

Madhur-rasūl: An Insight into Encomiastic Verses in the Arabo-Islamic Literary Tradition in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The genre of Arabic poetry of Nigerian authorship could broadly be classified into lyrical and didactic. They contributed significantly to didacticism with their works on religious teachings, historical exposition, morality and language studies. Lyricism in their works comprises panegyrics, threnody, satire, occasional poems and distress appeal. Madhur-rasūl, which specifically connotes the encomiastic verses composed in praise of Prophet Muhammad, is one of the themes under lyrical classification cultivated in Nigeria. The study employed both historical and contextual methods in examining the specific social and cultural contexts that spurred the development of this genre in Arabic literature and its incursion into literary space in Nigeria, through a critical study of relevant literature. The content analysis method was employed in the thematic study of the purposively selected model. Madhul-'asghar li n-nabiyyi 'l-'akbar, a 53 line panegyric on Prophet Muhammad, composed by Shaykh Luqmān Salāhud-dīn, a Nigerian Arabic poet was selected for study, to provide an insight into the components of Arabic panegyrics in Nigeria. Apart from being a compass to researchers in Arabic literary scholarship in Nigeria, the study provides information about the creativity of Nigerian 'Ulamā' from which further studies could evolve. Translation of the selected poem to English marks a remarkable contribution. Information obtained from this work could be a veritable tool in showcasing the ingenuity of Nigerian 'Ulamā' as well as the worth of their Arabo-Islamic literary contributions and diversity in the contribution of Arabic scholars to literary activities in Nigeria

Introduction

The anthology of the Arabic encomiastic poetry in Nigeria comprises of eulogies on Prophet Muhammad and some distinguished personalities respectively. Nigeria is an integral component of the

geographical expression known as West Africa. Arabic scholars of Nigerian provenance have records of significant contributions to literary activities, with their works on various genres and style. Thematically, the Arabic poems composed by Nigerian 'Ulamā' can be classified into lyrical and

didacticism. Of their lyrical compositions are *Madhur-rasūl*, the encomiastic verses on Prophet Muhammad. These eulogies of various length, style and quality consume significant portions within the anthologies of the Arabic verses in Nigeria.

We observe the paucity of research efforts targeted at this genre within the literary contributions of Nigerian 'Ulamā'. This paper attempts to fill this vacuum with this modest overview. It examines the evolution of *Madhur-rasūl* in Arabo-Islamic literary space, its cultivation as well as features in Nigeria. A model of encomiastic verses of Nigerian provenance was selected to provide us an insight into the main features of this genre. *Madhul-'asghar li n-nabiyyi 'l-'akbar*, a 53 line *Madh* on Prophet Muhammad, composed by a Nigerian Arabic poet was selected for study. The paper features the translation of the text to English while the text was also subjected to thematic analysis.

***Madhur-rasūl*: Evolution, Features and Cultivation in Nigeria**

Panegyric verses embrace *Madhur-rasūl*, which is the eulogy on Prophet Muhammad, as well as traditional rulers and, in some cases, distinguished personalities. *Madhur-rasūl* specifically connotes the panegyric verses composed in praise of Prophet Muhammad, both in his life time and after his death. Folorunsho (2020:50) 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 (1975:43) informs us that the origin of *Madhur-rasūl* can be traced to the days of the Prophet himself. Writing in the same vein, Yahya (1997:12) 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. Tracing the evolution of encomiastic verses in Arabo-Islamic literary tradition, Stetkevych (2010) says:

The first poem to bear the sobriquet of Mantle Ode (*Qasīdat al-Burdah*) is Ka'b ibn Zuhayr's *Su'ād Has Departed* (*Bānat Su'ād*) that, tradition tells us, the pagan poet presented to the Prophet Muhammad on the occasion of his conversion to Islam. In many respects, then, Ka'b's poem marks the transition from the pre-Islamic poetic tradition, the earliest extant examples of which are dated to around 500 C.E. to the Islamic, which begins in 622 C.E. (1)

In the early days of Prophet Muhammad's mission, some poets led by Hasan Thābit sang the praise of the Prophet, emphasizing his moral qualities since childhood and highlighting the Islamic values and uniqueness of the prophetic mission to humanity (Yahya, 1997:12). Of what distinguishes *madh* from other poetic themes of pre-Islamic era, according to Ameen (2018:100), is that *madh* is somewhat inclusive of elements of other motifs. For instance, when Arab extolled the virtue of their clan particularly on the attainment of victory, good gesture, boldness and courage in the battle field they employed *fakhr* as poetic theme.

Furthermore, Hiskett (1975) submits that;

By the thirteenth century such poetry had become established in a formal mould and was associated with a stock of images, miracles and pathetic fallacies known by the Arabic term *mujizat*, 'the evidentiary miracles', that distinguished Muhammad's life and demonstrated God's special favour towards him (43).

Yahya(1997:13) observes that, though poets sang in praise of the Prophet during and after his life time, most literary critics regard a long poem popularly known as *Qasīdat al-Burdah* written by an Egyptian – Sharafud-dīn Muhammad b. Sa'īd 'al-Busayrī as the first long poem to be identified thematically as a full-fledged *Madhur-rasūl*, thus giving identity to this new genre. Writing in the same vein, Stetkevych (2010:70) informs us that the most renowned poem of praise to the Prophet Muhammad (*madīh nabawī*) and arguably the most famous poem in the Arabic language is that known as the Mantle Ode (*Qasīdat al-Burdah*) originally titled by its author as *Al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah fī Madh Khayr al-Bariyyah* (Pearly Stars in Praise of the Best of All Creation).

We are beholden to Abdullah (2004:375) on the classification of the poetic genres in the Arabic literary space in West Africa as follows:

West African Arabic poetry included two poetic genres: lyrical (*al-shi'r al-ghinā'ī*) and didactic (*al-shi'r al-talīmī*). Lyrical poetry represents the majority of poems. This genre also includes a wide range of forms, from panegyric (*al-madīh*) to elegy (*al-rithā'*). Its types include pride (*al-fakhr*), description (*al-wasf*), love (*al-ghazal*), fortitude (*al-hamāsah*), militantism (*shi'r al-jihād*), complaint and

nostalgia (*al-shakwā wa al-hanīn*), occasional poetry (*shi'r al-munāsabāt*), and encomiastic verse praising the Prophet Muhammad (*al-madā'ih al-nabawiyyah*).

It is commonly believed amongst the Muslims that eulogising the Prophet is a fulfillment of Qur'ānic injunction which the Almighty Allah commands all believers to discharge thus:

God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet, O you who believe, send your blessing on Him and salute him with all respect (Q.33:56)

In addition to the composition of panegyrics as a fulfillment of Qur'ānic injunction, other vital motifs that serve as catalysts for the composition of these verses have further been identified by Hunwick (1997:217) as follow:

'another avenue for expressing personal piety, while creating a work of devotional nature for the community was , the writing of poems in praise of the Prophet and the 'treatment' of some of the classical works of this genre. Poems extolling the Prophet's virtues and reminding Muslims of the model he provides for them such ,as the *'Ishrīniyyāt* of 'Al-Fāzāzī, or the *Burda* of 'Al-Būsīrī, or the more 'secular' praises of Ka'b b.Zuhayr's celebrated *Lāmiyyah Bānāt Su'ād*, are studied, recited and imitated'.

While analysing the style of the West African '*Ulamā'*' in the composition of their encomiastic verses, Abdullah (2004:375) observes that West African panegyric poetry resemble in style the panegyric poetry of Zuhayr Ibn Abi Sulma, famous panegyrist of the pre-Islamic period in Arabia. Particularly, he notes that

Zuhayr would only applaud a truly praiseworthy person, unlike some profiteers among the panegyric poets who were only anxious to fill their pockets with gold and silver. To the West African poets, praise seems to be an echo of admiration from the depth, of the soul. Praise was to them an expression of the love of absolute ideals and the passion for pure values (p.375)

From the foregoing, we can discover the active participation of West African '*Ulamā'*' in the cultivation of encomiastic verses. Specifically in

Nigeria, we have records of active participation of the Arabic literati in the cultivation of this genre. Of the earliest contribution to this genre was *Hal lī masīrah* of the celebrated twentieth century jihadist, Shaykh Uthmān b.Fūdī. Yahya(1997:13) also informs us about the preponderance of panegyric poetry within the anthologies of Kanem-Borno '*Ulamā'*'. According to him:

Eulogies of varying length and quality form a notable part of the corpus of the Kanem-Borno Arabic poetry. However, it is the eulogy of the Prophet himself rather than members of his household that seems to be popular among Kanem-Borno poets (p.13)

Madhul-'asghar li n-nabiyyi 'l-'akbar of Shaykh Luqmān Salāhud-dīn

Madhul-'asghar is 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. It is apposite to recall that his grandfather was Shaykh Salāhud-dīn Muhammadul-'Awwal , popularly known as Alfa Agba. Folorunsho (2011:134) notes that Alfa Agba was a scholar of Ilorin origin who laid solid foundation for Arabic and Islamic scholarship in Ikirun, a prominent rendezvous of Arabic literary scholarship in Yorubaland(Nigeria). This scholar (Alfa Agba), produced a good number of scholars who later became prominent in Yorubaland.

Madhul-'asghar is not as long as *Qasīdatu'l-burdah* yet it is also a lengthy poem, devoted solely to the eulogy of Prophet Muhammad. It is selected for study as a model of the Arabic encomiastic production within the anthologies of the Arabic verse makers in Nigeria. Furthermore, it is selected to protect it from going into oblivion as it is not published and widely circulated.

مدح الأصغر للنبي الأكبر للشيخ لقمان صلاح الدين

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

اللهم صلي على محمد وسلم

الحمد لله الوهاب على ساحتته النخاب وبيدين الإسلام

الأسباب وما يذكر إلا أولو الأبواب" وأصلي وأسلم على النبي

- ١٠ محمد مدحه فرج لكربتنا # وفيه برئتنا حقا من
السقم
- ١١ شفيعنا في غد كالبحر في الصغد # وما سواك لنا
السايغ بالنعم
- ١٢ يا من لبي دعوة في آن معرجه # أسرى رويدا
وعين الشخص لم تشم
- ١٢ يا أكرم الخلق في الدارين قاطبة # يا أكمل الحزم في
القدر وفي شيم
- ١٣ ونوره في أب البشر آدمنا # أبعثه رافة موله
للعلم
- ١٥ شهادة الضبّ قدما من آيات له # قد اجتبي أحدا
الله من التمم
- ١٦ يا من بطرفيه قدرنا مهيما # با لله جبريل عاجز
عن الأمم
- ١٧ محمد الهاشمي السن العرب # والأنبيا وجميع
الناس كلهم
- ١٨ أنى تهرول في تويخ سيدنا # تا الله أظن من
طعن ومن عذم
- ١٩ يا اشرف القوم في الفره وفي الورع # ولا قرين له
في القرم والرسم
- ٢٠ محمود بين الورى أجيل في الرتب # أشهر في غيته
الشافى بلا وهم
- ٢١ فاق الخلائق اجلالا ومعرفة # ما مثله أحد في
المدح والرشم
- ٢٢ يا من غشاه البهاء فانجلى بيذا # يا خاتم الأنبيا
ودافع الغم
- ٢٣ يا ذا الجمال من الطبع وفي الظرف # يا مكرم
بنجاتنا من اللمم
- ٢٤ عاف بلا ضيزى لأنت خصائله # راقت عجائبه في
العز والعظم
- الأناب - ننتظره شفيعا يوم الحساب ومن إتبعه ينال نحوه من
الثواب وله حسن المثاب، ومن تولى عنه لقد ضل وتردد في
التباب وماله شيء من النصاب ومصيره إلى العقاب (نعوذ من
سخط الله وإهانة العذاب). والسلام على آل محمد أولى النقاب
وأصحابه الأحباب. أما بعد: فهذه قصيدة مدح الأصغر للنبي
الأكبر وناظمها الشيخ لقمان ابن عبد الرفيغ ابن صلاح الدين
الألوري. اللهم لاتعوق رحمتك على السابقين بمدحه الذين اقتفيت
على أثرهم واقتبست من ضياء هم ووقفت على آسهم ولا غرو
ان اجرع من فيضهم العذب ومن لهم النخاب واقتدي بمتوالهم
الراغب لأنهم اللقينون ولا اللاكئون وهم العالمون وأنا المتعلم وأين
الطل من الويل والسمع من السيد وإن تعذلي بجينه الموسخ
بهجتي فلا أبال وأقول:
- ١ الحمد لله ذي الطول بقدرته # تم الصلاة على
الموصوف بالكرم
- ٢ طوبى لمن لولاه ما اهتديت ولا # أرى اليقين
وكنت موبق الصمم
- ٣ يا من بيعته قد زهق الأحن # والنور لألا
للإسلام لم يضم
- ٤ يا قائد الخير في الإنس وغيرهم # قد إصطفى الله
المختار من قدم
- ٥ ونوره كائن والله راقبه # قبل وجود الساء
واللوح والظلم
- ٦ كالثر في صدف والشمس في فلك # تجري هدوء
ياذن الله من سطم
- ٧ والله كمله بالزينة وصفى # عن الرذائل والخذلان
والشجم
- ٨ راعت به أمه قبل ولادته # لكن ما مستها وجع من
الضرم
- ٩ وعطره أفوح مكنون في صدق # وهو الربيع لنا
حبنا بلا فصم

- ٤٠ وصال من عاده وجيشهم نفس # وهم كخاوية عرقا
بلا قدم
- ٤١ ونارهم خامدة في يوم مولده # أوثانهم شاقة خرا
لذي الكرم
- ٤٢ لولا لفراق لكان بيننا بيقا # لكن سوا الحتف
ذوقا الله بالحكم
- ٤٣ طوعا وكرها نموت لو يعمرنا # أين محمدنا المخصوص
من نسمة
- ٤٤ لا شك من خلد دوما أن يكون له # لكنه راحل
فينا بلا اثم
- ٤٥ نور حلول خديني دابا وصبا # أنت الكريم
القدوس بالغ الذم
- ٤٦ أثنى أبابكرنا خليفة الامم # وبعده عمر ذا الأيد في
الخصم
- ٤٧ عثماننا عادل نوران لقبته # عليتنا صناديد الجيش
بالصرم
- ٤٨ وأصحابه كلهم في بند الرغد # بشرى لمن معهم في
جنة اللذم
- ٤٩ وإن يقل لكموا عن منشدها # تقل عبيد الفقير
شاعق النعم
- ٥٠ لقمان سميتيه أضعف في النسب # فاستر عيوي من
الرجس وعن عظم
- ٥١ فاصفح لمنشئها عن كل حوبته # وكل قارئها يا
مالك النقم
- ٥٢ بجاه قدوتنا الأشم من مضر # وهو يبلغنا الوحي
بلا وغم
- ٥٣ آياتها عددا بحسب أحمدنا # فاقض مآربنا باليسر
والتعم
- ٢٥ كفى به فرحا فصل الحكام له # بي الخلائق
مصفوفا بمزحم
- ٢٦ من لم يصل عليه قد زها وهوى # فليت وفرا بما
يجن من السدم
- ٢٧ الله صلى عليه والملائكة # كانوا يصلون والحبر
من الأمم
- ٢٨ يا ابن قريش الذي جلت مناصبه # ونال من ربه
القربة بالهمم
- ٢٩ ردائه الصبر والزهد لحرفته # وكنزته الثقة والصفح
بالمكظم
- ٣٠ ووجهه الرونق وما به قدر # أكرم به المجتبي
وفارج الجشم
- ٣١ وجاشه الطاهر خلا من الوسخ # والله زينيه
بالوحي والحكم
- ٣٢ عالت مقامته شالت مناقبه # في عليين وفي
أطراس في القدم
- ٣٣ فمن أنامله الماء لوارده # كالبحر في موجه والويل
في السجم
- ٣٤ أعطت خديجة نفسها لسيدنا # لما رأت ماله في
الرفق والفخم
- ٣٥ صلوا عليه دواما بكرامته # تلك عناية كل أحذق
الأمم
- ٣٦ ففي رسالته الحظ لتابعه # لهم حبور كما راموا من
الحميم
- ٣٧ ومن يكفره قد طال في الوخم # والنار تحرقه وهو
من الحطم
- ٣٨ قد فاز من واصل باسم مختزنا # وسلا إلى ربنا
الرحمن بالنعم
- ٣٩ يا رب صلى على خير بريتنا # لينا وفضلا من
النطق وفي الكلم

Translation

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate the Merciful
O! Allah shower your blessing and peace on
Muhammad. I remain grateful to Allah the Provider,
for being Magnanimous and for giving us the religion
of Islam as steps (towards Him). No one reflects
except the intelligent ones. I seek blessing and peace
on the ever-repentant Prophet, in whom is our hope
of mediation on the day of reckoning. Whoever
follows him will get reward similar to his
(*Muhammad*) own and will get a befitting abode,
whoever turns away from him has gone astray,
wavering in destruction, hopeless of getting reward,
ending up in punishment (we seek for protection
against the wrath of Allah and degrading
punishment) May the peace be on the Muhammad's
virtuous household and beloved companion.

This ode entitled "*Panegyric of a Smaller
One on the Greatest Prophet*" was composed by
Shaykh Luqmān b. 'Abdur-Rafī' b. Salāhud-dīn 'Al-
'Ilūrī. O! Allah do not delay showering your blessing
on the precursors in his praise, whose footsteps I
followed, from whose illumination I derived light and
on whose model I remained. No wonder on my
tapping from their tasteful flowing (of knowledge),
their superb intelligence and my imitating in their
attractive adventures. They are eloquent scholars,
not stammerers, they are erudite scholars while I am
a learner, drizzle cannot be compared to downpour
just as leopard cannot be equated with a lion. If you
criticize me for his strong affection in my heart, I am
not bothered. I say:

1. Praise be to Allah, the Almighty, may the blessing
be on the one (commonly) portrayed as a generous
one.
2. Blessedness is his without whom I could not be
aright, and know the certainty, and I could have
remained deaf in a place of destruction.
3. O! Ye with whose mission falsehood is destroyed,
and the sparkling light of Islam remains
inextinguishable.
4. O! The best leader among mankind and other
creatures, Allah has purified 'Al-Mukhtār
(Muhammad) before his birth
5. His light had been preserved under the watchful
eyes of Allah, before the creation of the sky, slate and
pen
6. Like (the preservation of) fruit in the couch and
sun in the orbit, moving quietly unstopped with
Allah's permission
7. Allah has completed his creation with beauty and
has purified him from vileness, unreliability and
mischievousness
8. His mother was frightened in the state of
pregnancy, she suffered no pain as a result of the
pregnancy

9. His scent is sweeter than a perfume kept in the
shell, he is (unto us) like a vernal period bringing
gifts without severance
10. Muhammad is the one whose eulogy relieves us
of our affliction, and in it is healing for our sickness
11. He is our intercessor when we remain in shackles
in the hereafter, we have none like you, as generous
as river, providing complete blessing
12. O! The one who honoured His divine invitation by
his ascension, he journeyed quietly without being
seen by any mortal
13. O! The most dignified mankind here and
hereafter, the most resolute in administration and
disposition
14. His light is extracted from Adam, the father of
mankind; His Lord raised him as mercy for the world
15. The mastigure's testimony of yore is one of his
signs; Allah has exonerated Ahmad from being
doubted
16. O! the one who saw the Almighty with naked eyes
(advancing to a point) where Jibril remained feeble
of going further
17. Muhammad, an Hashmite, the most eloquent of
the Arabs, of the Prophets and the generality of
mankind.
18. Why the haste in reprimanding our leader? By
Allah he is well above being defamed or castigated.
19. O! The most dignified of the people in sturdiness
and piousness, he is unrivalled in (good) leadership
and administration
20. Muhammad the occupant of the highest place
among mankind, so prominent like beneficial rainfall,
beyond imagination.
21. He was greater than all creatures in dignity and
intelligence; none is praiseworthy like unto him, the
seal
22. O! The one covered by bright light, O! The seal of
the Prophets and remover of affliction
23. O! The beautiful one in natural disposition and
expressing novel ideas, O! the one honoured with our
safety from mental derangement
24. (Endowed with) good health, uprightness, subtle
in characters, his miracles (are) contained in his
dignity and greatness.
25. It is enough a joyful matter that he was granted
explicit (religious) injunctions while mankind lined
up in confusion

26. Whoever fails to seek for blessing on him has fallen down (spiritually) what an abundance of repentance he has to offer!

27. Allah and the angels seek for blessing on him, so also are the learned men of the communities

28. O! the son of (the tribe of) Quraysh whose origin is great, who obtained closeness to his Lord with ardour

29. His garment is endurance, asceticism is his vocation, his treasury is confidence and forgiveness with suppression of anger

30 His face is beautiful without blemish, what a beautified one! , The one who ameliorates difficulties

31. His heart is pure, free from filth; he is beautified by Allah with revelation of the Qur`ān

32. His position is elevated, likewise his virtues, in the uppermost heaven remaining like that from time immemorial

33. Water gushed out from his fingers for the thirsty-ones like waves of the water of the river and flowing of the downpour

34. Khadijah surrendered herself (in marriage) to our leader after assessing the depth of his kindness and stateliness

35. Seek blessing on him constantly for his being honoured, in doing that is succour for every mankind

36 In his message is a fortune for his follower, there is gladness as they desire wherever they are

37. Whoever disbelieves him remains squalid for long, he will be consumed by fire, wrecked therein

38. Whoever derives attraction from the name of Mukhtar has benefitted from getting a step towards the favour of our Beneficent Lord

39. O! Lord bless the best of the creatures in disposition, and the most eloquent of them in making speeches

40. He conquered his enemies and their accomplices, leaving their camp desolate, getting their stem uprooted.

41. Extinction overtook their light on his birth; fatigue overtook their gods, bowing down for the honoured one

42 But for death, he could have remained with us but God has designed death for every soul to taste

43 Willy-nilly we shall die, where is Muhammad the best of the human race, if He is to leave us in perpetually?

44 Undoubtedly, he deserves living perpetually, but he left us unblemished

45 Provide an outpouring persistent illumination for the rising of my intimate friend; you are Generous, All-Holy and Provider of security

46 I commend Abubakri, the caliph of community, next to him was Umar, the powerful one in defense.

47 `Uthmān the just whose cognomen is "owner of two lights", also `Aliyy a valiant leader of conquering battalion

48 And all his followers who constituted large body of troops, happiness is for whoever enters the paradise with them

49 You may be asked about the composer, tell them he is poor servant (who is) interested in poetic composition

50 His name is Luqmān from an humble background, protect my shortcomings from the filth and protect me from getting perished

51 Pardon the composer of his misdeeds and the readers O! the Owner of vengeance

52 For the sake of our most honourable exemplar, who brought us the revelation without concealment.

53 The number of lines is equivalent to *Ahmad* **, Provide our needs O! Allah with ease

Thematic Analysis of *Madhul-'asghar lin-nabiyyi l-'akbar*

This fairly long panegyric on Prophet Muhammad can be divided into three units;

(a) Introduction

Badawi (1975:3) describes *Nasīb* (prologue) in the poetry of the classical Arab-Islamic period "as the traditional amatory preamble, and elegiac reminiscence of love in which the poet expresses his gloomy and nostalgic meditation over the ruins of the deserted encampment of the beloved". In the Arabic writings of Nigerian provenance, doxology replaces the *Nasīb* with a view to erasing the un-Islamic elements in the prologues.

The *Nasīb*, the first unit of this text introduces the poem. It is in prose. It features doxology, a component of the prologues that is commonly employed by West African Arabic writers. It features in the beginning of either their prose or verse writings, Abdul Rahmon (1995:325) notes that

doxology also takes a significant portion of their closings. Their verses end not only with doxology but the number of lines as well as the poetic metre adopted probably, because the Qur'an specifically enjoins believers to seek blessings for the Prophet of God and to offer thanks to Allah. The tradition of Prophet Muhammad also advises Muslims to begin and end activities by seeking blessings for the Prophet and emphasizes the magnificent of the rewards that await those who do so as earlier noted in this paper. The introduction goes further to enumerate the motif for the composition of the poem, *Madh 'al-'asghar*, describing the attempt as a fulfillment of divine injunction. The unit also contains the expression of humility which is a common feature in the prologues of the Arabic literary productions of Nigerian authorship. Expressions of self-abnegation feature prominently on the pages of their writings.

(b) Eulogy

The second lines 1-48 unit contains the eulogy. It opens with religious doxology. The second line of the poem features the expression of self abnegation, a style that is common to the Arabic works of Nigerian authorship. The content of this unit tallies with the description of encomiastic poem of Yoruba '*Ulamā* as noted by Bidmus(1972):

In praising the Prophet, Yoruba Arabic poets narrate the life history of the Prophet, recount his achievements and *Karāmāt (mu'jizāt)* and, as Muslims they show their gratitude to the Prophet for bringing Islam which according to them is the only acceptable religion to God(98).

The poem extols the virtues of Prophet Muhammad as a messenger of Allah. Citing the importance of eulogising the Prophet, the poet claims, in line 10, that the Prophet Muhammad is the one whose eulogy relieves man of his affliction, and in it is healing for man's sickness. This spiritual effect of eulogizing the Prophet had been established earlier by a panegyrist – Sharafud- dīn 'al-Busayrī whose *Qasīdat 'al Burda* was composed in memory of his miraculous cure of a paralytic stroke by a vision of the Prophet (S.A.W.) casting his mantle on him(Raji,1993:60).

The poem contains a lot of historical facts about the Prophet. Line 12 discusses '*Al-' Isrā' wa 'l-Mi'rāj*, the ascension of the Prophet as narrated in the Qur'an (Q17: 1). It eulogizes the noble descent of the Prophet, his birth, childhood growth amongst the Makkans and his call to prophethood. Miracles he performed are also discussed. His marital life is also discussed stating in line 34 that "Khadijah

surrendered herself (in marriage) to our leader, after assessing the depth of his kindness and stateliness". The poem, apart from commending the virtuous conduct of the Prophet contains prayer for the blessings of Allah on the Prophet and his household. The four rightly guided caliphs are also mentioned with prayer offered for them also.

(c) Closing

The last unit (lines 49 – 54) reveals the identity of the composer and traits of humility in him are shown by the expression of self abnegation contained in lines 49 and 50. Lines 51 and 52 contain supplication for Allah's forgiveness, not only for the composer but also for the readers. The last lines contain information on the number of lines contained in the poem, using the method known as *Abjadiyyah* (chronogram). English alphabet serves the purpose of sub-numbering. In standard Arabic, Arabic letters are assigned arithmetical value and they are used in dating or numbering known as *Abjadiyyah*. It is one of the common features of the Arabic writings of Nigerian '*Ulamā*'. Sanni (2017:42) discusses the propensity for the tradition of using *Abjadiyyah* in the Sudanic African literary productions and indeed by Yoruba authors in Arabic.

Gwarzo(1967,116-123) confirms further that *Abjadiyyah* serves primarily the purpose of sub-numbering or listing which Roman figures or alphabets serve in English prose.

Conclusion

The observed paucity of research efforts targeted at this genre within the Arabo-Islamic literary contributions of Nigerian '*Ulamā*' has been modestly addressed by this paper. Tracing the evolution of encomiastic verses in Arabo-Islamic literary tradition, the study discovered that the origin of panegyric on Prophet Muhammad dates back to the days of the Prophet. It discovered the active participation of West African '*Ulamā*' in the cultivation of encomiastic verses. Specifically in Nigeria, we have records of active participation of the Arabic literati in the cultivation of this genre

This paper examined the classification of the genre of Arabic poetry of Nigerian authorship with attention paid to *Madhur-rasūl*(the encomiastic verses) under the lyrical classification. The study examined the specific social and cultural contexts that stimulated the development of this genre in Arabic literature and its incursion into literary space in Nigeria, Thematic study of the purposively selected model, *Madhul-'asghar li n-nabiyyi 'l-'akbar*, a 53 line panegyric on Prophet Muhammad, composed by Shaykh Luqmān Salāhud-dīn, a Nigerian Arabic poet

was undertaken to provide an insight into the components of Arabic panegyrics in Nigeria.

It discovered that the anthology of the Arabic encomiastic poetry in Nigeria comprises of eulogies on Prophet Muhammad and some distinguished personalities respectively. Nigeria is an integral component of the geographical expression known as West Africa. Arabic scholars of Nigerian provenance have records of significant contributions to literary activities, with their works on various genres and style.

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- **A = 1, H = 10, M = 40, D = 4 = 55 lines. Contrary to this figure, the poem contains only 53 lines. For details on the system of assigning arithmetical values to the Arabic alphabet, see Gwarzo, H.I. (1967): The Theory of Chronograms as Expounded by the Eighteenth Century Katsina Astronomer-Mathematician-Muhammad b. Muhammad. *Research Bulletin* 3.2: 116-123.
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