

## **COURSE GUIDE**

### **ARA 228 ARABIC LITERATURE IN ABBASID PERIOD**

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## MODULE I      INTRODUCING ARABIC PROSE

- Unit 1      Meaning and Characteristics of Arabic Prose
- Unit 2      Classification of Arabic Prose
- Unit 3      Historical Development of Arabic Prose

### UNIT 1      MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ARABIC PROSE

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#### 1.0      INTRODUCTION

Arabic literature or *al-Adabul-`Arabī* is, in the main, made up of prose (*an-Nathr*) and poetry (*ash-Shi`r*). In the previous course on Arabic Literature, you have been introduced to various types of poetical compositions and the poets who composed them. You also learnt about *al-Khiṭābah* (oration) which is a form of Arabic prose. The focus of your present study is therefore not entirely new. In this unit, you will learn about artistic prose called *an-Nathr al-Fannī*, a major component of the Arabic literary heritage.

This module is designed to equip you with the theoretical background necessary for an effective study of Arabic prose-works. You will specifically study the meaning, characteristics and categories of Arabic prose. You will also be taken through the stages of the development of this branch of Arabic literature. In this first unit, our efforts will focus on the meaning and distinguishing characteristics of prose and concentrating on the peculiar nature of *an-Nathr al-Fannī* in Arabic literature and the method of its study. Since prose is used in various human interactions much more than poetry, its importance can therefore not be overemphasized.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define prose
- differentiate between prose and poetry
- explain the meaning of *an-Nathr al-Fannī*
- discuss the peculiarities of Arabic prose and methods of its study

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 What is Prose?

Prose is similar to our everyday speech. When we engage in a conversation, write a letter or minutes of a meeting, we do them in prose. The origin of the word “prose” is traceable to the Latin “*prosa*” which literally means “straightforward”. According to the Encarta Online Dictionary, it is “writing or speech in its normal continuous form, without the rhythmic or visual line structure of poetry”. From this definition, you will observe that the language of prose is, more or less, direct when compared to poetry. This is the reason why it is used in newspapers, magazines, text-books of various subjects and even in the broadcast media such as radio and television.

You must have come across different Arabic materials written in prose style. As a student of Arabic at the secondary school level, you must also have used prose to write or discuss a number of topics. Now you should be able to carry out a little task based on what you have learnt so far before learning about the characteristics which distinguish prose from poetry.

### SELF -ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- i. Make a list of ten different Arabic prose materials you have come across. Do they have some common characteristics? Identify three of them.
- ii. Ensure you carry out this exercise before proceeding to the next segment.
- iii. Now let us find out if the characteristics you identified are the same with those we are about to learn by way of comparison.

### 3.2 Basic Differences between Prose and Poetry

We have discovered that prose and poetry come under the broad umbrella of literature. In other words, they are both literary compositions. To this extent, they are expected to share certain

characteristics in common. For instance, they are both used to convey feelings and emotions in an attractive fashion even though they do so in unequal ways. However, they are quite distinct in several ways. If you place a prose work side by side a poetical composition, you will instantly notice that they are significantly different in form. Similarly, when they are orally rendered, you will notice that the musical nature of poetry is almost entirely lacking in prose. There are, of course, other distinguishing characteristics of both. Let us consider some of them.

- a. Poetry makes use of metric meters called *al-Wazn* and rhyme (*al-Qāfiyah*) while prose is expressed or written freely without these features.
- b. Prose works follow strictly the rules of grammar and etymology whereas the poet may be constrained to violate grammatical rules because of what is termed *al-‘Iḍtirārāt ash-Shi`riyyah* (poetic constraints or poetic license). This shows that the poet is more obliged to adhere to prosodic rules than the rules of Arabic syntax and morphology. Prosody, which is called *al-‘Arūḍ* is the subject that studies the principles that must be adhered to in composing various forms of poems. For this reason, the poet may elongate a short vowel, shorten a long one, change the form of a word and generally play with words and expressions.
- c. In poetry, inner feelings and reality of deep experiences of life are brought to the fore instead of the day to day experiences of life which are usually addressed in prose.
- d. In prose, the language is easily comprehensible even though the writer may introduce ornamentations to make the work attractive. However, in poetry, the language is sophisticated often involving the manipulation of ordinary language. The message of poetry may not be easily discernible due to the extensive use of imagery and symbols.

We shall in the next segment examine more characteristics of prose by looking at literary prose in Arabic.

### **SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Select one prose work and a poetic composition you are familiar with then try to establish the observable differences present in them.

### **3.3 Features Of *An-Nathr Al-Fanni***

In our task of getting properly introduced to prose, we have been able to define prose and establish the distinction between prose and poetry. However, we must note that not all prose works are written or expressed in the same manner. This brings us to the notion of artistic prose which

in Arabic is called *an-Nathr al-Fannī*. What would you consider to be the difference between the way a book of science is written and the style adopted in writing a novel for instance? While a scientific work is primarily intended to convey information in a matter-of-fact manner meant for topical reading, a novel could employ the use of rhythm, repetition, balance and other literary devices to inject life into the composition to achieve the objective of entertaining the reader. Artistic prose is therefore used in novels, epistles, oration, short stories and the like.

You will observe that the purpose of writing is a vital determinant of whether a work of prose is artistic or non-artistic. Artistic prose is used to refer to well written literary compositions. Artistic prose often employs various rhetorical devices to stress points and enliven the discourse. The writer can employ his writing skill to express different moods and ideas. For instance, while short sentences might be used to achieve brevity and rapid disclosure of information thereby increasing the effect of a fast moving plot in a story, longer sentences can be used to slow down the rate at which events unfold and instead supply elaborate details of a particular scene.

Let us consider some specific features of *an-Nathr al-Fannī*:

1. In artistic prose, the author uses language in an imaginative way. The message is presented as vividly as possible. To achieve clarity, the author might use rhetorical devices such as *tashbih* (simile), alliteration, rhyme and so on to drive home his message.
2. The prose work may become highly ornamented when the author intends to showcase his craftsmanship and literary abilities. The *maq- āmāt* constitute a typical example of this form of writing. The writer may concentrate on form at the expense of content. His writing in this case is usually verbose. The author employs his linguistic ability to entertain as well as convey important messages regarding life.
3. Emotions are displayed to engender happiness or sadness, love or hatred, morality or immorality.
4. Prose writing may be used to depict the political, social and economic life of a people or a country. It may be used to correct the ills of society. Fictional prose writing in form of fables, short stories and novels are good media of achieving this.



Our focus in this course is on artistic prose. Have you read prose works of this type in the past? Try to recollect their titles and their authors. Since our concern in this course is to study this type of prose, we should also identify the appropriate method of studying artistic prose in Arabic literature.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

What would you consider to be the dissimilarities between artistic and non-artistic prose? Mention three of them.

#### **3.3.1 Studying Arabic Prose**

You must by now have discovered that a lot goes into the preparation of an outstanding prose work especially the artistic type. The writer not only considers the accuracy of the information being passed across but the style used in conveying his message so that the reader is not bored. The summary of this is that the author is systematic in composing his work of prose. This brings us to the way a work of prose is studied. The study of a work of prose is also systematic. The intention is to properly access the author's overall ideas, the thought behind it and literary skill deployed in producing a readable and impressive work of art. This may be called "Literary Appreciation". The author may also be criticised for being excessive or flamboyant in his use of literary tools. This is sometimes referred to as *an-Naqd al-'Adabī* (Literary Criticism)

Two major areas must be touched in appraising a prose work:

1. The Context
2. The Text

We shall now briefly examine the specific considerations under each aspect.

#### **The Context**

Any literary work, be it prose or poetry is influenced by certain events. The author is reacting to an event around him. In other words, certain situations made him to engage in literary composition. Such motivating events could range from the nature of the environment, the author's life experiences, the social conditions of his people and so on. All these put together constitutes what is referred to, here, as "the context". In this regard, we study the biography of the author as a way of establishing the historical circumstances under which the author composes his work. This task provides a good background to the understanding and appreciation of the values of the work. When a writer composes a work

of prose, he does so with a view of achieving certain objectives. It is necessary to examine the extent to which those objectives have been achieved. In order to do this, certain procedures are followed. The reader may need to read the text a couple of times. The first reading may be rapid so that one is just able to have a general overview of the work. The second or subsequent readings are slower so that the reader is able to decode not only the diverse messages of the prose work but also the styles adopted by the author in conveying his message.

The tasks to be carried out in appraising Arabic prose compositions according to **Zughul (1979:8)** include but not limited to the following:

1. Bringing to the fore the original thoughts of the writer and its relevance to contemporary issues.
2. Identifying the main theme or subject matter of the text and how it is further broken down into sub-themes if any.
3. Commenting on and explaining the text generally with a view of fishing out key expressions used by the author.
4. Focussing on the literary styles employed by the author including for instance the diction, word economy, coherence, literary/rhetorical devices and their impact on the mind of the reader.
5. Examining the extent to which the author has been able to achieve balance between form and content etc.
6. Ascertaining the kind of values the work promotes and its contributions to the proper functioning of human societies.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Discuss four main steps/tasks to be accomplished in studying Arabic prose works.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Arabic prose is, no doubt, an integral aspect of Arabic literature. We all make use of prose one way or the other in our interactions. We can improve on our communication skills by studying the outstanding works of distinguished literary personalities in history whose works have been preserved for posterity. Each individual also possesses the potential of developing the skills of writing and thus helping to develop literature as an academic discipline, a way of communicating unique messages and of course a means of entertainment or recreation. These, of course, are vital attributes of excellent prose works. The study of Arabic prose is a way of engendering the culture of contributing in an original way to the development of the Arab literary heritage.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been introduced to prose as a major literary genre. The unit provides a good foundation for the study of Arabic prose in the subsequent units. In order to be able to describe the characteristics of prose, an aspect of our discussion centred on the differences between prose and poetry. This discussion enabled us to also identify the distinction between artistic and non-artistic prose while stressing the unique features of artistic prose in Arabic literature. Finally, the method as well as essential elements of appreciating literary prose were also highlighted.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the ways in which Arabic prose-writing defers from poetical compositions.
2. State the specific features of artistic prose in Arabic literature?

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## **UNIT 2 CLASSIFICATION OF ARABIC PROSE**

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- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Our task under this unit is to consolidate our familiarity with the nature of Arabic prose by studying how various prose compositions are classified. This exercise would enable us identify the various levels of classifying prose works. Arabic prose can, for instance, be classified in broad terms in which case we are concerned with only the main classes of the subject. At the same time we can identify the specific types of Arabic prose which fall under each main category. Classification can also be done in terms of themes or the subject-matter of the specific work of prose. Arabic prose can also be classified according to the style adopted by the writer. We shall be studying these classes of Arabic prose so that we can establish the inherent characteristics of each category and the differences between one category and another.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- identify the main categories of prose
- discuss the various forms of Arabic prose
- name the main themes in Arabic Prose
- state the values of Arabic prose

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Categorising Arabic Prose

Since its emergence during the pre-Islamic period, Arabic Prose has developed into a wide range of genres. Since literature itself is a reflection of events characterising civilisation and various aspects of life of a people, Arabic prose is not an exception in this regard. Arabic prose can be broadly classified by virtue of the form in which they appear. Arabic prose can be in oral and written forms. It may also be artistic or non-artistic. Since we shall be involved in studying virtually all these classes, it is necessary that we familiarise ourselves with them from the onset. Let us begin with the oral and written forms of Arabic prose.

##### 3.1.1 Oral and Written Prose

Oral prose which can also be called *an-Nathr ash-Shafawī* is the type of literary composition that is communicated in form of speech. The audience hears it directly from the original composer or through a third party. You must have come across public speakers at different occasions either at school, in religious places such as the mosque or even at an official function where a high ranking government official delivers a memorable address. These forms of public presentations are all in prose and since they are delivered orally they are certainly oral forms of prose. Many types of Arabic prose are usually in the oral form. A typical example of this is *al-Khiṭābah* (oration or oratorical speech). From your study of pre-Islamic Arabic literature, you will recall that most of the compositions of the period were verbalised. Oral prose elicits the skill of the composer since he does not have the opportunity of rectifying errors in his composition. The composition is meant for immediate consumption. Written prose otherwise called *an-Nathr al-Kitābī* is a form of composition that has been reduced to writing. The author has the opportunity of polishing his writing to achieve his objectives and in meeting the expectations of the reader. *ar-Risālah* (Epistle) and *ar-Riwāyah* (Novel) are good examples of Written prose. Some prose forms lend themselves to both categories. This means that they can either be written or oral. This is true of *al-Qissah* (Story) and *al-Masrahiyyah* (Drama). The former, historically, started as an oral literature before it came to be documented and subsequently, authors of Arabic stories emerged with story books. As for drama, it is written so that it may eventually be acted in real life.

##### 3.1.2 Artistic and Non-Artistic Prose

Artistic prose is a form in which the author is not only interested in putting across a message but also in using his composition to entertain.

To be able to achieve these two aims, he uses a number of literary devices such as alliteration, simile, metaphor, metonymy and other rhetorical and literary devices. He is cautious in the use of diction, sentence varieties and paragraphing so that the reader gets the best out of the piece. In artistic prose, the speaker or writer uses language as an art to achieve maximum communication effect. He carefully selects his words as well as his style to suit the particular occasion. `Alī ibn Abī Tālib displays his literary craftsmanship in the use of simile in the following words:

العلم نهر, والحكمة بحر, والعلماء حول البحر يطوفون, والحكماء  
وسط البحر يغوصون, والعارفون في سفن النجاة يسيرون.

Knowledge is river, wisdom is sea, the possessor of knowledge go round the stream, while the wise ones dive into the sea and the knowledgeable ones go in the boat of success. (Abubakre: 1989:27)

Novels and drama books are typical examples of artistic prose. Non-artistic prose on the other hand lays emphasis on the content rather than on the form. The language is simple, straightforward and coherent. Rhetorical devices and other literary features are seldom used if not altogether discarded. Non-artistic prose is used in the compilation of textbooks in different disciplines such as science, philosophy, exegesis and the like. The intention of the author here is to divulge vital information to the reader and not to entertain or display his literary prowess.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Describe briefly the various classifications of Arabic prose.

#### 3.2 Forms of Arabic Prose

Arabic prose has appeared throughout history in different varieties. From the pre-Islamic era up to the present times, the artistic form which is the object of our study, has evolved not less than seven forms. These are:

- i *al-Waṣāyā* (Admonitions).  
These are short epithetic sayings which have didactic values. They are meant to teach morals and norms of the Arab tradition.
- ii *al-Amthāl* (Proverbs)  
Proverbs are short pithy sayings meant to teach morals and culture of a particular people. The Arab culture is rich in proverbs.
- iii *al-Qiṣaṣ* (Short Stories)

As the name indicates, they are brief narratives meant to entertain as well as teach and communicate values. They may be oral or written.

- vi *al-Khiṭābah* (Oration)  
Orations are powerful speeches delivered to create an immediate impact on the audience. The orator holds the audience spellbound and mesmerized. The speech has an immediate impact.
- v *ar-Rasāil* (Epistles) These are basically letters addressed to an individual or a group of people usually written in an elegant style. They are literary works which appear in form of an extended correspondence.
- vi *ar-Riwāyah* (Novel). This is a long narrative having a continuous plot usually fictitious but portraying real life experiences.
- vii *al-Masraḥiyyah* (Drama). A play composed in written form meant to be acted or read for entertainment.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. Describe briefly at least 5 forms of Arabic prose.
2. Identify forms of literary prose that are widely used today then state the reasons for this.

### 3.3 Themes in Arabic Prose

Themes deal with subject matter or the object of focus in a work of prose. A particular type of Arabic prose could have different themes. *al-Khiṭābah* for instance could either address political issues in which case it is called *al-Khiṭābah as-Siyāsiyyah* (political oration) or address religious ideas in which case it is *al-Khiṭābah ad-Dīniyyah* (Religious oration) and so on. Similarly, epistles can either be in form of chancery documents in which case it is called *ar-Rasāil ad-Dīwāniyyah* and when it is literary in nature it is called *ar-Rasāil al-Adabiyyah*. Each literary genre, therefore, could have different themes. Each of the various forms of Arabic prose could, therefore, function as a vehicle for expressing different kinds of beliefs, feelings, ideas, philosophies and emotions. They also constitute various means of communicating assorted messages.

The implication of the foregoing is that themes are not limited to any particular form of prose. In fact, a particular type of prose can appear in as many themes as possible. However, certain types of prose lend themselves to some particular themes than others. This is true of *al-Khiṭābah* which more or less is limited to religious, political and social themes. The prevailing conditions of life in the Arab society also determine the kind of theme in which prose writers showed interest. For instance, the socio-political conditions of life under the Umayyads necessitated the focus on issues of politics, tribalism and religion while

in the preceding early Islamic period, the themes of *al-Khiṭābah* were more or less limited to religious and administrative matters. The orations of the Prophet (SAW) and the *Khulafā' Rāshidūn* which you have studied under Arabic Literature I are typical examples of such themes.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Apart from the themes identified in our discussion, mention other themes of Arabic prose you are familiar with. A study of prose in the *Jāhiliyyah* and early Islamic periods will assist you.

### 3.3 Values of Arabic Prose

Arabic prose has both a long history and a rich repertoire of outstanding compositions. It is, in fact, very valuable in many respects. The fact that several of these prose forms have come down to us is an indication that those who preserved them for posterity attached great values to them and therefore found them worthy of being passed on to subsequent generations. Our task in this segment is to identify the various ways in which Arabic prose of different types can be considered valuable. The various ways in which Arabic prose works are valuable include the followings:

- a. Arabic prose has projected both the linguistic and literary heritage of the Arabs. The point of contact with Arabic for any new student of the language will be through prose. It is therefore the gate or entrance to Arabic.
- b. It is a practical implementation of the various principles governing both oral and written communication in Arabic. Through prose, we see the rules of syntax, morphology, rhetoric and the like in operation.
- c. The reader of Arabic prose is exposed to various styles and expressions used by celebrated writers. These provide a useful framework to be followed by aspiring prose writers and a mechanism for existing authors to standardise and sharpen their writing skills.
- d. It is a means through which very vital messages are communicated to the society. Different prose forms have didactic values and thus been employed and still being used to pass across vital messages bothering on the cultivation of right attitudes and morality to the society.
- e. Since any literary work mirrors society, Arabic prose therefore constitutes a large reservoir of information on the ancient history of the Arabs and the peoples they interacted with.
- f. The corpus of Arabic literary prose now constitutes a body of vast materials for research of various types. They have been and



will continue to attract scholarly reviews, analysis, intensive studies and commentaries from intellectuals all over the world. A substantial collection of these prose compositions have already enjoyed universal appeal. For instance, The *Maqamat*, *Alif Laylah wa Laylah* and the writings of celebrated authors such as Nagib Mahfūz and Tāhā Husayn have been subjected to several translations and extensive studies all over the world. This development underscores the universal acceptability of such Arabic prose works.

- g. Arabic Prose is a veritable source of entertainment and recreation. It has assisted in cultivating and improving the culture of reading. Many of the works have also been acted on stage and in movies. It has thus contributed and still contributing to the development of a flourishing Arab and world theatre.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

In what ways would you consider Arabic prose useful today?

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The Arabs have a diverse literary prose heritage. Arabic prose is not only rich in form but also rich in themes. The form of Arabic prose that we are concerned with is the artistic type which has literary characteristics. Due to their diversity, one single kind of classification is not easy hence the need to categorise them using different parameters. Through this approach, it is possible to distinguish oral from written prose, artistic from non-artistic and so on. An area of convergence among these categorisations is the area themes addressed in various forms of Arabic prose. For instance, the political theme has been expressed through *al-Khiṭābah*, *ar-Risālah*, *ar-Riwāyah* and so on.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

Discussion in this unit has focussed on the categories of Arabic prose. We have been able to identify various headings under which Arabic prose can be categorised. These classifications involve identifying prose forms that are oral or written, artistic or non-artistic. In the process, we discovered the distinguishing characteristics of various forms of Arabic prose. This exercise further led us to enumerate and explain briefly Arabic prose forms such as *al-Amthal*, *al-Hikam*, *al-Qisas*, *ar-Riwāyah*, *ar-Riāslah* and *al-Khiṭābah*. We also highlighted the main themes in which the Arabic prose compositions have been presented. Such themes include the political theme, religious themes, social and moral themes. We concluded the discussion by examining the values of Arabic prose literary heritage. One of the main values of Arabic Prose is that it serves

as a mechanism for the preservation of both the linguistic and literary heritage of the Arabs.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the similarities and dissimilarities of artistic and non-artistic prose.
2. Enumerate six main forms of Arabic prose.

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## UNIT 3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ARABIC PROSE

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- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The development of Arabic prose is usually divided into various periods. The periods invariably tallies with the periodization of Islamic history. Since various developments characterised socio-political life during the different periods, the reflection of this in literary productions of each period must be expected. The type of Arabic prose forms that featured in each period vary from one period to another. The periods of the development of Arabic prose is normally studied under *al-`Aṣr al-Jāhiliyy* (Pre-Islamic period), *`Aṣr Sadr al-Islām* (Early Islamic Period) *al-`Aṣr al-Umawī* (Umayyad Period) *al-`Aṣr al-`Abbāsī* (`Abbasid Period) *`Aṣrul-Inḥiṭāt* (The Period of Decadence) and *al-`Aṣr al-Hadīth* (Modern or Contemporary Period). In this unit, we shall briefly survey the important changes that were brought into the world of Arabic prose during each period. We shall discover that Arabic prose went into transformation in terms of form, style, theme and sophistication. We shall note further that, the fortunes of this literary genre also changed according to the personalities and social conditions of life under each of the periods. We shall further establish the fact that events characterising each period, to a large extent, determined the kind of Arabic prose composition that flourished in an era. You will learn that these periods can also be structured into stages of the development of this genre using the level of progress recorded at each stage as criterion.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the periods of the development of Arabic prose
- describe the social and political conditions of each period
- enumerate the prose genres of each period
- identify the personalities who promoted Arabic prose

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.2 The Foundational Stage

By Foundational Stage we mean the period in which the framework for subsequent development of Arabic prose was established. Arabic prose definitely has a base upon which superstructure was erected. The importance of this primary platform cannot be overemphasized since its success determined, to a large extent the destiny of Arabic literary prose. This stage also paved the way for a speedy growth of this art. This initial stage comprises two main periods, namely: the Pre-Islamic Period and Early Islamic Period. We shall now discuss each in turn.

#### 3.1.1 Pre-Islamic Arabic Prose

Most of what people consider today to be literature is written literature. This is of course a narrow conception of literature because there is a large body of oral literature which has been preserved for posterity. In fact, there is still a growing development of oral literature. It is this type of literature that dominated the prose compositions of the pre-Islamic Arabs. The pre-Islamic period is the era before the advent of Islam. Historians generally consider the immediate century preceding the emergence of Islam as the pre-Islamic period. It is also called the *Jāhiliyyah* period. Arabic prose, in this period, was mainly in oral form. This is to be expected since very few of the Arabs were literate. Writing materials were very scarce. For these reasons, Arabic prose was largely confined to *al-Khiṭābah* (Oratorical Speech), *al-Waṣāyā* (Wise Sayings) and *al-Amthāl*. (Proverbs). Literary figures who distinguished themselves in prose then, include Qaṣṣ ibn Sa`idah al-`Iyyadī and Aktham ibn Sayfī. The main features of the prose of the period include brevity, limited use of rhyme to make the composition pleasant to hear and perhaps to facilitate memorisation. They also have traces of philosophy in their compositions as evinced in an oration of Qaṣṣ where he declares: "من عاش مات و من مات فات"

“He who lives must die and he who dies has vanished” (Farhūd, `Ayyād, `Abdul-Wahhāb, R. *et al*, (1981:32)

### 3.1.2 The Early Islamic Period

This period covers both the Prophetic Era and the period of the *Khulafā`Rāshidun* (The Orthodox Caliphs). The period, therefore, lasted for some fifty-two years i.e. 609 – 661 CE. The forms of prose that existed in the *Jāhiliyyah* period continued to flourish during the Islamic era except that *al-Khiṭābah* became more widely used especially for religious purposes.

With the rise of Islam, Arabic prose was given a big boost through the revelation of the Holy Qur`ān, which is basically in prose and widely considered as the height of eloquence. The Qur`ān proved to be a repertoire of divine wisdom, knowledge and positive ideas. The Qur`ān was revealed to Muḥammad (SAW) through the angel Jibrīl for a period of twenty-three years. The Qur`ān was later compiled in book form during the reign of Abu Bakr (632 CE). The Qur`ān contains over 6,000 verses called *āyāt* (singular *āyah*) and a total of 114 chapters each of which is called a *sūrah*. The surahs are organised into Makkan and Madīnan surahs. The Makkan surahs address monotheism and the consequences of polytheism while the Madīnan surahs focus on regulation of the political, economic, social, moral and spiritual life of people. The language of the Qur`ān constitutes the foundation of the literary edifice of Arabic. Hadīth, the sayings, actions and approvals of the Prophet (SAW), also provided a new standard and large reservoir of prose style. The language of Hadīth is simple, catchy and easy to comprehend. Although, the Hadīth remained in oral form during the lifetime of the prophet, it was later compiled into a vast body of literature. However, during the life-time of the Prophet a number of his companions took special interest in Hadīth and became prominent as repositories of information and knowledge of Hadīth. These companions include Abū Hurayrah, Abū Bakr, `Umar ibn al-Khaṭāb, `Uthmān ibn `Affān, `Alī ibn Abī Tālib, `Abdullāh ibn `Umar, Aishah bint Abī Bakr and so on.

Both *al-Khiṭābah* and *ar-Risālah* were used during this period. The former being more extensively used. The reason is not far fetched. It became a tool for the propagation of Islam, its defence and enunciating its teachings. It was used during the battles as a means of inspiring the soldiers and as a part of worship. Prominent orators of the period include the prophet (SAW) and the orthodox caliphs. This same set of individuals wrote a number of epistles as occasion demanded. Therefore, we discovered that the prose forms of this period comprise the Qur`ān, the Hadīth (in oral form), *al-Khiṭābah* and *ar-Risālah*.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Briefly discuss the genres of prose during the foundational stage of its development.

### 3.2 The Stage of Consolidation

Consolidation presupposes progress, expansion and further development. This is exactly what happened to Arabic prose at this stage. The period covers both the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE) and the `Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE).

#### 3.2.1 Prose during the Umayyad Period

The Umayyad period otherwise known as *al-`Asr al-Umawi*, spanned some 89 years (661-750 C.E.) It was the period the Umayyad caliphs became the leaders of the Islamic state after the leadership of the *Khulafā' Rāshidūn* ( Rightly Guided Caliphs). There were intense political activities as manifested in the emergence of political groups such as the Alids, the Zubayris, the Kharijites and the Murji'tes. The period also witnessed the flourishing of intellectual activities especially in *an-Nahw* (Arabic Syntax), *as-Sarf* (morphology), *hadīth*, *ʿIlm al-Kalām* (Scholastic Theology) and science. The society became more urbanised. The Arabs came into contact with non-Arabs especially the Persians. Many new cities such as Wasīt located between Kufah and Basrah emerged. The expansion of the state brought more revenue thus becoming more prosperous.

These developments impacted positively on the prose works of the period. *al-Khitābah* became more widely used. Apart from its delivery for religious purposes as in the previous period, it was used to champion the cause of the parties that had emerged. Prominent orators of the period include al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf, Ziyād ibn Abih, Abū Hamzah al-Khārijī, `Imrān ibn *Haṭān* and so on. Apart from chancery documents especially in form of *ar-Rasāil* (epistles) which was more widely used due to the robust nature of governance, literary prose called *an-Nathr al-Adabī* made its debut. The pivot in this regard is `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib. He laid the foundation for the style of this genre. It was the pivotal roles of `Abdul-Hamīd that laid the foundation for the outburst of artistic prose during the era of the `Abbasids.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Consolidation of Arabic prose can said to be during the periods of Umayyah and Abbasid. Expatiate.

### 3.2.1 Prose during the `Abbasid Period

You must have discovered that prose during the Umayyad era recorded some progress. It even developed further during the Abbasid period. The factors responsible for this unprecedented flourishing of *an-Nathr* are traceable to the long period of Abbasid rule (750-1258 CE), the exposure of the Arabs to Persian, Indian and Greek intellectual output and the patronage and support the Abbasid caliphs gave to scholars. The era witnessed the translation of many foreign works into Arabic. Al-Ma'mūn established the *Baytul-Hikmah*, a bureau of translation in Baghdad. The Arabs were, therefore, able to access the intellectual heritage of various peoples of the world. The result is an outburst of prose writings in form of orations, short stories, anecdotes, epistles. An important feature of the prose-works of this period is the appearance of monumental works in various fields such as philosophy, medicine, history, biography, geography, Qur'ānic exegesis, zoology, astronomy, jurisprudence to mention but a few.

Literary prose also witnessed the appearance of outstanding works which up till today are considered outstanding books of literature. `Abdullah ibn Muqaffa`s *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, a series of didactic fables translated from Persian is a prominent work of the period. The works of al-Jāhiz namely; *Kitābul-Hayawān* (The Book of Animals), *Kitābul-Bayān wa at-Tabyīn* (The Book of Elucidation and Exposition) and *Kitābul-Bukhalā'* (The Book of Misers) elicited both elegance and precision in Arabic prose. The *Alif Laylah wa Laylah* (One Thousand and One Nights) which has been translated into many languages is also credited to the period. Other prominent literary giants of the period include Ibn Qutaybah, author of *Kitābul-Ma`ārif* (Book of Knowledge). A new literary form, the *Maqāmāt* (Assemblies or Sessions) was added to the literary heritage of the period by Badī` Zamān. The book which is in rhymed prose is a collection of episodes about the life of Abul-Fath al-Iskandarī, a trickster. Al-Harīrī followed the footsteps of Badī` Zamān through a similar work which lays much emphasis on showcasing the linguistic competences of the author. Other important contributors to the development of prose include `Ibn al-`Amīd and several others.

### 3.3 The Period of Decadence

The period 1258 –1798 C.E. is usually considered the age of literary decadence. You must be wondering why this period is so named. The flourishing of literary productions witnessed in the previous periods faced some challenges during this period. Arabic literature during this era manifested weakness in terms of originality, diction and style. Arabic literature of the period were largely imitative, the thoughts

became superficial while the artistic ornamentation became excessive with a lot of artificiality. The literature of the period also exhibited lack of imagery and emotion. For this reason, the era is generally regarded as *Aṣṛul-Inḥiṭāṭ* or Era of Decay.

The reasons for this development is usually associated with the following factors:

1. The Turkish invasion of Baghdad brought unprecedented destruction on both infrastructure and intellectual heritage of the Arabs. Schools, libraries and public institutions were destroyed.
2. The scholars themselves were destabilised. Arabic ceased to be the official language of the state. It was replaced by Turkish which the new rulers promoted at the expense of Arabic.
3. The new leaders cared less about intellectual activities. They did not patronise literary productions as their predecessors did and the scholarly efforts. Arabic civilisation was generally affected in an adverse way.
4. There was palpable fear, schism, injustice and civil strife. These did not create a conducive atmosphere for the thriving of literature.

Although this term may be appropriate as far as poetical compositions are concerned, the same may not strictly be applicable to prose since the prose works of the period rank among the best in history. The period witnessed the appearance of many outstanding writers such as Ibn Faḍlallah who among others wrote the monumental work titled *Masālik al-Amṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, al-Qalqashandī, author of the popular *Subḥ al-A`shā fī Sinā`atil-Inshā`* and Muḥyid-Dīn Ibn `Abd az-Zāhir to mention a few.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Compare the characteristics of Arabic prose during the foundational stage and the stage of consolidation.

### **3.4 The Renaissance (Modern and Contemporary Periods)**

You must be wondering whether the age of decadence has continued up to the present time. No, it did not. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Napoleon Bonaparte occupied Egypt and in the process introduced the printing press which had Arabic characters. Muḥammad `Alī who helped Egypt to gain independence ruled between 1805 and 1848. He initiated many projects to modernize Egypt. Many Egyptian students were sent to study in France and on upon their return were saddled with the responsibility of translating many technical manuals. The translations and the classical



literary compositions of the Arabs were printed at the government press at Bulāq. These works became accessible to many Arabs from all walks of life and consequently influenced them. Another factor is the growth of journalism in Lebanon and Egypt. By 1900, many newspapers and journals had emerged. Different avenues were thus created for the publication and propagation of the Arab literary culture.

Butrus al-Buṭṣāmī opened the gate of the renaissance with his dictionary and encyclopaedia. His nephew, Sulaymān followed suit with his translation of Horner's Iliad. Muṣṭafā al-Manfalūṭī adapted French romantic novels to the way of life of the Arabs. He also wrote a variety of essays on a variety of topics. Jurj Zaydān's historical novel, Muḥammad Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab* ranks many European popular novels. Tāhā Husyan's *al-Ayyām* (The Days), an autobiography, Tawfiq al-Hakīm's drama and the many monumental writings of Nagīb Maḥfūz give the modern period a huge literary prose credibility. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has now made it possible for many writers to make available to the global audience the rich literary prose of the Arabs. This is an area that is expanding very fast. There are currently a wide range of resources on the internet on Arabic prose. You will observe that such resources are listed under References/Further Readings virtually in every unit of this course material. There are numerous others that we are not privileged to list. Ensure you search the internet for Arabic e-books dealing with Arabic literary prose and study them as illustrations to the various concepts we are exposed to in this course.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

It is incontrovertible that Arabic prose has a rich history. The effective study of Arabic prose can not be undertaken except one is familiar with its historical evolution. One is bound to appreciate that Arabic prose developed from stage to stage and that the sophistication that this literary genre has assumed, today, has an illustrious historical background worth studying. A thorough understanding of the various events that surrounded the composition of various types of Arabic prose will no doubt facilitate the understanding of various Arabic prose compositions. Similarly, the study of the roles various personalities either as authors, patrons or audience played definitely reveals an array of individuals who contributed immensely towards the building of the Arab literary culture. Finally, the quantum of works produced and the universal acceptability of the compositions engender a sense of satisfaction and an eagerness to access a substantial number of such compositions by studying them for academic purposes and by reading them for recreation.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

We have in this unit surveyed the various developments that characterised the evolution of Arabic prose from the *Jāhiliyyah* period when prose was more or less in oral form up to the contemporary period when written prose is in ascendancy. We tried to identify the periods under which Arabic prose is conveniently studied. These are *al-`Aṣr al-Jāhilī* (Pre-Islamic period), *`Aṣr Sadr al-Islām* (Early Islamic Period), *al-`Aṣr al-Umawī* (Umayyad Period), *al-`Aṣr al-`Abbāsī* (Abbasid Period), *`Aṣr al-Inḥiṭāṭ* (The Period of Decadence) and *al-`Aṣr al-Hadīth* (Modern or Contemporary Period). We also discussed the main events that occurred within each period, the individuals behind them and nature of Arabic prose under each period. What we have done in this unit is expected to put us in good stead to be able to study various texts contained in the modules to follow.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the essential features of Arabic prose during the early Islamic period.
2. What would you consider to be the basic difference between Arabic prose during the *Jāhiliyyah* and the early Islamic period?

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## MODULE 2 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ARABIC ORATIONS

Unit 1	An Overview of <i>al-Khitābah</i>
Unit 2	Oration of al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf ath-Thaqafī
Unit 3	Oration of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz

### UNIT 1 AN OVERVIEW OF AL-KHITABAH

#### CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Meaning of <i>al-Khiṭābah</i>
3.1.1	The Anatomy of <i>al-Khiṭābah</i>
3.1.2	The <i>Khatīb</i> and His Qualities
3.2	Types of oration
3.3	Functions of Oration
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Having carried out a background study of Arabic prose in the previous module, we should be sufficiently prepared to study various types of prose compositions. The first in this regard which this module will be devoted to is *al-Khiṭābah* or oratorical speech. The module will enable you learn about *al-Khiṭābah* theoretically and practically. Theoretically, you will study the structure and essential elements of Arabic oration while the practical aspect will focus on the celebrated speeches of prominent orators.

*al-Khiṭābah* has been a means of expression of the Arab mind since the *Jāhiliyyah* period. Both the Arabs of the past and the present cherish pure, unadulterated and captivating speeches meant to create a memorable impact in the minds of listeners. This shows that the import of a message is as important as the form in which it is delivered. As a form of Arabic prose, it is usually accorded an important position among the various forms of the literary heritage of the Arabs. No wonder that it has contributed and still contributing to the vast literature of Arabic. This segment of the course provides an insight into the art of Arabic oration and the orations of two personalities who contributed to the building of this aspect of Arabic literature. We shall specifically

examine the meaning and characteristics of *Khiṭābah*, the qualities of the *khatīb* (orator) which distinguish him from the ordinary speaker, the types and roles of orations in the socio-political life of the Arabs. This exercise is expected to serve as a good foundation for us to be able to engage in the textual study of *al-Khiṭābah*.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- define *al-Khiṭābah*
- identify the various types of *al-Khiṭābah*
- describe the characteristics of *al-Khiṭābah*
- explain the functions and values of *al-Khiṭābah*

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 What is *al-Khiṭābah*?

The word “*Khiṭābah*” is derived from the verb “*khaṭaba*” which according to the Han’s Weir Dictionary (1963:245) means to deliver a public address, make a speech, deliver a sermon. The verbal noun “*khuṭbah*” means public address, speech; lecture; discourse; oration or sermon. The identical synonym of “*khuṭbah*” which is “*al-Khiṭābah*” has similar meanings with “*khuṭbah*” except that additionally, it can also be used to refer to a letter, note or message.

The term “*Khiṭābah*” in Arabic literature specifically means oration, rhetoric or discourse. It is sometimes called “*khaṭābah*” which has virtually the same semantic significations of *al-Khiṭābah*. Technically, *al-Khiṭābah* refers to a persuasive or impressionable public speech delivered to convey an important message of interest to a physical audience.

The Arabs revere forceful and elegant speeches. They sent their children to the countryside to develop pure speech and avoid *lahn* (incorrect speech). Apart from the poet, ancient Arabs respected their orators who were saddled with the responsibility of championing the cause of a clan or the entire tribe to preserve their prestige. No wonder that it became a crucial aspect of their literary culture. Many of the age-old orations of their leaders and talented public speakers were subsequently memorised and preserved for posterity.

*al-Khiṭābah* is different from every day conversation in many respects. First, unlike normal speech, it is only delivered at significant occasions. The theme also revolves around a vital topic of public interest.

Secondly, an oration has a sharp focus in that it only addresses a single subject matter in a given context. Although the orator is at liberty to insert one or two lines of poetry or verses of the Qur'an to strengthen his speech, he does not introduce irrelevant issues. Thirdly, the language is superb often involving the use of grammatical, rhetoric and literary devices.

In order to gain further insight into Arabic oration, we shall now consider the structure of *al-Khiṭābah*.

### 3.1.1 The Anatomy of *Khiṭābah*

Anatomy here refers to the structure of *Khiṭābah* and its main features. In other words, we shall be examining the components or essential features of *al-Khiṭābah*. Being the main form of oral Arabic prose, it has its own peculiar characteristics which perhaps make it distinct from other prose forms. In terms of structure, four features of *al-Khiṭābah* are easily recognisable; these are:

#### 1. The Evocation or Call.

This is usually the beginning of *al-Khiṭābah*. It reflects the kind of audience the speaker is addressing. Before the advent of Islam it usually begins with the vocative particle "يا" (O!). The expression "يا معشر قريش" (O Qurayshites! or O people of Quraysh!) or "يا ايها الناس" (O people!) typify evocation in an Arabic oration. It usually marks the beginning of the speech as well as assists in gaining the attention of the listeners and for this reason the speaker may repeat it severally at strategic points in the speech to ensure that the listeners are following the trend of the address. It is also meant to renew the interest of the audience in the speech.

#### 2. The Prologue

This aspect contains the *Tahmīdāt* (Celebrating God's praises). In an Islamic oration, it may additionally contain prayers of peace and blessings for the Prophet (SAW). The following oration of Abū Tālib at the occasion of the marriage of his nephew, Muḥammad to Khadījah begins with God's glorification before dwelling on the theme. He says:

الحمد لله الذى جعلنا من زرع إبراهيم، وذرية إسماعيل، وجعل لنا  
بلدا  
حراما، وبيتا محجوجا، وجعلنا الحكام على الناس.  
ثم إن محمد بن عبد الله – ابن أختي – من لا يوازن به فتى من قريش  
إلا رجح عليه، برا وفضلا، وكرما وعقلا، ومجدا ونبلا... وله فى

خديجة بنت خويلد رغبة، ولها فيه مثل ذلك، وما أحببتم من الصداق فعلي.

Glory be to God who has made us a seed of Ibrāhīm, and descendants of Ismāīl. He bestowed on us a sacred city and a majestic house. He further appointed us as leaders of men.

Now Muḥammad son of `Abdullah- my nephew- who no youth among the Quraysh can compete with except that he proves better than him in righteousness, merit, honour, mental stability, distinction and nobility... In Khadījah daughter of Khuwaylid he has a desire and she too desires him likewise. Whatever you are keen on as dowry is my responsibility.

### 3. The Main Message

The actual message or main body of the speech is broken down into relevant points. Here, the speaker divulges the major aspects of his speech and may punctuate them with quotations.

### 4. The Concluding Part

This marks the end of the address. In an Islamic oration, it may contain prayers or statements such as:

أقول قولي هذا استغفر الله لي ولكم ولسائر المسلمين من كل ذنب استغفروه انه هو الغفور الرحيم

“I declare this statement of mine saying: May Allah forgive me and you and the rest of the Muslims regarding every sin committed. Seek His forgiveness; He is Oft –forgiving, Most Merciful”.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define *al-Khiṭābah* then state its component parts.

### 3.2 Types of oration

Arabic orations are usually classified according to the theme addressed. Although the topic addressed might differ, orations otherwise called orature share similarities in terms of impressive diction, elegant style and the literary artistry injected into it to make it a truly eloquent address. The most prominent themes of Arabic orations include:

### **1. Tribal Orations**

This form of oration was delivered to extol the virtues of a tribe, their gallantry and attributes which distinguish them from other tribes. It may also focus on reconciliation between feuding tribes.

### **2. Social Oration**

This type is delivered during social activities especially during occasions such as marriage ceremony. An example is the oration of Abu Tālib during the marriage between Khadījah and his nephew Muḥammad (SAW).

### **3. Religious Oration**

This theme became widespread with the advent of Islam. It was used to propagate Islam, defend it and part and parcel of Islamic worship and ceremonies. During the Umayyad period, various religious groups like the Mu`tazilites, the Qadarites, Murji'ites and Jabrites employed it to expound their doctrines.

### **4. Elegiac Oration**

This was used to mourn the dead. The orator recounts the qualities and services of the deceased and generally pay a literary tribute to the figure, his household and even his tribe.

### **5. Political Oration**

This type also became popular during the Umayyad period as a result of the emergence of political parties each supporting one of the contending political groups that have emerged. The Umayyads themselves constituted a group while the Shi'tes supported Ali and members of his family. The Zubayris and the Kharijites were also formidable political groups. Orations were delivered to champion the cause or in defence of each of the groups.

### **6. Military Oration**

This type was used during battles to instil a sense of gallantry in the minds of the soldiers. It extols the virtues of fearlessness, bravery, courage, valour, professionalism, sacrifice and gallantry. It may also draw attention to the advantages of martyrdom and the need to pay the supreme sacrifice if need be.



## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Apart from the themes highlighted so far, identify other themes which in your opinion Arabic oration can be used for.

### 3.3 Qualities of the *Khaṭīb*

Not every one can be a good public speaker. The art requires a variety of skills and to some extent some sort of talent and natural disposition. The *Khaṭīb* is a person who possesses unique skills in public speaking. He uses language in a powerful and imaginative way. He is knowledgeable in various aspects of language, rhetoric and even in the non-verbal means of communication. For instance, he may raise or lower his voice pitch and at the same time uses a variety of gesticulations to create maximum impact. He stands erect sometimes on an elevated place or an object to deliver his speech. The Arabs in the ancient times would climb a small hill or sit at the back of a camel to deliver their oratorical speeches; He moves his body strategically to create special effects. He organises his thoughts in a logical manner. He tailors his message to meet the expectation of the audience. He is generally articulate with an ability to deliver moving speeches. He possesses a pleasant personality.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Have you ever exhibited the qualities of an orator? Identify such qualities and those you need to develop to become a good public speaker.

### 3.4 The Values of *al-Khiṭābah*

Public speech-making has today assumed a significant position. People still appreciate and indeed attach great importance to it as the ancient people did. Since the *Jāhiliyyah* period, the Arabs used *al-Khiṭābah* as a powerful tool of communication. It is still so up till today. The Arabs used oration as an effective tool for engendering patriotism, pledging allegiance, paying homage, instilling morality, social mobilisation, cohesion, reconciliation and sometimes for propaganda. It is used for any serious discourse demanding elegant presentation. The message has an immediate impact. The listener is expected to act upon it without delay.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Identify four things you think *al-Khiṭābah* can help to achieve which ordinary speech cannot achieve.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Our study of *al-Khiṭābah* has shown that eloquent speech delivered in Arabic to an Arab audience is highly coveted by the Arabs. It is different from everyday speech in several respects. The orator himself must be skilful so that the desired effect or impact of his oration will be felt by the hearers. *al-Khiṭābah* plays multifaceted functions. *al-Khiṭābah* is a vital means of community and civic engagement. It is also a literary art especially when it is well crafted to create special effects in the minds of the listeners. It is also a powerful tool of social and political mobilisation. Orations assist to make a difference in the life of a people. It could make or mar the society. The Arabic orations have helped nurture a literary culture of the Arabs that is cherished and studied for its artistic and recreational values up till today.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Discussion in this unit has focussed on *Khiṭābah* as an art and as an integral aspect of Arab social and intellectual life. We were able to examine the meaning of *Khiṭābah* and closely related terms. We studied its structure and the main themes in which *al-Khiṭābah* can appear. We also looked at the qualities which make the *khatib* distinct from other speakers. Finally, we identified the values of *al-Khiṭābah*.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you now know about *al-Khiṭābah* that you did not know before you studied this Unit?
2. What is your view on the notion that *al-Khiṭābah* is still relevant today not only to the Arabs and Arabic speaking peoples but to the entire humanity. Support your response with illustrations.

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## UNIT 2 ORATIONS OF AL-HAJJAJ IBN YUSUF ATH-THAQAFI

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Brief Biography of al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf
  - 3.2 Oration of al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf
  - 3.3 Analysis of al-Hajjāj's Oration
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Orations are delivered in context. In other words, *Khiṭābah* is usually a part of an event or a product of a particular situation. For it to be fully comprehended, it is necessary to bring to the fore the circumstances which led to its delivery, the personality of the speaker and the kind of society that produced him. Although our primary concern in this unit is to study the orations of celebrated public speakers such as al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf in terms of their literary values, we shall nevertheless also take a look at the biography of the orator to enable us have a good background information of the orator himself.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- narrate the life history of al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf
- read and translate excerpts from his oration
- identify the significant features of his oration

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Who is al-Hajjāj?

Abū Muḥammad Al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf ath-Thaqafī al-Kulayb lived between 41 AH and 95AH (661-714 CE). Al-Hajjāj (The Pilgrim) was not his original name. He began to bear that after expunging al-Kulayb from his name prior to his appointment as governor of `Iraq. Early in

life, he functioned as a Qur'anic tutor. Thereafter, he served in the police under Rawḥ ibn Zinbā' al-Judhamī, a wazīr to the Caliph.

The period in which he flourished witnessed intense political strife and rivalry between the Umayyads and those who opposed their rule especially, the Alids, the Zubayris and the Khawārij. He emerged as the leading general of the Umayyads. He was particularly mandated to quell the opposition of Abdullah ibn Zubayr who had declared himself a caliph in Makkah. His victory over `Abdullah ibn Zubayr in 692 CE so much impressed the caliph that he appointed him as governor of `Iraq. His chief mandate was to put a stop to the unrest, revolt and excesses of the Alids, the Khawārij and other groups fomenting trouble in that region. He served Marwān, Abdul-Malik and al-Walīd who were caliphs at different times. Under the reign of 'Abdul-Malik, he used a variety of strategies including threats, force, military tactics and intellectual ability to carry out his assignment. He left no one in doubt regarding his administrative skills, military competence and above all his impressive power of oration.

Parts of his outstanding achievements include the following:

1. He facilitated the expansion of Islam to India and Central Asia. Under his direction after the defeat of Zubayr, the Ka`bah was reconstructed.
2. It was also under his direction that vowel signs were introduced into Arabic from Syriac.
3. He moved the capital to newly built city he named Wasīt (Medial) because it was located between the al-Baṣrah and al-Kūfah.
4. He contributed significantly to the Arabic literature through his eloquent speeches and epistles.
5. He made Arabic the official language of the lands Islam had expanded to.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Discuss briefly the activities of al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf as a politician, military commander and administrator.

#### **3.1.2 Oration of al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf**

One of the objectives of studying *al-Khiṭābah* is to be able to access its literary values. A numerous oratorical speeches are credited to al-Hajjāj but the one that is usually cited is that he delivered when he assumed office as the governor of Iraq. Two activities are necessary here. The first is to read the text in Arabic and in English translation with sufficient understanding. The second is to do a textual analysis of the

oration itself. Let us now read an excerpt from al-Hajjāj's *Khiṭābah*. The circumstances surrounding the delivery of the oration was reported in the following words by Hitti (1970:207):

The unexpected arrival of al-Hajjāj at the famous mosque in Kūfah in disguise and accompanied only by twelve cameleers, his brusque mounting of the pulpit and removal of the heavy turban which veiled his face, and his fiery oration, are among the most dramatic and popular episodes recounted in Arabic literature.

al-Hajjāj addressed his audience beginning with a line of poetry before going into the actual speech. He says:

أنا ابن جلا وطلاع الثنايا  
متى أضع العمامة تعرفونى

يا أهل الكوفة، إني لأرى رؤسا قد أينعت وحان قطافها وإني  
لصاحبها. وكأني انظر إلى الدماء بين العمام واللى .  
وان أمير المؤمنين [اطال الله بقاءه] نثر كنانته بين يديه فعجم  
عيدانها، فوجدنى امرها عودا، واصلبها مكسرا، فرماكم بى لأنكم  
ظالما أوضعتم فى الفتنة واضطجعتم فى مراقد الضلال.  
والله لأحز منكم حزم السلمة ولأضربنكم ضرب غرائب الإبل، فإنكم  
لكأهل قرية كانت أمنة مطمئنة يأتيتها رزقها رغدا من كل مكان  
فكفرت بأنعم الله، فأذاقها الله لباس الجوع والخوف بما كانوا  
يصنعون، وأنى والله ما أقول إلا وفيت، ولا أهم إلا أمضيت ولا  
أخلق إلا فريت.  
وأن أمير المؤمنين أمرنى بإعطائكم اعطيناتكم، وأن أوجهكم  
بمحاربة عدوكم، مع المهلب بن ابى مغرة. وانى أقسم بالله لا أجد  
رجلا تخلف بعد أخذ خراجه بثلاثة أيام إلا ضربت عنقه.

I am he who scattered darkness and climbs lofty summits.  
As I lift the turban from my face you will know me.

O People of `Irāq! I can see that some heads are ripe for plucking and they certainly belong to me. As if I see (streams of) blood (trickling) between the turbans and the beards... The Commander of the Faithfuls, may he live long, has spread his sheath before him and has tested the stems (of its arrows), and he found me to be the strongest and toughest, (of them all) so he threw you at me. This is because you are unjust in your position in the crisis and you slept on the couches of error. By

God! I shall bundle you up like acacia tree and beat you like a straying camel.

You are like dweller of a town secured... but became unappreciative then God made the taste of hunger and fear on account of what they do. Of certainty – By God! I speak not except I actualise, or take an issue as important except I achieve it, or behave except on purpose. Certainly, the Commander of the Faithfuls has instructed that I come to you and to face your enemy with a battle together with Muhallab son of Mugirah. I swear by God, I find not a man to take his place three days after his capture except that I break his neck.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List 3 characteristics of the oration of al-Hajjāj.

### 3.3 Textual Analysis

From your familiarity with the classification of oration which we discussed in this last unit, you will discover that this is a political oration. The context of the delivery of this *Khitābah* was when al-Hajjāj was sent on mission of quelling the revolts of Alids and the Kharijites against the Umayyad government. Upon his arrival in a disguised manner- his turban covered almost his entire face, he mounted the *minbar* (pulpit) and remained speechless for a while. The audience was agitated and was about to pounce on him when he commenced his speech.

He used a line of poetry to introduce himself and thereafter dwelled on the subject matter. His intention was to inject palpable fear into his audience. He succeeded in doing this by his choice of diction through words and statements like, ‘blood’, ‘I see ripe heads’ ‘he threw you at me’ ‘I shall certainly flog you’ and the like. To achieve similar objective he used both *ta’kīd* (emphasization) and *qasam* (oath).

He strengthen his presentation through poetical quotes and verses from the Qur’ān.

He employed a number of rhetorical forms to add power and colour to his oration. The rhetorical devices used include;

1. *al-Isti`ārah* (Metaphor) as observable in the expression “I see ripe heads ready for harvest and the one to do it” Here he likens human heads to ripe fruits or crops. This is to say that their conduct has attained intolerable level and will lead to a harvest of calamity for them.

2. *at-Tashbih* (Simile) in the statement “I shall bound you the way acacia is bound”. The orator here compares his approach in tackling the Iraqis to the way acacia tree is bound together so that no possibility of disentanglement is possible.
3. *al-Kināyah* (Metonymy) “As if I see blood between the turbans and beards” This is to indirectly refer to the consequences of their refusal to halt their unrest which will likely lead to death.  
The language is generally forceful, well informed and very coherent.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Read the full text of the oration of al-Hajjāj as contained in the selected books for further reading with a view to discovering other literary values of his oration apart from those already discussed.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Our discussion has enabled us to experience practically, the nature of *Khitābah* during the Umayyad period. We also saw the power and artistry behind al-Hajjāj’s eloquent speech. This unit is expected to assist you to study other Arabic orations that you come across in a more independent manner. It will also assist in developing in you an interest in becoming an accomplished orator. The ambition of every orator is to ensure that his speech is classical, informative, elegant and catchy.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt about the biography of al-Hajjāj. You have also been exposed to his oration. The textual analysis has revealed the literary abilities of al-Hajjāj.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you consider to be the values of al-Hajjāj’s oration?
2. What is your view on the approach of al-Hajjāj in addressing the Iraqis?

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## UNIT 3 ORATION OF `UMAR IBN `ABDUL-`AZIZ

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Brief Biography of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz
  - 3.2 Oration of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz
  - 3.3 Textual Analysis
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit presents you with more practical study of *al- Khitābah*. It is similar to the study of oration of al-Hajjāj which was accomplished in the preceding unit. You must be making a steady progress in your study of Arabic prose and in particular, the study of Arabic orations. In the last unit, we selected for study the political oration of a distinguished orator of the Umayyad period. Since Arabic orations have various themes, it is important that we select for study another theme. In this unit, therefore our focus will be on the religious theme. More specifically, we shall be discussing the oration of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz who is another accomplished orator of the same period. As we did in the previous unit, we shall begin by looking at his biography. Thereafter we shall study the text of his oration and in the process identify the characteristics which make it imperative to study.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- narrate the life history of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz
- read and translate excerpts from his oration
- give textual analysis of his oration

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Brief Biography of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz

`Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz was born in 681 CE into the illustrious family of the Umayyads. He first served as the governor of Arabia in the government of al-Walīd. With the passing away of Sulayman, the successor of al-Walīd, he became the seventh Umayyad caliph in 717 at the age of 36. He subsequently reigned for only three years. `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz was a son of a granddaughter of `Umar ibn al-Khattāb, the second orthodox caliph. He shared many similarities with his namesake and maternal grandfather. Apart from the identical name, they shared several qualities including piety, selflessness, vision, justice and of course good leadership. He lived an ascetic, simple and exemplary life. According to Rahīm (1983:146-7),

`Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz inherited both the blood as well as the qualities and ideas of his great maternal ancestor and namesake. Piety, simplicity, and deep devotion to the duty of the *khalīfah* were the distinguishing qualities of his character

He represents a sharp contrast to the perceived recklessness of most of the Umayyad caliphs.

He died in 720 CE at the age of thirty-nine

#### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Do you subscribe to the notion that `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz should be considered one of the orthodox caliphs? Give reasons to support your position.

##### 3.1.3 Oration of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz

This oration is reported to be the last oration before his demise. He addresses a number of issues bothering on death, grave and accountability. The full text of the oration reads:

أيها الناس انكم لم تخلقوا عبثاً ولم تتركوا سدى، وانّ لكم معاداً يحكم الله بينكم فيه فخاب وخبر من خرج من رحمة الله، التي وسعت كل شيء، وحُرم الجنة التي عرضها السموات والأرض. واعلموا ان الأمان غداً لمن خاف اليوم، وباع قليلاً بكثيرٍ وفائتاً بباقي ألا ترون أنكم في اسلاب الهالكين، وسيخلفها من بعدكم الباقون، وكذلك حتى تردّوا إلى خير الوارثين.

ثم أنتم في كل يوم تشيِّعون عاديًا ورائحًا إلى الله، قد قضى نحبته،  
 وبلغ أجله، ثم تغيّبونه في صدع من الأرض ثم تدعونه غير مؤسِّدٍ  
 ولا ممهَّدٍ، قد خلع الأسباب، وفارق الأحباب، وباشر التراب، غنيًّا  
 عما ترك فقيرًا إلى ما قدّم.

O People! Certainly you are not created without a rationale, and not free from accountability. You certainly have an allotted time of death, in which God judges among you. Certainly unsuccessful is he who fails to attain God's mercy which embraces all things; forbidden for such is paradise, expansive as the heavens and the earth.

Realise that a secured future awaits he who fears today, such who sells a little with a lot, the transitory with the everlasting, do you not recognize that you will in the ranks of the dead and who will be succeeded by the surviving ones. You remain so till you are returned to the Best of Inheritors.

Thereafter, everyday, you are ushered gradually to God. Such (a person) is deceased and reached its end and they will conceal him in a crevice in the land and they abandon him with neither a headrest nor a couch. He casts off the means of sustenance and abandoned the loved ones, interacts with the sands, and faces accountability, in no need of all he left behind, a pauper relying on what he put forth.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss any two aspects of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz's oration which fascinates you. Ensure you carry out this exercise before moving on to the next segment of this unit.

### 3.3 Textual Analysis

Having carried out the last self assessment, you are likely to have discovered some of the literary characteristics of the oration under study. If you have discovered any relevant point not mentioned in this discussion, feel free to add it because there is no saturation point for appreciating any literary work. We can now turn again to the text of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz's oration.

The religious oration in focus begins with the evocation "O people!". By using it the orator intends to gain the attention of the audience and to prepare their minds for a message he considers very germane. At the beginning of the second paragraph, the orator uses the imperative verb "Realise" to further secure the concentration of the listeners. Also in the second paragraph he employed the interrogatory particle to dialogue

with the minds of his listeners. This is also another way of involving the audience and ensuring that he carries them along throughout his speech. We therefore see a variety of communication strategies deployed to ensure that a vital message is delivered and the objective of making the speech realised. You may want to try out some of these strategies in your own speeches and thereafter try to assess the impact it creates in your audience.

He juxtaposed antonyms (*al-Muqābalāt*) such as غنيًّا and فقيراً , فائتاً and بكثيرٍ , باقٍ and قليلاً to achieve multidimensional effects on the addressees. The intention is, first of all, to make the message explicit. Secondly, it is for the purpose of emphasis (*ta'kiqīd*). Thirdly, it creates rhyme and euphony.

The speaker uses a number of Qur'anic phrases to strengthen his presentation. A good example of these include ( الجنة التي عرضها ) (السموات والأرض). The use of Qur'anic phrases is to be expected considering the spiritual profile of the author which is well acclaimed.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Read the full text of the oration of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz as contained in the selected books for further reading with a view to discovering other literary values of his oration apart from those already discussed.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

The study of oration of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz has enabled us to experience practically, the nature of *Khitābah* during the Umayyad period. We also saw the power and artistry behind `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz's eloquent speech. This unit is expected to assist you to study other Arabic orations that you come across in a more independent manner. It will also assist in developing in you an interest in becoming an accomplished orator. The ambition of every orator is to ensure that his speech is classical, informative, elegant and catchy.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt about the biography of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz. We were able to reveal the qualities which distinguished him among the Umayyad caliphs. More importantly, the unit exposed you to his oration which is religious in theme. The textual analysis has revealed the literary abilities of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz. He employed various literary devices to deliver his message.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you consider to be the values of `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz's oration?

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## **MODULE 3      INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ARABIC EPISTLES**

Unit 1	An Overview of <i>ar-Risālah</i>
Unit 2	Epistles of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib
Unit 3	Epistles of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī

### **UNIT 1      AN OVERVIEW OF AR-RISALAH**

#### **CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Meaning of <i>ar-Risālah</i>
3.1.1	The need for Epistles
3.2	Types of <i>ar-Rasāil</i>
3.3	Structure of a Typical <i>ar-Risālah</i>
3.4	The Literary Values of <i>ar-Risālah</i>
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

#### **1.0      INTRODUCTION**

You must be familiar with the idea and practice of letter-writing. You have perhaps composed and sent different types of written messages to your acquaintances. The subject matter of our discussion in this unit is strongly related to written communication in a slightly different manner. Here, we are concerned about the practice of communication through the means of Arabic epistles. We shall learn about the distinction between an epistle and ordinary letters we write from time to time. We shall also examine the characteristics of Arabic epistles, their typologies, purposes and values. We shall in the process discover that epistles are important components of the Arab literary heritage

#### **2.0      OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define *ar-Risālah*
- discuss the need for epistles
- describe the types of *ar-Risālah*
- explain the structure or characteristics of Arabic epistles.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Meaning of *ar-Risālah*

The word “*risālah*” (plural *rasāil*) according to Cowan (1963: 338) means among others a mail item, letter, note, message, treatise or epistle. From the ordinary meaning of the word, a good idea of the actual significance of the term in Arabic literature emerges. *ar-Risālah* or epistle is a written form of communication. The composition which usually deals with a definite subject matter is systematically written. It is carefully crafted in a way that the message is easily comprehended and able to achieve the purpose of its composition. To achieve coherence and elegance the services of professional writers who are experts in stylistics are usually procured. In Arabic literature, epistography is recognised as a form of literary prose composition. In the early Islamic period when this art was first cultivated, longhand was used. Today we know that many people now type their letters. A good number even appear in electronic form. The distinction however lies in the artistic nature of the Arabic epistles which have come down to us.

##### 3.1.1 The Need for Arabic Epistles

The idea of communicating or passing vital information through the medium of writing was largely instrumental in the emergence of Arabic epistles. The Arabs of the Jāhilliyah period employed oral means of communication because of the low number of literate members of the pre-Islamic society. Writing materials were also very scarce. The few inscriptions credited to the period were preserved on stones. With the advent of Islam, additional materials such as animal skins, flat wood and bones came to be used. The emergence of Islam also encouraged literacy due to need to record the Qur’ān, Several companions of the prophet (SAW) emerged as secretaries and scribes in charge of writing down of revelations. These scribes were known as the *Kuttāb*. A number of other factors contributed to the use of epistolary writings, some of these include:

- a. documentation of the activities of government, drafting of treaties and passing written instructions to government officials in distant places.
- b. the need to introduce Islam to the leaders of various kingdoms, empires and states. The prophet therefore, sent epistles to such rulers inviting them and their people to Islam.
- c, commercial activities had increased and the need to record commercial transactions led to increased writing activities. This, in turn, encouraged many to acquire the skills of reading and



- writing. Some of these literate men eventually became writers of distinction.
- d. foreigners who embraced Islam studied Arabic and subsequently brought into Arabic their flare for writing.

The above factors contributed immensely to the building of the culture of writing which commenced through epistography. Having learnt about the meaning of *ar-Risālah* and the factors that facilitated its emergence, we shall now take a look at the different types of *ar-Risālah*.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Check the meaning of an epistle in different dictionaries and find out which is close to the definition of an Arabic epistle as espoused in our discussion.

### 3.2 Types of *Risālah*

People write different types of letters. The basic categories are the official and unofficial letters. The case of Arabic Epistles is not far from this popular categorisation as we shall soon discover. There are three forms of *ar-Risālah*, namely:

1. *ar-Risālah ad-Dīwaniyyah* (Chancery Epistles): This type is the official correspondence which emanates from the court of the head of state or one of the senior officials of government addressing an official matter. The epistle bears the official seal of government. A typical example is the letter of the prophet addressed to foreign rulers. An excerpt from one of the letters reads:

من محمد رسول الله الي كسري عظيم الروم. سلام علي من اتبع الهدى.  
فأمن با الله ورسول الله واشهد ان لا اله الا الله واني رسول الله الي الناس  
كافة لاندز من كان حيا. اسلم تسلم فان ابتليت فعليك اثم المجوس.

Meaning:

From Muḥammad, Messenger of Allah to Chosroe, Emperor of Persia. Peace upon those who follow the guidance. Believe in Allah and His messenger and bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and I am the messenger of Allah to all people so that I may warn those that are living. So, accept Islam, you will receive salvation but if you reject it the sin of the magians will be upon you.

2. *ar-Risālah al-Adabiyyah* (Literary Epistle): This type addresses purely a literary issue. It is written to promote the literary culture.

Among writers, it is meant to encourage excellence in the writing profession while among the general public it is supposed to entertain. It is elegantly written with very good diction. A typical illustration of this is the literary epistle of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib addressed to the Kuttāb. We shall study this essay more closely in the next unit.

3. *ar-Risālah al-Ikhwāniyyah* (Personal Correspondence): This type of epistle is that addressed to relatives, friends and acquaintances. The subject matter relates to personal matters and may be of little interest to members of the public.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Under what category would you place the epistle of Muḥammad (SAW). Explain the reasons for your categorisation.

### 3.3 Anatomy of *ar-Risālah*

Most of the epistles of the early Islamic period (610 CE-661 CE) were brief and straight to the point. (Mubarak,1934:59-60). The *Risālah* that first appeared during the prophetic era basically has two components which are the opening and the main message. Let us consider the characteristics of each of these using the prophet's epistle earlier quoted as an example.

#### 1. The Opening

This initial aspect supplies information about the writer and the addressee. This part of the letter may also contain salutation. These two characteristics can be seen at the beginning of the prophet's epistle as observable in "From Muḥammad, Messenger of Allah to Chosroe, Emperor of Persia. Peace upon those who follow the guidance".

#### 2. The Main Body

This contains the main message of the epistle. Usually, only one single theme is addressed. For instance, the prophet's message was meant to invite Chosroe, Emperor of Persia to accept Islam. This message immediately follows the opening part and ends the epistle. In this epistle, it contains the following two sentences:

Believe in Allah and His messenger and bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and I am the messenger of Allah to all people so that I may warn those that are living. So, accept Islam, you will receive salvation but if you reject it the sin of the magians will be upon you.

However, during the Umayyad period, *Risālah* came to have additional features as follows:

### 3. Conclusion

This part of the epistle contains the final message of the writer. Sometimes, it summarises the high points of the composition and brings the epistle to a close.

### 4. Division into paragraphs

Most epistles, prior to the period of the Umayyads just had one paragraph. However, al-Kātib appeared to have pioneered the division of the epistle into paragraphs each representing a fresh idea linked to the main theme.

### 5. Artistic language

The language of epistles are artistically crafted to engender maximum effect in the mind of the reader. The writer is therefore able to achieve the twin objective of communicating his idea as well as entertaining the reader.

### 6. Extensive Length

The length of epistles were usually short and straight to the point often containing few sentences. This changed during the Umayyad period and subsequently, Arabic epistles became more extended running into several pages. This gave the writer more space to express his feelings and send across his message in a more convincing way.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

From what have been learnt about Arabic epistles, what would you consider to be the major differences between the structure of letters you are used to and Arabic epistles?

### 3.4 The Utilities of *ar-Risālah*

*Risālah* is used for a variety of purposes. As the name indicates it is primarily meant for communication. But we also see that it was also meant for entertainment because of its artistic nature especially for those who appreciate works of art. We do know that art works can be read for leisure. They also address issues of common interest to society. Because of their high standard, different aspects of the text can be cited to strengthen essays and various forms of oral or written prose. In other

words, interesting ideas have been quoted and are still being quoted. Aspiring writers have a large pool of approaches, styles and models they can follow or modify to enhance the quality of their writings.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Arabic epistles have contributed immensely to the development and growing legacy of Arabic literature. The Arabic epistle itself evolved gradually out of necessity to become a recognised genre of Arabic literature. This has paved the way for it to develop its own peculiar characteristics and utilities which perhaps it does not share with other literary genres. Contemporary writers of letters have a lot to learn from the vast Arabic epistles of the past.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

So far, we have been able to define *Risālah* showing both its ordinary meaning and the actual meaning. Our discussion also took us through the need for epistles, its various types and the anatomy of an Arabic epistle. Finally, we identified the various utilities of Arabic epistles.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Identify three standard Arabic correspondences you have come across, then discuss how they can be classified giving reasons for such classification.

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## UNIT 2 EPISTLES OF `ABDUL-HAMID AL-KATIB

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
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  - 3.1 Brief Biography of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib
  - 3.2 Epistles of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib
    - 3.2.1 His Literary Prose Writings
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- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

You have in the last unit learnt about Arabic epistles. We have among others studied the nature, role and relevance of epistles as a form of Arabic prose. In order to consolidate our study of Arabic epistles, there is need to focus attention on a prominent figure whose contribution to this area of Arabic literature marked an important turning point in the annals of Arabic prose writing. To achieve this objective, three relevant issues must be addressed. The first is his biography which will provide a good background to an understanding of his writings. This second is his epistolary composition which, in fact, is the main import of our discussion here. Finally, we shall study the values of his epistles.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- narrate the life history of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib
- describe the literary qualities of al-Kātib
- identify the types of his epistles
- explain the features and values of his epistles

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Brief Biography of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib

Abū Ghālib `Abdul-Hamīd ibn Yaḥyā al-Kātib was of Persian descent from the city of Anbār. As a child, he was reported to have been endowed with a sharp intellect. It is, therefore, not surprising that he committed the entire Qur'ān to memory as a child. He learnt various aspects of the Arabic language with particular emphasis on Arabic rhetorics from his main teacher, Abū al-`Alā Sālim. According to Ibn Nadīm (1960:257), Abū Sālim himself was a master of literary style and eloquence who had translated a number of Greek epistles into Arabic. al-Kātib benefited immensely from the works of his teacher. Apart from Arabic, he studied Persian and Greek (Khūrī: 163:180). He also learnt oration and other aspects of Islamic studies.

He first served as an itinerant teacher of children before Marwān ibn Muḥammad, who was then the Umayyad governor of Syria discovered his mastery of Arabic language and rhetorics and consequently employed him to assist in improving the effectiveness of his administration.

In the year 744 CE, Marwān became *khalīfah* in Damascus. He appointed `Abdul-Hamīd as his chief secretary and head of chancery. His responsibility in this capacity included drafting vital correspondences, record keeping and sundry administrative duties (Adigun: 1986:55). Throughout the ten years in which he served in this capacity, he followed the ethics of the writing profession. He has to his credit six literary epistles (*ar-Rasāil al-Adabiyyah*), some chancery documents (*ar-Rasa'il ad-Dīwāniyyah*) and private letters (*ar-Rasāil al-Ikhwāniyyah*) Ibn Nadīm (1960:257) reports in his *Fihrist* that he had some one thousand epistles authored by him. Unfortunately, most of these are extinct. Scholars of Arabic rhetorics and language history are unanimous that he pioneered the art prose writing as a profession. He was said to have introduced a number of innovations which assisted subsequent prose writers to standardise their compositions. For instance, he introduced the elaborate *taḥmīdāt*, the breaking of essays into sub-sections and paragraphs. He also introduced the use of rhetorical devices in correspondences. Ibn `Abd Rabbih al-Andalūsi (1967:4: 165) testified to these innovations when he said:

"اول من فتنق اكمام البلاغة وسهل طرقها وفك رقاب الشعر"

“Abdul-Hamīd was the first to open up the buds of rhetorics, to smooth out its ways and to loosen the bonds of poetry”.

He died in 750 CE at the hands of the `Abbasid agitators. Prior to this, his master, reportedly suspected him by accusing him of betrayal. He politely told his master:

"ان الذي اشرت به علي أنفع الأمرين لك واقبحهما بي وما عندي الا الصبر  
حتي يفتح الله عليك او اقتل معك"

“Surely, what you allude to is for the better of the two issues to be yours and the more repugnant for me. I cannot but be patient until Allah grants you victory or I be killed with you”.

### 3.2 Epistles of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib

From the biography of `Abdul-Hamīd, you will observe that he was a leader of Arabic prose writing of his time. One can only expect very outstanding prose compositions from such a literary icon of the Umayyad period. Let us now consider the writings of al-Kātib which are all in form of correspondences. His *Rasāil* are basically of three types: *ar-Rasāil al-Adabiyyah* (Literary Epistles), *ar-Rasāil ad-Dīwāniyyah* (Chancery Epistles) and *ar-Rasāil al-Ikhwāniyyah* (Private Epistles). Let us study the features of some of these epistles for illustrative purposes.

#### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Trace the life history of Abdul-Hamid al-Katib showing the diversity of his training and career.

##### 3.2.1 His Literary Prose Writings

The literary prose writings of al-Kātib are of paramount importance to us since we are engaged in the study of prose as a type of literature. It is also important because such writings showcased his literary prowess as well as constituting a model for other writers. He himself was concerned about the enhancement of standard of literary compositions hence the dedication of one of his writings to the *kuttāb* (writers) in which he admonished them on the need to adhere to the ethics of the profession. An extract from his epistle to the *kuttāb* reads:

#### إلى الكتاب

أما بعد، حفظكم الله يا أهل صناعة الكتابة وحاطكم وافقكم وارشدكم،  
فإن الله عز وجل جعل الناس بعد الأنبياء والمرسلين صلوات الله  
عليهم اجمعين، ومن بعد الملوك المكرمين أصنافا وإذا كانوا في  
الحقيقة سواء. وصرّفهم في صفوف الصناعات وضروب المحاولات  
إلى أسباب معاشيهم وأبواب أر□اقهم فجعلكم معشر الكتاب في  
أشرف الجهات أهل الأدب والمروءة، والعلم، والرواية، بكم تنتظم

للخليفة محاسنها، وتستقيم أمورها وبنصائحكم يصلح الله للخلق  
سلطانهم وتعمر بلادهم.

Meaning:

O ye people of the writing profession! May God protect, guide and make you succeed. Indeed, God the Majestic, the Magnificent, created people after the prophets and messengers; may peace be upon them all. (He also created) subjects for the noble kings even though they are equal. He despatched them to various professions and different endeavours as sources of their sustenance. He therefore put you fellow writers in the most honourable discipline as literary men. You are virtuous, intelligent and reflective. It is through you that the state organises its functions and carries out its affairs. With your suggestions, God sets aright the sultanate for the good of the people and so the state prospers.

### Textual Appraisal

This piece was addressed to chancery secretaries or prose writers in general. The full text of the letter covers about four pages in al-Qalqashandi's (pp85-9) *Subh al-A`shā*. The subject matter of the letter includes stating the code of conduct of the writing profession, the competences to be acquired by writers and the importance of interaction and cooperation, the prestige and invaluable services of writers among others.

The diction of the author is highly impressive. The sentences are relatively long but properly connected. The use of *`atf* is well sustained to inject rhythm into the composition. He makes use of *tashbīh* (simile) when he likens the functions of secretaries to the functions performed by the rulers' body. The language is business-like and straight to the point.

### 3.2.2 His Chancery Prose Writings

In his capacity as secretary to the *khalīfah*, part of al-Kātib's responsibilities was to write vital letters on behalf of the *khalīfah* who endorses such letters. Considering al-Kātib's status as an accomplished writer, the chancery documents credited to him reflect his literary prowess. The chancery correspondences of `Abdul-Hamīd cited by literary historians are many. They all exhibit his ability to use language in a creative way. The accuracy of the diction is particularly remarkable in all his writings. For the purpose of illustration, his epistle in which he prescribed the criteria to be followed in selecting competent commanders to head various detachments of the army typifies the style he adopted in his chancery prose. An excerpt from it reads:



ولّ شرطك وأمر عسكريك أوثق قوادك عندك وأمنهم نصيحةً  
واقدمهم بصرةً في طاعتك وأقواهم سكيمةً في امرك وامضاهم  
صريعةً واصدقهم عفاةً واجراهم حنانًا واكفاهم أمانةً واصحها  
ضميرًا وارضاهم صبرًا واحمدهم خلقًا واعطفهم على جماعتهم رافةً  
واحسنهم لهم نظرًا واشدهم في دين الله حقًا وصلابةً.

Meaning:

Manage the affairs of your army through the most reliable of your generals who should be the most sincere, very sharp in discerning your commands, most active in carrying out your assignments, the keenest in determination, and the best in safeguarding others' interests, the conscientious and completely resigned to patience. They must be the most laudable in morals, extremely benevolent towards their troops, most caring to them and the most steadfast with the religion of God truly and tenaciously.

### Textual Appraisal

The text above shows that `Abdul-Hamīd can adopt any style at will and at the same time make the most of such a style. In the case of the extract above, he employed multiple use of a long sequence of superlatives (*Sīgat at-Taḥdīl al-`Ulyā*) followed by specifications (*at-Tamyīz*) in each phrase. Thus the sentence contains sequences that are phonologically related as observable in the word-final nunnations which agree in voicing. The epistle is valuable for its professional and moral messages. It should be of interest to people associated with military governance in particular and administrators in general.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List at least 3 characteristics of `Abdul-Hamīd's writings.

### 3.3 Values of al-Kātib's Epistles

`Abdul-Hamīd is incontrovertibly a legend as far as the art of prose writing is concerned. He pioneered the introduction of many innovations into Arabic literary prose not known in the preceding *Jahiliyyah* and early Islamic periods. `Abdul-Hamīd appeared in an era the number of literate persons had considerably improved but certainly the number of expert or professional writers was still low. He felt the need to feel a vacuum, to provide leadership and promote writing as an art as well as a profession. His intervention came in two forms: theoretically and practically. Theoretically, he addressed the issue of maintaining standard

in writing in one of his writings. He highlighted the means of attaining such standard. Practically, he displayed the kind of standard he envisaged throughout his numerous epistles.

Although, he used epistles as a means of promoting his literary ideas, we however note that the values of his contributions transcend the area of epistolary writing. The kind of style and standard he advocated are applicable to any form of literary writing be it epistle, story, novel and indeed all prose forms. He himself envisioned a world of literature that is beyond the writing of epistles, his traditional area of focus. Most of the literary dimensions he introduced into Arabic prose became more or less permanent features of Arabic prose even up to the contemporary period. Innovations, such as the division of a prose work into subdivisions and paragraphing have become writing traditions that are adhered to up till today.

He allowed the length of an essay to be determined by the subject matter. This approach ensured that the balance between form and content is achieved. This is an important consideration in determining the standard and literary worth of any writing. A major deficiency in writing is when one of these is unduly emphasized at the expense of another. `Abdul-Hamīd wrote in order to convey a message as well as to entertain so that the reader would feel the need to read through the entire work. He recognised the challenges facing the writing profession and intervened in a professional manner. The epistle he addressed to the writers will for ever remain a manual for writers.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Read through the entire text of `Abdul-Hamīd's epistle addressed to professional writers then highlight the measures and mechanisms which, in the author's opinion, will help raise the standard of prose writing.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

You will agree that the career, status and innovations of `Abdul-Hamīd are all impressive. Ibn Qutaybah (undated: 548) acknowledged him as one of the ten prominent teachers of the early period of Islam. His judgement is predicated upon the fact that early in his career he taught pupils directly as an itinerant tutor but later in life he taught existing and prospective artistic prose writers indirectly through his monumental epistles, several of which have been preserved for posterity. The epistles of `Abdul-Hamīd are no doubt landmarks in the history of Arabic prose writing. The reason for this is not far fetched. He ensured that he equipped himself by studying rigorously under an accomplished scholar of note. He himself worked assiduously to ensure that anytime

he wrote, standard was maintained. This is the legacy he left for members of the writing profession. The innovations he introduced influenced the generation of prose writers after him. His salient accomplishments perhaps led to the popular saying:

بدئت الكتابة بعبد الحميد وختمت بإبن العميد.

“The art of prose writing began with `Abdul-Hamīd and ended with Ibn al-`Amid.”

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This discussion has revealed the pioneering roles `Abdul-Hamīd played in the standardisation of Arabic prose writing during the Umayyad period. His education, career as an itinerant tutor of children and later as secretary to the Umayyad governor in Armenia prepared him for a glorious and outstanding career as an accomplished prose writer. He introduced new dimensions into the art of prose writing. These literary innovations include the division of prose compositions into subdivisions further broken down into paragraphs so that the author’s thoughts are systematically and logically arranged. He eased the application of rhetorical devices in letter writing. He varied the lengths of the essay according to the subject matter. He employed grammatical devices to achieve rhythm and concord so that the reader does not only access the message but also enjoy the literary piece. He particularly used indefinite nouns (*nakrah*) all of which bear nunation. This renders the composition musical and pleasant to hear. Three main types of prose are credited to `Abdul-Hamīd. These are literary prose writings, chancery prose writings and personal prose writings. Extracts from two of these forms of epistles have been illustrated along with an appraisal of the texts.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the ways in which the education and administrative career of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib influenced his achievement as a writer.
2. Critically appraise the *rasā'il* of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib highlighting the main features of his compositions. Cite appropriate texts to support your answer,

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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## UNIT 3      EPISTLE OF AL-HASAN AL-BASRI

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Brief Biography of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī
  - 3.2 Epistle of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī to `Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz
  - 3.3 Textual Analysis
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we were able to study the epistles of `Abdul-Hamīd under two main themes, namely; chancery and literary prose-writing. It is important that we examine another prose writer and another theme apart from these two. In this unit therefore, we shall be studying the religious epistle of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī who also flourished within the Umayyad period. To carry out this task effectively, we shall in the first instance study his biography briefly then study the text of his epistle. After studying this unit you should be in position to identify the similarities and differences that exist between the writings of `Abdul-Hamīd and al-Hasan al-Baṣrī. This objective should be borne in mind as we study the epistle in focus.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- narrate the life history of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī
- describe the literary qualities of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī
- explain the important features and values of his epistles

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Brief Biography of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī

You may not be coming across the name al-Hasan al-Baṣrī for the first time. This is because, this Islamic scholar of repute has played several crucial roles in the history of Islam especially in the area of Islamic scholarship. He is, in fact, more prominently known as a distinguished scholar of Islamic studies than a literary figure. The fact that his

contributions to scholarship are not limited to the Islamic studies realm testifies to his erudition and intellectual capabilities.

Abu Sa`īd al-Hasan ibn Abīl-Hasan Yasar al-Baṣrī was born in Madīnah in the year 642 CE (21 AH). His parents were both Persians. He was said to have been nursed by one of the wives of Muḥammad (SAW) named Umm Salama in his infancy. As a *tābi`* (follower or successor of a companion of the prophet), he reportedly studied under `Alī ibn Abī Tālib up to the age of 14 before he migrated to Iraq.

He subsequently became a teacher in Baṣrah where he also established a *madrakah*. His prominent students include Waṣīl ibn `Aṭa' who is credited with the founding of the Mu`tazilite group. Other prominent students of his include `Amr ibn `Ubayd, Imām Ayyūb as-Sakhtiyānī and Humayd.

He practised asceticism extensively so much so that many *sūfī* initiatic chains (*silsilah*) pass through him (Glasse; 2002:173). He was known for his promotion of the doctrine of free-will under the religio-philosophical movement of Qadarism. He kicked against the idea of predestination which he contended would conflict with Allah's attribute of justice. al-Hasan al-Baṣrī opposed the practise of hereditary succession to the *khilāfah* introduced by the Umayyads. He died and was buried in Baṣrah in 728 CE. According to Hitti (1970:242-3) "the populace of Baṣrah turned out in a body to follow his funeral on Friday, the tenth of October, 728 CE, and none was left to attend or conduct the afternoon prayer in the mosque that day". He was survived by three sons: `Alī, Muḥammad and Sa`īd and their mother who was either a Jew or a Christian. al-Hasan al-Baṣrī is renowned for his extensive learning which attracted to him scores of students. He was a strong link between the companions of the prophet and the next generation of Muslims. He was thus a link in the transmission of Hadith having met and lived with many *ṣahābah* in Madīnah. His lectures covered among others, issues of philosophy, theology, jurisprudence and asceticism. Many scholars have quoted his numerous insightful sayings. The following piece, quoted in Glasse's (2002:173) *Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam* contains his prescription to his spiritual disciples. It reads:

One must seek to have the ten qualities of a dog: to sleep little during the night, which is a characteristic of a truly fervent soul. Not to complain of the heat or cold, which is the virtue of patient hearts. Not to leave behind an inheritance, which is the character of true devotion.

Never to be angry or envious, which is the character of the True Believer. To keep away from those who devour, which is the nature of the poor. Not to have a fixed abode, which is the quality of being a

pilgrim. To be content with what we are thrown to eat, which is the virtue of moderation. To sleep where we find ourselves, which is the characteristic of a satisfied heart. Never to mistake our Master, and if He strikes us to return to Him, which is the quality of hearts that are aware. To be always hungry, which is the characteristic of men of virtue... To be with the crowd dims the light of the heart.

These prescriptions of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī as well as the style of his presentation gives us a feel and serves as a precursor of what to expect when we study his religious epistle in the next segment of this unit.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Having read the life-history of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī, identify the factors that enabled him to be a versatile Islamic scholar of repute.

### 3.2 Epistle of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī

al-Hasan al-Baṣrī admired the style of leadership of Umar II because of his piety, openness and readiness to support the oppressed. He saw him as a person that loved the truth and willing to accept the truth. The particular epistle of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī in focus is a response to the open request of Umar II asking Islamic scholars, ascetics and the pious under the Islamic state to describe the attributes of a just Imam. Read below an excerpt from al-Hasan al-Baṣrī's scholarly response to the caliph's request.

...واعلم يا أمير المؤمنين إن الله جعل الإمام العادل قوام كل مائل،  
وقصد كل جائر، وصلاح كل فاسد، وقوة كل ضعيف ونصفة كل  
مظلوم، ومعزع كل ملهوف.  
والإمام العادل يا أمير المؤمنين، كالراعي الشفيق على أبله، الرفيق  
بها، الذي يرتاد لها أطيب المرعى، ويذودها عن مراتع الهلكة،  
ويحميها من السباع، ويكفيها من اذى الحر والقر.  
والإمام العادل يا أمير المؤمنين كالأب العانى على ولده يسعى لهم  
صغاراً، ويعلمهم كباراً، يكتسب لهم فى حياته، ويدخر لهم بعد مماته.  
والإمام العادل يا أمير المؤمنين كالأم الشفيقة، البرّة بولدها، جملته  
كرها ووضعته كرها، وربّته طفلاً، وتسهر بسهره، وتسكن بسكونه،  
ترضعه تارة، وتقطمه أخرى، وتفرح بعافيته، وتغتم بشكايته.

... And realise, O Commander of the Faithfuls! That God has made the just Imām a pillar for the wavering deviant, a guide for every transgressor, a redeemer of the morally bankrupt, a source of strength

for the oppressed, succour for the victimised, a comforter for every depressed person.

The just Imām - O Commander of the Faithfuls!- is like a dedicated loving shepherd for his camel, a companion for it who provides for it the best husbandry and protects it from perilous pasture. He secures it against beasts and shield it from the harm of cold and heat.

The just Imām - O Commander of the Faithfuls!- is similar to an affectionate father to his son. He strives for their upliftment as juveniles; he educates them in adulthood, and provides the necessary comforts during his lifetime and bequeath to them treasures after his demise.

The just Imām - O Commander of the Faithfuls!- is similar to a compassionate mother who is kind to her child. She console him in pain and delivers him in pain; she nurtures him as an infant, she shares both his discomfort and tranquillity. She breastfeed him for a time and weans him at another. She remains joyful when he is well and distressed when he experiences uneasiness.

Having gone through this text let us now carry out some tasks before venturing further to study the text.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Read the Arabic text of al-Baṣrī's epistle above carefully then try to establish the type of style adopted by the author in terms of the degree of its simplicity. Ensure you do this before moving to the next segment of our discussion.

### 3.3 Textual Analysis

The statement “The just Imām - O Commander of the Faithfuls!- begins every meaningful component of the epistle. The purpose is to sustain the attention of the reader and prepare his mind for a fresh idea. Apart from this, the text encapsulates the trust bequeathed to Islamic scholars which is that of providing Islamic guidance. They are to use pure, soft and impactful admonition to change people for the better.. al-Hasan al-Baṣrī exemplifies this approach through his epistle as reflected in the excellent diction and relevant imagery throughout the work. He consistently used *al-Muqābalat* (antonyms) to strengthen his message. Typical examples are:

وتغتمّ بشكايتيه and تفرح بعافيتيه , مماته and حياته , كبارًا and صغارًا



The intention is to facilitate understanding and embellish the language to make it appealing. He uses a variety of similes (*at-Tashbīh*) in the process of espousing the qualities and attributes of a just Imām. The particle of *tashbīh* “ك” is thus repeated severally’

We find particularly striking his use of the roles of the shepherd, the father and the mother illustrations typifying the manner in which a just Imām should relate to his followers. He arranged these roles in an impressive sequence beginning with the one with the lowest intensity of affection and ending with the mother who displays the highest intensity of affection.

Euphony pervades the entire epistle. Expressions such as قوام كل مائل، جانر، وصلاح كل قاسد، وقوة كل ضعيف ونصفة كل مظلوم، ومزعج كل ملهوف (وقصد كل give the work a musical tone. This makes the epistle a pleasant adventure for the mind and sense of hearing.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Reassess the epistle of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī with a view of bringing other unique features of his epistle not among those already identified.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Arabic epistles have a long tradition of literary excellence. Unlike the day-to-day letters and correspondences that are exchanged between individuals and groups, they exhibit peculiar characteristics of an artistic nature. This, we have seen in the epistle of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī and the writings of his contemporaries, his predecessors and many others that flourished subsequently. Two important features are evident from the epistle we have studied. The first is that the author has an important message to put across. This message is valuable to the society because it is capable of providing vital information which spiritual leaders in the society can rely on in carrying out their responsibilities effectively. The individual members of the society are ultimate beneficiaries. The second point is that the message is delivered in an impressive and captivating manner so that the reader finds it difficult to abandon the message midway. In fact, he would want to read and re-read the message because of its beauty. This is an important characteristic of artistic works. The epistle of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī typifies this peculiarity.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Our discussion has focussed on the epistle of a distinguished Islamic scholar, al-Hasan al-Baṣrī who flourished in the Umayyad period. We took a cursory look at his biography as well as studied the text of his

epistle addressed to the then caliph, Umar ibn `Abdul-`Azīz who in fact prompted al-Hasan al-Baṣrī to compose this literary piece. We subjected the text of the epistle to literary analysis which expectedly revealed why the epistle is worthy of academic study.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Through the use of illustrations from the epistle of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī, show the different levels of his utilisation of imagery to convey his message.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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## MODULE 4      INTRODUCING ARABIC STORIES

- Unit 1      An Overview of *al-Qissah*
- Unit 2      Ibn Muqaffa's *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*
- Unit 3      al-Qalamāwi's *al-Bāsimah*

### UNIT 1      AN OVERVIEW OF ARABIC SHORT STORIES

#### CONTENTS

- 1.0    Introduction
- 2.0    Objectives
- 3.0    Main Content
  - 3.1    Meaning of *Qiṣṣah*
  - 3.2    Brief History of Arabic Short Stories
  - 3.3    Types and themes of Arabic Stories
  - 3.4    Features and Functions of Arabic Stories
- 4.0    Conclusion
- 5.0    Summary
- 6.0    Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0    References/Further Reading

#### 1.0    INTRODUCTION

This module introduces you to an aspect of *an-Nathr al-Fannī* (artistic prose) that is slightly different from the forms of Arabic prose that we studied in the last two modules. The difference, of course, partly lies with the emphasis of *al-Qiṣṣah* on entertainment, recreation and perhaps education. People of all ages like stories because of its capacity to relax the mind, energise thoughts and create scenes with heavy presence of imagery. You have read different short stories in the primary and secondary school levels. You must still remember the fond memories of the story-line, the characters and their roles and the probable lessons one can learn from such stories. The Arabs have a rich and expanding tradition of story-telling. In this module, therefore, you will learn about the theoretical background of *al-Qiṣṣah* as a literary genre. We will also study at some length two major stories one of which is a product of the medieval period and the other a modern Arabic short story. The first unit of this module introduces you to the evolution, nature, types and importance of Arabic short stories. This will be done keeping in mind the way the Arab audience perceives this genre as well as the way people outside the Arab culture view Arabic short stories.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define *al-Qiṣṣah* in Arabic literature
- trace the history of story-telling among the Arabs
- describe the types of Arabic short stories
- explain the features and functions of *al-Qiṣṣah*

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Meaning of *al-Qiṣṣah*

Etymologically, the word “*Qīṣṣah*” is derived from “*qaṣṣa*” which among others means ‘to relate’ ‘to narrate’ and ‘to tell’. The verbal noun is, of course *qīṣṣah* (plural form *qaṣṣaṣ*) which means a ‘narrative’ ‘tale’ or ‘story’ (Cowan: 1963:765). It is otherwise also called *hikāyah* which is a synonym of *qīṣṣah*. As the name connotes, a short story is expected to be brief even though there are no hard and fast rule as to the actual length of a short story. The author as much as possible strives to achieve brevity expunging unnecessary details and limiting the number of characters. Stories with long and complicated storyline may not also appeal to both the writer and reader of the short story. The reader especially is interested in a quick conclusion. He can therefore not be left in suspense for a long period. Some of these characteristics will be further elaborated upon as we progress in this unit.

### 3.2 Brief History of Arabic Short Stories

From time immemorial, the Arabs enjoyed recounting the history of their heroes and the gallantry and extraordinary accomplishments of great personalities in history. They also took pride in calling attention to the nobility and status of their tribes, clans and families. They are blessed with good memory and this aided the oral transmission of their history from generation to generation. They were also fond of tracing their genealogies and folklore which they list with a sense of pride. This type of information is reflected in the poetical compositions of the *Jāhiliyyah* era. Apart from other functions, the poet of the pre-Islamic period in fact served as the historian of the tribe (Hitti: 1970:95). The Arabs also engaged in narrating fables but all these forms remained oral. The Arabs did not engage in serious story-telling as a literary art until the revelation of the Qur’ān.

The advent of Islam created a new opportunity for the growing of the culture of story-telling. The Qur’ān itself though not primarily a book of

history or stories contains several accounts of ancient history especially the history of prophets, great nations, peoples, personalities and notable events. Through this the Arabs came to have their first written record of assorted stories. The Qur'ānic stories have been compiled in separate works. A typical example of this is the *Qisāṣul-Qur'ān* authored by Ibn Kathīr which has also been translated into English by `Alī as-Sayyid al-Halawānī (2001).

The Arabic short story witnessed a new impetus during the `Abbassid caliphate when `Abdullāh ibn Muqaffa` translated the *Panchantras* into Arabic. He titled the translated work "*Kalīlah wa Dimnah*". This work is considered the pioneer Arabic work as far as this genre is concerned. The other in the class of Ibn Muqaffa`s work is the "*Alif Laylah wa Laylah*" usually translated as "One Thousand and One Nights" or "The Arabian Nights" whose author is unknown. The work has nevertheless impacted greatly on the world population of readers of stories. These two works have been translated into several prominent languages. It is also within this period that the *Maqāmā or "The Assemblies"*, a new literary form which emphasizes use of highly ornamented language came to public light first at the hands of al-Hamadhānī and later by al-Harīrī.

The establishment of the printing press in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the founding of newspapers and magazines provided an impetus for the rapid growth of the Arabic short story. The stories first appeared in 1870 in newspapers and weekly magazines. By the end of the Century, a floodgate of the appearance of Arabic short stories had been opened in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon through their newspapers and magazines. Western influence came to be exerted on the Arabic short Story. Popular authors of short stories at this early period include Egyptian authors such as Muḥammad Husayn Haykal, Mahmūd Taymūr, Tawfīq al-Hakīm Yūsuf Idrīs. Today, distinguished authors like Zakriya Tamir, Farzūr, Ghada al-Sammarī are making waves in the short story market.

In relating the history of the modern Arabic short story, three periods are usually cited along with those who played major roles in shaping the periods. The periods and the personalities associated with the events of each of the periods are highlighted below:

1. *al-Marḥalah al-Junayniyyah* or Embryonic Period  
This period began from 1900 up to 1914. Apart from being considered melancholic and moody, the works of the period tried to adapt western techniques to the traditional Arab technique. The works of Muṣṭafā Luṭfi al-Manfalūṭī, Salīm al-Buṣṭānī, Labībah Hāshim Khalīl Gibrān represents this tendency.

## 2. *al-Marhalah at-Tajrībiyyah* or Trial Period

This period covered 1914 to 1925. During this period, there were attempts to introduce innovations into Arabic short story writing by freeing it from the bondage of tradition. The writings of Muḥammad Taymūr and Tāhir Lashin represent this move.

## 3. *al-Marhalah al-Tashkīliyyah* or Formative Period

This is the period between 1925 to the present time. This is the period in which the idea of a narrative style emerged. Writers of short stories started emphasizing the psychological analysis of the characters with a more realistic approach. A new standard which includes vital features of short story writing was introduced. The features first pioneered by Muḥammad Taymūr include adherence to brevity, coverage of short-time frame, inclusion of critical and deep details, use of prose language without mixing it with poetry, use of limited number of characters and a possibly vague end which allows the reader to exercise his own power of imagination and interpretation. The numerous modern Arabic short stories in circulation to a large extent comply with this nascent standard.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Discuss three important features that characterised the development of the Arabic short story over the periods.

### **3.3 Types and Themes of Arabic Stories**

We can identify two basic types of stories in Arabic. These are the fictional and non-fictional stories. Let us consider together the characteristics of each of them starting with the latter.

#### **1. The Non-Fictional Arabic Story**

This is a true life story related the way it occurred in history either for didactic, recreational, informative, spiritual or moral values. The stories related in the Qur'ān are largely non-fictional. The Qur'ān states the purpose of its stories when it submits that: "Certainly in their stories is an instruction for men of understanding" (Qur'ān 12:111).

#### **2. The Fictional Arabic Story**

This type constitutes the bulk of Arabic story literary heritage. It is not a representation or a report of an event that actually occurred in history even though it may address in a subtle way happenings in a given society. Arabic short stories have in fact been used to call attention to or

criticise social maladies. When short stories are used to showcase a social context, the characters are changed; the place and even the events may be slightly modified so that it loses some of the original characteristic features of the original event.

### 3. **Fables**

The story may take the form of fables in which case the characters in the story are animals that play human roles. This form is employed as a device to represent or symbolise a true life story by changing the human characters to animals. The discerning reader will readily relate the story to the original event.

The *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* is a typical book of fables.

### 4. **Anecdotes**

Anecdotes are types of stories that are meant to amuse the reader. It contains heavy content of humour. The intention of the author to entertain the reader perhaps overrides other purposes of writing the story. The *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī contains many interesting anecdotes.

The themes of Arabic stories vary greatly. In fact, one can safely say that the subject matter is not restricted to any particular theme. Social, political, economic, moral and spiritual issues have all been addressed by short story writers. Events in the Arab world have presented the short story writer opportunity to contribute to social discourse through the medium of stories.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Examine the differences that exist between the Qur'anic and non-Qur'anic stories.

### **3.4 Features and Functions**

The short story has distinguishing characteristics which make it unique from other literary genres. It is like a novelette which is a miniature novel or short novel. Have you ever tried to write a story of your own? In order to do that in a way people will appreciate, you need to take into cognizance a number of peculiarities that will assist you in making your story a masterpiece. These features of a short story are what every serious short story writer needs to consider in crafting a readable story. The main features discussed below cover both elements of the old and modern Arabic short stories:

### 1. Wholeness

The story must be complete and on the whole make sense. In other words, it must have a beginning, middle and end. A story that is related half-way leaves the reader frustrated. This is not ideal in story writing.

### 2. Story-line

There must be a story-line, an event that has a cause, course and aftermath which may or may not be pleasant. The story line must also have a logical sequence. In the Arabic short story this is called *al-Hikāyah*.

### 3. Plot

This is termed *al-Uqdah* or *al-Habkah al-Qaṣaṣiyyah*. It refers to the plan of the story. It is the general direction of the story. It is the story in a nutshell.

### 4. Characters

The major or minor protagonist and antagonists as well as all those who played one role or the other are called the *ash-Shakhsiyāt* or the Characters in the story.

### 5. Language

A good story must be capable of conveying its message in an elegant and pleasant manner. The diction must be and aimed at maintaining accuracy of the information so that clarity and coherence are achieved. It may be lyrical at some points in the story.

### 6. The Ending or Conclusion

This of course marks the end of the story. The term for this in the Arabic story is '*al-Hall*' The author chooses between an open-ended story or a close-ended story. When it is open-ended the reader is given his own opportunity to interpret the story according to his own judgement and draw conclusions. He is thus given the opportunity of partaking in "the writing of the story" because he is expected to fill the gap that is perceived to exist in the story. The close-ended style which is the opposite resolves whatever conflict that may exist in the story. The author ends the story by himself and takes full responsibility of telling the entire story.



## 7. Brevity

Perhaps one of the major concerns or preoccupation of a short story writer is how to shorten his story so that it does not end up becoming a novelette or a short novel. He uses a variety of devices to ensure that brevity is achieved without undermining the story line. He therefore tries to eliminate redundancy in language. Only words or expressions that contribute meaningfully to the objectives of the story are retained while all others are eliminated. He might for instance use **paralipsis** which helps him to subtract information or data concerning the characters, their identities, demographic characteristics and so on. He may also use **summary** or **ellipsis**. Summary helps him to avoid details of scenes. Instead of describing scenes, he uses reporting or telling. The use of ellipsis enables the author to omit an entire period of time. He also uses very short period of time instead of long periods that may require details of what transpired within the period.

By and large, the short story is employed to correct a social malady, to react to the events in a society or to criticise it. It is used to convey vital information about purposeful life and living. It is used to teach morals or even employed to propagate ideas, doctrines and philosophies. It is above all used to entertain and relax the minds. These elements are portrayed in the numerous themes of the Arabic short story whether the ancient forms of it or the modern.

You will be privileged in the next unit to see some of these characteristics and elements of the Arabic short play.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Arabic short story has no doubt contributed immensely to Arabic literature especially in the modern and contemporary periods. This literary genre we discovered have a strong universal appeal as evidenced in the number of Arabic short stories that have been translated into various world languages. The Arabs therefore did not write for their immediate locality alone but for all those who appreciate literary works. The universal acceptability of the shorts stories also opened up a new mechanism of the integration of world cultures especially with the current move towards globalisation. Arabic short stories have experienced a boom in patronage and are still flourishing not only in Arab lands but outside it. It has also proved to be a subtle method of communicating messages and building values. Such a literary form is, no doubt, extremely useful.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to carry out four important tasks. These are

- defining *al-Qiṣṣah*
- tracing the history of story-telling in Arabic
- describing the types of Arabic short stories
- an explanation of the features and functions of *al-Qiṣṣah*

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Select three short stories narrated in the Qur'ān then identify the following:

- a) the characters
- b) the storyline
- c) the values of the story

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## UNIT 2 IBN MUQAFFA`S *KALILAH WA DIMNAH*

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Brief Biography of `Abdullah ibn al-Muqaffa`
  - 3.2 Ibn Muqaffa`s *Kalilah wa Dimnah*
    - 3.2.1 History and Content
    - 3.2.2 Plot Summary
  - 3.3 Textual Analysis
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This module introduces you to Brief Biography of `Abdullah ibn al-Muqaffa`

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- narrate the life history of `Abdullāh ibn al-Muqaffa`
- trace the history *Kalilah wa Dimnah*
- highlight the contents of the book
- summarise the plot of the frame story
- analyse the text of *Kalilah wa Dimnah*

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Brief Biography of `Abdullāh ibn al-Muqaffa`

We must begin by studying the life history of Ibn al-Muqaffa` to enable us study effectively his contributions to the art of story writing. Abū Muḥammad Abdullāh Rūzbeh ibn Dādūya, popularly known as Ibn al-Muqaffa`, was a distinguished writer, translator, chancery secretary who flourished during the later Umayyad period and the early `Abbasid period. He was a contemporary of `Abdul-Hamīd al-Kātib. He acquired this name from his father whose hand was crushed because he was convicted of embezzlement of public funds as an official in charge of taxes. After the incident, people called him Ibn Muqaffa` (Son of one

with shrivelled hand). The inclusion of Rūzbeh ibn Dādūya clearly shows his Persian identity. He converted to Islam from Zoroasternism and consequently showed great interest in Arabic which he not only mastered but used as a literary tool of expression so much so that he was able to introduce, through Arabic, a work now considered as the first masterpiece of Arabic literary prose.

Ibn Muqaffa` originally came from the town of Jūr located within the Iranian province of Fars. He however flourished in Baṣrah under the rule of the `Abbasids. He can be regarded as a polyglot- one who is able to communicate in many languages. The fact that he could use several languages contributed immensely to his skill in translation. He translated the history of the ancient Persian kings into Arabic. The *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* which popularised his name is basically a translation first from ?? language and later from Persian to Arabic. Ibn Muqaffa` added his own input to the translation. He added a complete chapter meant to complete the frame story.

Ibn Muqaffa` was killed on the orders of al-Manṣūr in 756 CE, having been accused of trying to import Zoroasternism into the Islamic state. Some historians however believe that the underlying reason for his execution was not unconnected with a rude document Ibn Muqaffa` wrote demanding for a safe passage for `Abdullāh ibn `Alī, a rebellious uncle of the caliph.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Narrate in your own words the life history of Ibn Muqaffa`.

### 3.2 The *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*

#### 3.2.1 History and Content

This literary work is basically a book of advice for princes, civil servants and political players crafted into series of stories of animals. The book is no doubt a pioneer work because it is the earliest surviving book of Arabic art prose. It was originally known as the Panchtantra or the Five Discourses. The oldest surviving version is Ibn Muqaffa`s *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* which, according to the Wikipedia has appeared in more than 200 versions and translated into more than 50 languages.

Ibn Muqaffa` traced the authorship to an Indian philosopher Baydabā (English Bidpai) who at the request of the then Indian King, Dabshalim wrote a series of didactic stories meant to be a repository of wisdom and an instruction for his three princes who had strayed from the standard of discipline expected of future leaders. Some six years later, the princes

were transformed and firmly on the path of rectitude. They in fact later ruled judiciously.

After about two hundred years, during the reign of Anushravan (Anushirwan ibn Qubādh b, Fayrūz) the then Shah of Iran commissioned a distinguished, physician, scholar, translator and philosopher, named Barzawayh (English Borzuy) to obtain a copy of the book. Several versions reported that he was actually sent in search of the herb ‘*kalīlah*’ said to prevent death but instead discovered that *kalīlah* was a metaphor for a book of wisdom. After much effort he was able to access the original text written in the ancient Sanskrit or Hindustani which he translated into Persian and brought back to the Shah who reportedly “enshrined the translation in a special room of his palace” (Lunde:19 ). Ibn Muqaffa` translated the Persian text into Arabic three hundred years later. An edition of the book published by Mu’assasah al-Mukhtār (2007) presently comprises the text of the *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, an account of the process of its retrieval by Barzwayh and the input of Ibn al-Muqaffa`. This edition is structured into 18 sections including the introduction. Basically, the book contains six main stories in which is enboxed several subsidiary stories. This means that several sub-stories are told in the process of narrating a major story. Each story has a vital moral lesson to be imbibed. The morals of each of the five stories are:

1. First Story: One must not accuse others falsely to gain advantage.
2. Second Story: Truth is constant and will be revealed as at when due.
3. Third Story: Friends are indispensable aspects of life.
4. Fourth Story: Intelligence and deceit are stronger than physical strength.
5. Fifth Story: Circumstances should not lead one to betray friends.
6. Sixth Story: One must not give judgement hastily.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

From the history and content of *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, do you think that the book is relevant to events in the contemporary human society? Give reasons.

### 3.2.2 Plot Summary

The book derived its title form the first main story of the book. The main characters in the frame story of the *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* are:

1. The Lion - King
2. Two Jackals - Kalīlah and Dimnah (brothers)
3. The Bull - Shatribah

#### 4. Other animals- The King's companions and aides

The jackal Dimnah through series of conversations with his brother, Kalilah planned to win the heart of the king of the beasts, the lion. He succeeded and gained favour with the king. The bull, called Shatribah, having overcome some personal difficulties won the heart of the king after the king had discovered that he was intelligent, noble and lovely. Shatribah, in fact got closer to the king than Dimnah. This development earned Shatribah the displeasure of Dimnah who planned the downfall of Shatribah. He set both the king and Shatribah against each other. The king eventually killed Shatribah.

In the next and concluding part of the story which Ibn al-Muqaffa` added, the evil of Dimnah was exposed. He was tried and crucified. The lesson as earlier indicated is that it is unethical to accuse others falsely in order to gain favour. Such misdemeanour in most cases end in disaster which is what befell Dimnah.

### 3.3.3 Textual Analysis

The story which is told in a vivid well-crafted prose is strongly narrated with the use of both common and uncommon diction. The text is interspersed with popular maxims and wise counsels of sages. Some of these include:

- إن العلم لا يتم إلا بالعمل  
 إن العلم كالشجرة والعمل به الثمرة  
 □ ن لم □ علق قلبه بالغايات قلّت حسره □ عند □ غارقته  
 ٤- المرء □ رفعه □ رواءه □ ن المنزلة الوضيعة إلى المنزلة  
 الرفيعة.  
 ٥- ان الإ □ قاع إلى المنزلة الشريفة شديد والإنحطاط □ نها هيّن.  
 ٦- الحجر الثقيل رفعه □ ن الأرض إلى العائق عسرٌ ووضعهُ إلى  
 الأرض هيّن.

Meaning:

1. Knowledge is incomplete without putting it into action
2. Knowledge is like a tree putting it into action is the fruit
3. He whose heart is not pregnant with aspirations, his grief will be less if he loses them.
4. Virtue elevates man from a despicable status to a lofty one.
5. Climbing a lofty height is difficult, descent from it is easy.
6. A heavy stone is difficult to lift from the ground, placing it on the ground is easy.

There is a lot of dialogue in the story. Typical examples are the conversations between characters such as that between Kalilah and Dimnah, between the king and Dimnah and between Shatribah and the king among others. The conversations, of course, make the story look real and convincing. Now let us consider this dialogue between Dimnah and Shatribah, when the king who had been disturbed by Shatribah's mooing in the forests permitted Dimnah to bring him before him.

فانطلق دانه إلى الثور فقال له غير هائب ولا كترث: إن الأسد أرسلنى إليك  
لايه بك ورنى ان أنت عجلت إليه ان اؤنك على سلف ن ذنبك فى  
التأخر عنه وركك لقاءه. وان أنت أخرت واحجمت ان اعجل إليه فأخبره.  
قال له شتربة: ون هذا الأسد الذى أرسلك الى وأين هو واه حاله؟  
قال دانه: هو لك السباع وهذه الأرض التى نحن عليها له وهو بمكان كذا  
ومعه جند كثير ن جنسه:  
فرعب شتربة ن ذكر الأسد والسباع وقال: ان أنت جعلت لى الأان على  
نفسى اقبلت عك إليه. فأعطاه دانه ن الأان واثق به ثم اقبل والثور مع  
حتى دخلا على الأسد، فأحسن الأسد إلى الثور وقر به...

Dimnah then went to the bull without any trace of fear or fright and said to him: “The lion sent me to you to bring you before him. He decreed that if you promptly hearken to him I should assure you of pardon over your past offence of delay and refusing to meet with him but if you persist in staying back I should intimate him accordingly. Shatribah said: “Who is this lion who sent you to me? Where is he and what is his status? Dimna replied: “He is the king of the beasts. This land we inhabit belongs to him. He is somewhere with his large army, those in his ilk.

Shatrabah was petrified with mention of the lion and the beasts so he said: “If you earnestly assure me of my security then I go with you to him”. Dimnah confidently assured him thereafter the bull followed him till they reached the presence of the lion who received the bull warmly and drew him close to himself.

The story is replete with similitudes, similes and imagery. There is proper linkage between the sub-stories and the main story. One of the devices of interconnectedness employed by the author is for a character in a dialogue with another character in the story to demand for illustration of a point. The illustration is provided in form of a short story told within the context of the frame story. Statements such as: **وما** (What is the illustration for that?) or **كيف كان ذلك؟** (Why is that so?) are frequently used in this type of situation to make the other party in the dialogue initiate a story. The dialogues between Kalilah and

Dimnah on one hand and Dimnah and the lion on another are typical examples of this phenomenon.

The language is well-crafted in a way that the reader is able to visualise the scenes in an accurate way. The choice of words is impressive often involving the use of simple, easy to comprehend expressions. The story itself is short but the several interludes gives it the nature of a fairly long story. The reader nevertheless enjoys the privilege of reading several stories within the context of one story. All the stories have important lessons to teach. The book thus has very extensive didactic values.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Read the sub-stories of the *Kalilah wa Dimnah* with a view of extracting their moral values.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

*Kalilah wa Dimnah* is no doubt a world classic. The Arabic text has been translated into many European languages including English, Spanish German Slavic to mention a few. It has also been translated into Persian, Turkish, Malay, Siamese, Javanese, Syriac, Ethiopic and Laotian. It was re-translated into Hindustani in the 19<sup>th</sup> century making the book complete the linguistic journey it started several centuries ago. There are high prospects that the book will continue to attract interest not only in the Arab world but at the global level. The book has continued to attract readership for the fact that it depicts the animal kingdom as being similar to human society. The book is particularly valuable as an instructional text for people holding or aspiring to occupy political offices.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Our discussions in this unit have enabled us to narrate briefly the life history of `Abdullāh ibn al-Muqaffa` and to trace the history of his *Kalilah wa Dimnah* which he translated and added his own input to in order to give the original story a balanced outlook and to make it appeal to the Arab audience. We were able to highlight the main contents of the entire book. We focussed on the first frame story out of the six and summarised its plot. Textual analysis of the frame story enabled us to discuss the style of the author in the light of its compliance with the literary tradition of story writing.



## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Assess the literary and didactic values of Ibn Muqaffa`'s *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*.
2. To what extent did Ibn Muqaffa` conform to the ethics of writing stories?

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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## UNIT 3 SUHAYR AL-QALAMAWI'S *AL-BASIMAH*

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Brief Biography of Suhayr al-Qalamāwī
  - 3.2 The Characters and Plot
  - 3.3 Textual Analysis
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

You are about to study a different dimension of Arabic Stories. In the last unit, we studied Ibn Muqaffa`a's *Kalīla wa Dimna*. Two differences exist between our preoccupation in the last unit and what we are about to study. The first is that though we dealt with an entire book, this is just a single story on its own. Secondly, while the stories of *Kalīlah wa Dimna* is a product of the Medieval period, the story we are examining here belongs to the modern era. This will enable us have a balanced experience of both the old and recent. This therefore confirms the fact that story writing is still a flourishing literary tradition of the Arabs. It is in fact likely to be a permanent feature of their literary heritage. One of the strong reasons for this is that books of stories have a huge audience among Arabs. The other is that stories have a social role to play in the life of any society. Apart from its capacity to entertain and provide the raw material for the film industry, it plays such educative and reformative role in the society. In this unit we shall study the modern Arabic story titled *al-Bāsimah*. First, we shall study the biography of the author before discussing the plot and analysing the text.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- narrate the life history of Suhayr al-Qalamāwī
- identify the characters in the story
- sketch the plot of the story
- undertake a literary analysis of the story, and
- state the values of the story

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 A Brief Biography of Suhayr al-Qalamāwī

This distinguished female scholar, teacher, author, activist and advocate of human rights was born in 1911. This clearly places her in the modern period of Arabic literature. She equipped herself academically by studying up to the doctoral level. However, before going for higher studies, she took interest in female rights' issues advocating for more freedom for the womenfolk. She pursued her crusade partly through the articles she published in the *Kawkab ash- Sharq* (Star of the East) Newspaper and *ar-Rādiyū* (The Radio) Magazine. She has to her credit several other articles in various publications. It is worthy of note that she worked closely with the celebrated author, Tāhā Husayn in the publication of '*al-Wadī*' (The Valley).

In the literary field, she pioneered the introduction of the study of modern Arabic literature into the Egyptian University. She specifically made a case for the indispensability of studying the novels of Nagīb Maḥfūz in literary criticism of modern Arabic literature. She was the first to study Arabic folktales extensively. She also engaged in translation activities.

Perhaps, the area in which she distinguished herself mostly in the literary field is in the authorship of books of short stories. Her prominent collections include titles such as *as-Shayātn Talhū*, *Hikāyāt Jaddāfī*. She continues to conduct scholarly research and publishing her writings and participating in conferences.

#### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Assess the various literary contributions of Suhayr al-Qalamāwī and justify whether her personality as an activist has anything to do with the theme of her *al-Bāsimah*

#### 3.2 Characters and the Plot

The author made use of very few characters in prosecuting her task of presenting an interesting story. The main character is the woman whom the entire story centered around. The author called her al-Bāsimah (The Smiling One), her little child which more or less played a passive role and the narrator herself. The story catalogued the travails of a widow who has been cut off from her relations and who had to fend for herself and her little child. In spite of the odds against her and the harshness of life she always maintained a smiling face which perhaps veiled the vicissitudes of life she confronted. The narrator encountered her within

an audience where she performed brilliantly as a singer. She and the entire audience were perturbed by the dexterity with which she entertained the audience and more importantly her captivating smiles and mien. However, when she got close to her as a friend she not only discovered the series of hardships behind the smiles but also further calamities to befall her. She lost her baby to sickness largely because she could not care for her properly. In spite of this development she maintained her amiable posture. The smiling woman passed on one day because of the imperative to depart this world but remaining on her face is the smile she managed to keep even in death.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Would you consider this story a true life experience of a woman? Give reasons for your submissions.

### 3.3 Textual Analysis

The author is conscious of the imperative to maintain brevity in her short story. She avoided the luxury of introduction and started the story abruptly with the opening event where she described her first contact with the main character of the story, the woman who is obsessed with smiles in spite of her difficult circumstance of living. She narrates:

سكت القوم وكأنهم ينصتون إلى نغم سماوى جميل، وكأن النغم قد حملهم □ ن الأرض الدنسة الطاهرة، واستمرت هى فى عزفها □ هز أو □ ار القلوب هزا ضعيفاً □ طرباً، ثم □ امت عزفها، والتفت إلى السبا □ عين فإذا كل □ نهم □ شدوه، الهاه الطرب، وانساه النغم ان يظهر اعجابه، او سروره، ورتت ضحكتها العذبة الجميلة، فتنبه السبا □ عون ودوى المكان بالتصفيق الشديد.

كنت فى السبا □ عين، ولم اكن اعرف عنها إلا انها عذبة الإبتسامة، وضاحة المحيّا، بشع □ ن نفسها سرّ عجيب يملأ □ ا حولها، فرحة □ شيطنة، سألت عنها فقيل: انها □ تكسب بعزفها هذا لتعول طفلها الصغير الوحيد □ ات أبواها وهى فى سنّ الطفولة، وفقدت اقرباءها واحداً وراء الآخر حتى فقدت زوجها □ نذ □ ن يسير. ّ

People were silent as if listening to a stunning heavenly tune, as if the melody hauls them up from a filthy soil to a pure sky. She persisted in her concert jolting the strings of their hearts softly, amusingly. Then she ended her performance and glanced at the audience; everyone was flabbergasted. No one is in the audience except the music had dazed him, made him forget expressing his bewilderment or joy. Her

beautiful, pleasant smile captivated the listeners. The arena was enveloped with a thunderous applause.

I was among the listeners without knowledge of her except the smiles and beaming face; within her a wonderful secret radiates, filling her surrounding joyful and active. I enquired about her and was informed that she ekes out a living from her concert and to support her only child... Her parents died while in her childhood and she lost her relations one after another until she lost her husband recently.

Events in the story occurred quickly that the story reached its climax within a short span. The woman lost her child to a combination of the effects of an ailment and the cold weather condition of the night. However, the woman's puzzled the author as she narrated:

...فأخذت ابكى وابكى، وظلّت هي ككف عبري، واسيني وكأني  
 انا المكلوبة.  
 ايمكن ان يكون عديمة الإحساس؟ كلاً لقد عرفت ان حساسيتها  
 الشيء الكثير ولعل نظرة واحدة إلى ذلك الوجه الجميل قنع الناظر  
 بالألام التي حاول إخفاءها...

...I began to cry and cry and she tried to prevent me from shedding tears as she consoles me as if I am the bereaved, the wounded. Is it possible that this woman is devoid of sensitivity? Nay, I have known much of her faculty of sensory perception. Perhaps a single gaze at that beautiful face will bring the spectator to terms with the pains that she tries to extinguish.

Another tragedy occurs in the story as the author reports:

ظلت نحو شهر في صراع بين الحزن وبين طبيعتها... فذهبت  
 اعودها يوماً فلم اجد بالدار أحداً.  
 سألت عنها راحةً واخيراً علمتُ انها فارقت الحياة اساء. اذا  
 حلّ بها؟ وأى أُر جديد انتابها؟ فعرفت انها لم صب بشيء جديد،  
 وإنما فارقت الحياة، وكأنها الشمعة حترق، فارقتها شيئاً فشيئاً وقد  
 لحقت ربّها وعلى فمها ابتسامة رضاً وطمأنينة.

She persisted for about a month struggling between her grief and her cheering and smiling disposition... So one day I went on a visit but could not find anyone at home.

I asked after her in fear, and finally I got to know that she abandoned life yesterday evening. What happened to her? Which near issue confronted her? I realised that no new calamity befell her. She just abandoned life. She appeared to be the burning candle that recedes little by little. She has met her Lord and within her mouth is the smile of satisfaction and tranquillity.

The style is simple without any trace of artificiality. The author used similes generously in trying to paint a vivid picture of the character of the woman and the events that characterised her life. In order to achieve brevity, the author used very few characters, avoided dialogue and made use of both paralipsis and ellipsis. The story encourages perseverance and strong composure in the face of daunting odds. The beginning, middle and end of the story are properly inter-linked. Events occurred in the story in quick succession. The language is simple, elegant and straight to the point. The story is close-ended since the author completed the entire story by her requiring little or no input from the reader.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Discuss the literary values of *al-Bāsimah*.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Arabic short story writing has become an expansive field of literary activity. It is as relevant today as it was in the past. One recurring phenomenon is that it has continued to mirror society in an appealing way. It serves as a vehicle for calling attention to the problems of society and the possible role individual members of the society can play in caring for the less privileged. This is the value *al-Basimah* seeks to promote. The story commenced on a note of contradiction and the need to resolve it. We saw in the story the conflict between the enormity of the predicament of a widow-entertainer and a privileged audience who enjoyed the lyrics of her music oblivious of the huge challenges that confronted the entertainer. This made a case for the need to focus on the cases of the downtrodden who though need the support of others but veil their problem through unusual perseverance, endurance and determination. The story derived its title from the remarkable smiling posture of a socially depressed widow.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Our activities in this unit centered around the study of al-Qalamāwi's short story titled *al-Bāsimah*. We studied the biography of the author briefly and analysed various aspects of the text of the story in terms of

the value of its message and the literary strategies employed by the author to achieve effective communication.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

In what ways would you regard al-Qalamāwi's *al-Bāsimah* as a social criticism through a literary medium?

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