pleasant weather

87. O! my Lord, grant us your protection, for it is constant for whoever is pious and abstains from sin.

88. Farewell, farewell, this is form the core of our hearts, after a long life everyone will board a similar carriage

89. I composed elegy on you to get relief from grief, so that I can remain blessed as long as I am alive.

4.8. *Ta'limī (Didactic Works)*

Didactic writings are the ones written primarily to teach. Didactic poetry and versification have been described by Abdul Rahmon (1992, p.28) as the verses composed to instruct. According to him, the term 'didactic' is used commonly for poetry which teaches morals. According to Preminger (1974, p.190), as noted earlier by Folorunsho (2018, p.42), didactic poem can also refer to poetry, which conveys information like astronomy, mathematics or rhetoric or systematic philosophy. The didactic Arabic writings in Nigeria are predominantly the ones focusing on religion, moral perfection and decent human relations. They are more in verses than in prose writings. *'Al-Hiwār* (Dialogue) is a didactic poem of 18 lines, of Nigerian provenance, composed by Mustafā Jumu'ah Adewale to enumerate the benefits derivable from seeking, and acquiring knowledge. It is one of the thirty *Qasā'id* contained in the *Dīwān* (anthology) of the author entitled *Buhayrat 'Al-'anāshīd* dated 1996.

4.9. *Hijā (Satire/Invective Poems)*

According to Folorunsho (2018, p.22), "satire is one of the traditional topics of Arabic poetry." During the Umayyad era, it became well-known due to the competition between its proponents, Akhtal, Farazdaq, and Jarīr. Abdul-Rahmon (1992, p.32) claims that the majority of these satirical works were the result of professional envy or tribal disputes among classical poets. Nigerian traditional Arabic poem writers take a cautious approach to their writing because they view their works primarily as a vehicle for religious propagation. In fact, this explains why there is a noticeable paucity of invective poetry in their works. An sample of their invective poetry is *Lāmiyyah*, a vitriolic satire composed by Mustafā Jumu'ah Adewale, an Arabic poet of Nigerian origin against an un-named opponent under the pretext of elegizing his late father. The title *Lāmiyyah* is derived from *Lām* – the rhyme letter of the poem. The original title of the poem is *'Abyāt qultuhā fi 'al-yawm 'al-thāmin min wafāt wālidī 'al-marhūm* Jumu'ah Adewale fi 11/6/1991CE *raddan 'alā man wasamahu bi maysām 'al-'ār* (The poem I read on the eighth day after the death of my father, the late Jumu'ah Adewale on 11/6//1991, in response to his reviler). Folorunsho(2019, p.36-42)has earlier studied the poem

5. Conclusion

Maghribī writing which is a development of *Kufic* script has been examined in this paper with attention on its features as applicable to the traditional Arabic writings of Nigerian authors. It identified the prominent features of the prologue as well as the epilogue of their writings as religious doxology, self-abnegation, introduction to the works as well as the writers and synopses on the contents of the works. Other aspects of the style dealt with are acknowledgement of sources, usage of chronogram as well as effective usage of language.

Attention was also directed towards the prominent themes of their writings which embraced threnody, panegyric, historiography, epistolography, distress appeal, invective poetry, occasional poems and didacticism. It should be noted that the work focused on the features of traditional Nigerian Arabic works available to us irrespective of the place of birth or descent of the writers in Nigeria.

It is hereby recommended that further comprehensive studies focusing specific geographical regions in Nigeria could be carried out, to give room for comparism and appraisal of the features of Arabic literary productions by the Arabic scholars in the selected

locales. A comparative study of the Arabic writings in Nigeria with the Arabic literature of the other parts of West Africa could be explored.

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