
RESEARCH ARTICLE

From *Mustalah al Hadith* to *Mustalah al Ta'rikh*: Transmission and Contents Criticism in Afrabic Historiography

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from this same concept, *Afrabic* is employed considering the fact that most of the ideas therein fall within the purview of the relationship between Africa and Arabic. The task of screening and documenting authentic prophetic traditions and discarding fabricated information attributed to the Prophet of Islam resulted in the evolution of the critical study of *Hadith* literature, technically referred to as *Muṣṭalaḥ al Ḥadīth*. Scholars of *Hadith* employed a method of validating *matn* (text) by subjecting the *isnād* (chain of transmitters) to tests of reliability. Considering the similarity of the process of *Hadith* verification and the methodology of establishing facts in historiography, which involves *Heuristik* (identification of sources), *Kritik* (testing sources for reliability), and *Hermeneutik* (interpretation of reliable sources for constructing a connected and significant narrative), there is a high potential for a symbiotic relationship between *Hadith* studies and historiography. This paper makes a case for the specific application of the method of validation of information in *Hadith* for obtaining authentic historical facts. For illustrative purposes and ascertaining the efficacy of this method and approach, two Arabic works on Medieval African Historiography, viz; *Infāq al Maysūr* of Muḥammad Bello and *Tārikh Mai Idrīs Alūma waghazawātuh* of Ibn Fartuwa were subjected to the mechanism of information validation hereby technically referred to as *Muṣṭalaḥ al Tārikh*. The outcome revealed significant strengths and weaknesses of the two works. While they both subsist as useful sources of history, various dimensions of inaccurate information were detected in the accounts of the authors.

KEYWORDS

Adab Literature, Afrabic, *Mustalah al Ta'rikh*, *Muṣṭalaḥ al Ḥadīth*, *Matn*, *Isnad*

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 05 October 2023

PUBLISHED: 03 November 2023

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2023.6.11.4

1. Introduction

It is interesting to note that in discussing the sources of African history, attention has always been drawn to the wealth of Arabic writings as well as local *ta'rikh* by the Arabo-Islamic scholars, whose contributions, though not the only causative factor, but it is certainly one of the most important, pervasive, dynamic, and significant factors that shaped and have continued to shape African history. (Sirajudeen, 2013)¹ For centuries, scholars have realized that Arabic as a language and Islam as a religion have contributed substantially to world civilization and culture.

Afrabic from *Afrabia* are coined from the words Africa and Arabic, and Africa and Arabia respectively, as a concept has been muted based on the idea that 'French had once examined their special relationship with Africa and later came up with the concept of *Eurafrica* as a basis of special cooperation' as noted by Mazrui (See: Mazrui, 1992). Drawing from this concept, especially for the

¹ Adam A. Sirajudeen, (2013) A Literary Review of the Medieval Arabic Writings on Kanem Borno, Journal of al-Tamaddun Academy of Islamic Studies, the University of Malaya, Issue 8, No. 2, pp. 49-61

purpose of this paper, I have decided to employ the same concept of what I describe as *Afrabic*, considering the fact that most of the ideas therein fall within the purview of the relationship between Africa and Arabic, which is the area of this study in particular.

Afrabic Historiography was, however, formulated in the Arabic language in Africa. The dramatic evolution of Arabic from a tribal dialect to one of the few carriers of world culture, its unique relation to the religion of Islam, and its role in the development of modern Arab nationalism form the basis of this matchless contribution to humanity. Incidentally, many of the most outstanding scholars of Arabic writings like al- Sa'di (b.1596); Mahmud Ka't, Ahmad Baba Timbuctu, Ahmad al-Tazakhti, Makhluḥ al _ Bilbali, Dan Marna, Muhammad b. Masanih, al –Mas'udi (c. 950); al –Bakri (1094); al – Idrisi (1154); al Yaqut (c.1200); AbulFida (1331); al – 'Umari (1349); Ibn Battuta (1354); Ibn Khaldun (1406) and al- Hassan Al – Wezaz were Africans, not Arabs (Sirajudeen, 2005 CC Jacobs.) Hence, the momentousness of the caption, '*Afrabic*'.

Besides, Africa had had contact with the Arabic language prior to the advent of Islam in the continent in the early part of the 7th century. As a consequence, the language had wider circulation among the peoples of Africa and later became the native and official language in some considerable parts of the African sub–continent, such as Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, the Western Sahara and the Sudan to mention but few. More so, the Arabic language could be regarded as a dominant language in Africa as speakers of Arabic in Africa, including non-native speakers, constituted one-third of the whole inhabitants of the continent. Perhaps that was the reason why Hunwick described Arabic as the Latin of Africa.

Islam, however, is a religion with a strong sense of history as every sizeable collection of Islamic manuscripts includes a good proportion of historical work, which in itself is a fair indication of the importance attached by Muslim scholarship to history. The beginnings of scientific history in Arabic are associated with the study of the life and activities of the prophet of Islam- Muhammad. The source of this discipline is consequently to be found in the collection of the prophetic tradition – *ḥadīth* and more especially of the traditions relating to the military expeditions of the prophet, literally referred to as *maghāzī*.

The development of traditions of collecting the *ahadith*, i.e. Prophetic traditions after sometime when the original narrator had died, and there had intervened several generations so that for every *hadith*, for example, there were several narrators in succession, it was necessary to submit the reports to searching criticism. Thus, the scholars developed canons of criticism that have not only endured but have earned the respect of the succeeding generations for their soundness.

The task of screening and documenting authentic prophetic traditions and discarding fabricated information attributed to the Prophet of Islam resulted in the evolution of the critical study of *Ḥadīth* literature, technically referred to as *Muṣṭalah al Ḥadīth*. Scholars of *Ḥadīth* employed a method of validating *matn* (text) by subjecting the *isnād* (chain of transmitters) to tests of reliability. Considering the similarity of the process of *Ḥadīth* verification and the methodology of establishing facts in historiography, which involves *Heuristik* (identification of sources), *Kritik* (testing sources for reliability), and *Hermeneutik* (interpretation of reliable sources for constructing a connected and significant narrative), there is a high potential for a symbiotic relationship between *Ḥadīth* studies and historiography. This paper makes a case for the specific application of the method of validation of information in *Ḥadīth* literature for obtaining authentic historical facts.

This work tries to relate the Hadith method of authenticating the sound traditions and the fabricated ones on the authenticity of historical information, thereby perfecting the interdisciplinary or rather transdisciplinary approach to historiography. It also tries to apply the cannon to the system of scrutinizing historical materials, invariably opening new vistas in the theory of historiography. The theoretical framework for this study, therefore, is drawn from a synthesized theory of Hadith Literature. Authenticating the reliability of Hadith literature, popularly referred to as *Mustalah al Hadith*, was synthesized here to read *Mustalah al Ta'rikh*.

For illustrative purposes, however, and in order to ascertain the efficacy of this method and approach, two Arabic works on Medieval African Historiography, viz; *Infāq al Maysūr* of Muḥammad Bello and *Tārikh Mai Idrīs Alūma waghazawātuh* of Ibn Fartuwa were subjected to the mechanism of information validation hereby technically referred to as *Muṣṭalah al Tārikh*. The outcome revealed significant strengths and weaknesses of the two works. While they both subsist as useful sources of history, various dimensions of inaccurate information were detected in the accounts of the authors.

2. Islamic Sense of History

With the inception of Islam, early Arab Muslims, who were led by a natural drive of curiosity and piety, took great interest in collecting records and reports of the prophet's personality and actions. Historical interest in his person thus increased necessarily according to the extent to which Muslim jurisprudence concerning religious matters and social ethics were deduced from his exemplary life. Hence, the prophet's historical portrait is drawn from the Qur'an, revealed in Arabic and the record of his sayings and deeds in his earthly mission, which was systematized as *Ḥadīth* – tradition. This record of the apostolic traditions prefaced by those who transmitted the message (mostly the companions) up to the prophet himself soon developed into numerous historical works, which formed the *Sirah* – biography was passed on to the classical epoch and formed the historiography. Early Muslim

historians strictly adhered to this system of historiography, at least up to the ninth century, which became a characteristic feature of these scholars.

Nevertheless, the fact that these historians, regardless of their philosophy of writing history, sprang from the same cultural tradition and thus shared a basic unity, scholars observed distinctive characteristics among them. Therefore, considering the basic interests of these scholars, they are broadly divided into two classes viz: i.) the traditionists / Jurists, i.e. *Muhaddith and Faqih* and (ii) the savants and secretaries, i.e. *Adib and Katib*.

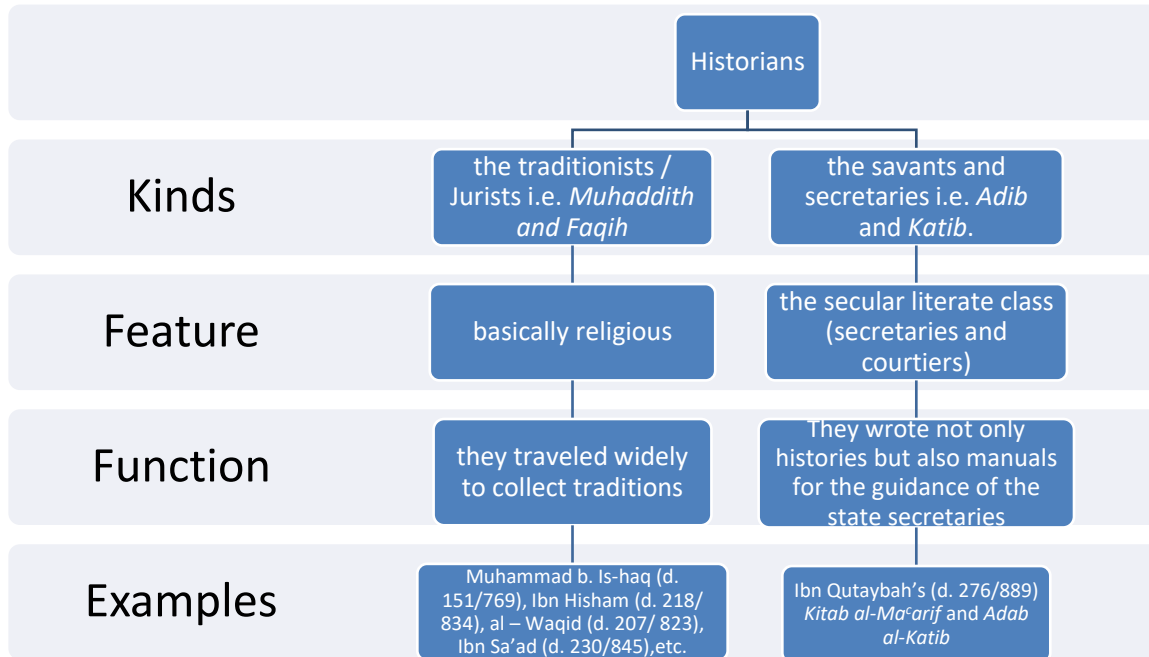


Fig. 3: Arabo-Islamic Historians

It is observed that the major factor determining the historical writing of the first group was basically religious. Thus, they traveled widely to collect traditions and also among them who combined their interests in the biography of the prophet, which was particularly connected with the traditions. This group gradually developed interests in the early history of Islam and thus became historians. Perhaps this lends credence to why, as late as the 15th century, al-Sakhawi (d. 902/1497) described history – *Tarikh* as a ‘science from among the sciences connected with the traditions of the prophet. In the words of Baladhuri, these traditions were described as *jama’atun min ahl al-ilm bil-hadith wal-Sirah* – a group of men learned in tradition and in the biography of the prophet (Scholezer, 1979).

It is pertinent to note that their attitude to their sources was the same as the attitude of a traditionists’ to the chain of transmission of a *hadith* – *Isnad*, except that there was a difference between the objectives of the two groups. While one group wanted to ascertain a particular saying of the prophet, the other wished to discover a fact of history. Examples of early historians belonging to this camp are Muhammad b. Is-haq (d. 151/769), Ibn Hisham (d. 218/ 834), al – Waqid (d. 207/ 823), Ibn Sa’ad (d. 230/845), Hisham b. Muhammad al – Kalbi (d. 206/822), Zubayr b. Bakkar (d. ca. 231/ 845) and al-Baladhuri (Issawi, 1969).

The other group of Arabic historians belonging to the secular literate class (secretaries and courtiers) equally belonged to the political class who were influenced greatly by the Greek sciences translated into Arabic as well as the Persian cultural influence, particularly under the erstwhile Abbasid. However, the most important factor was the need for trained officials for the administration. Thus, a number of histories have been written by men who, in varying degrees, can be called ‘court historians’.

Otherwise called savants – *Adib*, this group studied, aside from the Qur’an, the *hadith*, *Fiqh*, Arabic poetry, philology, and ancient Arabic history, other secular sciences and obtained some knowledge of Greek and Persian literature available to them in Arabic. Certain historians belonging to this group wrote not only histories but also manuals for the guidance of the state secretaries. For example, Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) wrote a historical work, *Kitab al-Ma’arif*, as well as a handbook for the guidance of secretaries, i.e. *Adab al-Katib* and he was followed by al-Suli (d. 335/946) in this respect. Their example was equally followed by others and grew a literature in Arabic (*adab*) written by the ‘*Udaba*’ or *Kuttab* (savants and Secretaries) (Issawi, *ibid.*).

With the passage of time, some kind of development was noticed in the methods of their works. The association of scientific history technique with the *hadith*, which left an enduring impress on historical method, explains the immense change which appears from

this moment in the character and critical accuracy of historical information amongst the Arabs. In a word, it is the biography of the prophet of Islam and his companions drawn from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* – tradition that gave impetus and marked the beginning of Arabo-Islamic historiography.

This biographical interest contained a very strong alongside interest in general and local history. The already pointed features of *Sirah* – biography turned the interest towards the general history. Thus, there arose the very large biographical literature on traditionists, which is a considerable part of the enormous biographical literature in Arabic. According to Franz Rosenthal, "History loomed very large in Muhammad's thinking. In fact, Muslim Historiography originated with Muhammad and the Qur'an, and it was the Qur'an which made the Muslims 'history-conscious'.

It would be seen from this analysis that historiography in the Muslim world has religious beginnings. It was religion that gave the Muslims their historical sense, and the requirements of developing a theology made it imperative for Muslim theologians not only to undertake historical research but also to lay down canons of evaluating historical data for eliminating doubt and error so far as it was humanly possible. It led them to explore the traditions of religious allied to their own, which had preceded the mission of the prophet in point of time. Indeed, historical studies started in Islam as a necessary adjunct of theological development (Sirajudeen, 2004: 228).

It was necessary, therefore, for the Muslims to cultivate a religious attitude towards history, which could not be easily discarded. Even when history ventured out into the courts of worldly monarchs, it was not able to overcome some of the conceptions developed in the cloisters of the mosques and the colleges of theology. The theologians looked upon their works as an act of worship; hence, it was to be approached with utmost sincerity. In such work, all merit was lost if any selfish motives were permitted to interfere with its objectivity .

3. *Adab* Literature and History

The inseparable nexus between literature (*Ar. Adab*) and History has been a subject of discussion amongst some contemporary scholars of Arabic Historiography. There have been the tripartite functions of literature (education, history and entertainment). Hence, considerable works of Muslim scholars of African origin, like many other Arabic literary writings, are more historical in orientation.

This work examines the historical information embedded in the Arabic writings of the African Muslim literati. This will form the nucleus of the literary history of the region. I have argued in some quarters that while the African Muslim scholars in their Arabic writings did not intentionally write their works primarily for historical documentation, an element of historical information could be gleaned therefrom. This formed the genesis of the Arabic historiography of the region. The reason was that during the period when writings seemed unavailable, especially in Muslim Africa, and this made Europeans declare the continent as 'Dark', the Arabic writings of the scholars formed the nucleus of the African Historiography.

The fact that history is synonymous with writings, the literary works of Arabic scholars are considered as historical, particularly when elements of historical information could be gleaned therefrom. It might be difficult to speak of African Historiography without mentioning the contributions of Arabic writings of the African Muslim scholars.

It needs to be stressed here that despite the fact that these literati wrote their works primarily for religious proselytization, there were some Arab travelers whose economic and curiosity spurred them into writing reports of their experiences in these regions. It happened much later that these reports, as well as the Arabic literature of the scholars, constitute the historical information about the region. There is no gainsaying the fact that the Arabic writings cover a wide range of information concerning nations, economic data, social life, international trade as well as merchant routes, religious beliefs and customs, and cosmographies (Lewicki, 1969)². All this later formed the beginnings of the Arabic Historiography of Africa. The Arabic writings of the African Muslim scholars later constituted a tremendous significance of the Arabic writings to the reconstruction of African history, particularly to the south of the Sahara with reference to Kanem-Borno.

Generally speaking, sources for the history of Africa, especially in Arabic, divide themselves into fairly clearly two principal categories. These include EXTERNAL and INTERNAL³. These categories are divided into all written sources derived, roughly speaking, from areas situated to the North of the Sahara in North Africa as well as in Europe and Asia. However, into the latter are sources which have originated in Africa to the South of the Sahara. Some of these sources from Arabic situated to the North of the Sahara, while some others derive from countries lying to the South of the desert. They can thus be classified as the 'external' sources and partly "internal". The latter consists mainly of chronicles and other historical works of local origin from the 16th to the 19th centuries, being the works of local authors⁴.

² Lewicki, T. (1969) *Arabic External Sources for the History of Africa to the South of Sahara*, London, Curzon Press, p. 8

³ Lewicki, ..., p. 7

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 8

Put differently, the "External" sources refer to those materials produced by Arab geographers, travelers, and traders as well as other forms of Arab literature, which were provided by the geographers and historians of the Arabo-Islamic world together with a few first-hand accounts such as those given by travelers like Ibn Battutah and Leo Africanus. The Internal sources (category) consist of later Arabic writings by the local indigenous literati, most of which the European scholars came to develop⁵.

It must be added here that some other information relating to the black Continent was provided not only by the geographers and travelers but also by the Arab conquerors. Besides, the intellectual centers of the Islamic caliphate began to be reached by information on the areas situated upon the Nile or Western Sudan, supplied to the Arab conquerors by the Copts or North African Berbers who had long reached those regions. It is pertinent to note that the bulk of the Arabic writings, which are considered the basic sources of the history of the discussed territory from the 8th to the 15th centuries, belong to external sources which are not different from the works related entirely to the countries or peoples of Kanem – Borno areas. It is, however, instructive to note that Kanem – Borno was known to Arab geographers and travelers as early as the 9th century or even earlier. The ruling dynasty was probably converted to Islam at the end of the 11th century.

4. Historiography and *Ḥadīth* Methods of Scientific Inquiry: A Symbiosis

A *Ḥadīth* is a record of deeds or words of the Prophet of Islam. Early Muslims were led by the natural drive of curiosity and piety in the personality of Prophet Muhammad, who was held in high esteem and thus took great interest in collecting records and reports of the life and personality of the Prophet and his actions popularly referred to as *sunnah* used interchangeably with *Ḥadīth*. The importance of *Sunnah* in Muslim life could be traced to its being a reflection of the central place of Muhammad in the life of the Islamic community, even after his demise, and consequently on, his becoming a model for all Muslims to imitate. This, in particular, gave rise to the documentary value of *Ḥadīth* as a mirror of the Islamic way of life.

During the period of the prophet's earthly ministry, he becomes the subject of narratives. The most important of these – his military campaigns- were soon taken up by serious historians and became the *maghāzī*, in which the old methods of the pre-Islamic '*ayyām* and '*ansāb* were used, thus laying the foundation for the writing of *futūḥ* (conquest) literature. The fact that it was through this personality that the religion of Islam was revealed his personality meant more than ordinary to them whose historical interest in his sayings and deeds in his earthly mission were systematized as tradition – *Ḥadīth*. This written biography of Muhammad's high moral drive and his divine mission, collected and recorded, marked the beginning of Arabic historiography⁶.

A *Ḥadīth* is a record of deeds or words of the Prophet of Islam. It consists of two parts; the first contains the names of the persons who transmitted the report to one another; this part is called the *isnād*, meaning the 'support' for the trustworthiness of the report. The second part consists of the statement itself, the text or substance (*matn*) of the report. *Ḥadīth*, as used here, may refer to a single narrative or communication or to the science of *Ḥadīth*, a field of Islamic religious knowledge⁷. This record of the apostolic traditions prefaced by (*isnād*) those who transmitted the message (mostly the companions) up to the Prophet himself soon developed into numerous historical works that formed the *sīrah*-biography. The main incentives for Muslim historical writing in the first centuries, even after Muhammad, lay in the desire to hand down the authoritative traditions of the prophet of Islam in the zeal for establishing a genealogical relationship with the Prophet⁸.

For a considerable time, historical documentation consisted chiefly of the unbroken transmission of supposedly authoritative traditions concerning the earthly mission of Muhammad. This later became a matter mainly of historical scholarship and criticism of sifting among the traditions and the transmitters of the traditions. Muslim historical writing, thus, was primarily religious and political in orientation. The earliest important Muslim historical works were, naturally enough, biographies of Muhammad and accounts of his personality⁹ as they affect the day to day practice of Islam. This further gave the later Muslim scholars the drive into the writing of historical works, as could be found in the writings of Ibn Is-haq (d.768)¹⁰. While this prophetic tradition cannot be considered as purely historical literature in the strict sense of the term, a distinct consciousness of history is perceptible. Hence, the science of *Ḥadīth* literature has developed another discipline, which is very much allied to real historiography, namely the science of transmitters of *Ḥadīth* or, in a wider sense, the genealogy.

The authentic *Sunnah* is contained within the vast body of *Ḥadīth* literature. During the lifetime of the Prophet, Muslims then used to refer to him in matters relating to their religion for guidance. Instruction from him formed the basis of the *sunnah* and or *Ḥadīth*.

⁵ Oyeweso, S. 'Values & Limitations of Early Arabic Accounts in the Reconstruction of Nigerian History', *Islamic Culture, India*, vol. LXII, No.1, Jan. 1988, p. 9

⁶ -Adam A. Sirajudeen, A Case for the Development of Arabic Historiography in Nigeria, *Anyigba Journal of Arts & Humanities*, Vol. 3 Nos. 1&2, 2004, p. 224ff

⁷ George Makdisi, The Diary in Islamic Historiography: Some Notes, *History & Theory*, Volume 25, No 2 May 1986, pp. 173-185

⁸ - H. E. Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, Dover Publications, 1963, p. 94

⁹ - H. E. Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, Dover Publications, 1963, p. 94

¹⁰ -The Biography of the Prophet which gather the traditions and facts relative to Muhammad, Ibn Hisham's (d. 834) Biography of Muhammad, al Waqidi (747-823) History of the Wars of the Prophet etc

Recognizing the necessity of *Ḥadīth*, early Muslims, particularly the companions of the Prophet, made concerted efforts to memorize this body of literature with a view to preserving it for future reference and usage. The overburdening of the memory where there is opportunity of writing technology has been, however, recognized by the later Muslims, particularly after the demise of the prophet Muhammad. Thus, efforts were made to document the considerable number of *Ḥadīth*.

It is interesting to note that during the later generation, there developed stages of *Ḥadīth* collection and documentation for preservation. Incidentally, with the passage of time, there came a period in Islamic history where there were various religious sects, most of whom had political inclinations. This gave rise to an unfortunate scenario where there was deliberate fabrication of *aḥādīth* by adherents of these various sects among the Muslim community in order to support their *religious* views. Other forgeries arose in the *Ḥadīth* literature, which later gave much concern to the Muslim scholars.

It was in their bid to rid this significant aspect of Islamic law that a method of sifting the fabricated and forged *Ḥadīth* from the authentic ones that the Muslim scholars devised. Certain rules and criteria governing the study of *Ḥadīth* were laid down. Study of *Ḥadīth* thenceforth followed a meticulous and careful selection, carefully sifted for possible genuine *Ḥadīth*, which was later formed a systematically documented principle but scattered among various texts. This system and or method are technically referred to as *Muṣṭalaḥ al Ḥadīth* (Method of *Ḥadīth* validation/authentication). Other branches of study, which the study of *Ḥadīth* gave rise to are *ʿilm al-Jarḥ wa al-taʿdīl* (lit. impugnement and justification) concerning the transmitters; and the rise of the biographical dictionary¹¹. It is interesting to note that the storytellers would have reached a higher artistic level if the *Ḥadīth* scholars had not closed the doors on them since any addition to the already vast corpus of *Ḥadīth* was undesirable.

Ḥadīth (pl. *Aḥādīth*), according to scholars, is composed of two parts, viz; the *matn* (text) and the *isnād* (chain of transmitters). While the *matn*, which is the text of the saying and deed, as well as the approval of the prophet of Islam documented as *Ḥadīth*, *Isnād* is referred to as the chain of those who reported the *matn*. The final verdict on the authenticity and otherwise of a particular *Ḥadīth* depends on the certification of both the *matn* and *isnād*, which will be described as *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), *ḥasa n* (good), *ḍaʿīf* (weak), *mawḍūʿ* (fabricated/forged). However, the early traditionists, mostly of the first two centuries, used to classify *Ḥadīth* into two principal categories only, viz; *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound) and *ḍaʿīf* (weak)¹².

Ḥadīth criticism consisted in ascertaining the names and circumstances of transmitters in order to investigate when and where they lived, whether they were personally acquainted one with the other, and whether they were reliable, truthful and accurate in their transmission of the texts¹³. To a great extent, historiography owes its existence in Islam to the exigencies of this *Ḥadīth* criticism.

The word 'historiography', however, is a useful compendious expression for describing a group of *activities*¹⁴, each of which, regarded separately, requires a wordy definition and which, in any case, should not be regarded as separate and mutually exclusive. By the *activities*, we mean certain activities connected with history. The word 'history' itself, of course, is one which, in both the Arabic and English languages, is used with a variety of meanings. For instance, history is regarded (and this should be a preliminary definition, which may need cultivation as we proceed) as a record of past happenings. This definition accords reasonably well with the connotation of the Greek root of the modern word in the Western group of the Indo-European languages and with what is known of the original significance of the roots of the words *akhbār* and *tarikh* in the Semitic¹⁵.

The *activities*, as noted above, which are the component parts of historiography here, refer to 'four different but closely related kinds of historical activity. These are; (i) the *discovery* and critical analysis of *historical sources*; (ii) the *reconstruction* and description of the past on the basis of *facts* quarried from the discovered sources; (iii) the construction on the basis of the ascertained facts of some *general theory*, which gives meaning and inner logic to the known past, or to most of it, as well as serves 'to educate and ascertain society as a whole' or even helps to influence aspects of contemporary public policy or action; and (iv) the *reflection* on the trends and patterns of historical writing.

Historiography is etymologically the compilation, writing, and, of course, making available of the record of past happenings for the purpose of possible but better understanding of the present. Some other writers would like to see historiography as an art (some would say the science) of writing history, particularly because of the techniques required in the practice of writing history. The words *writing* and or *record* are prominent in the description given above. It presupposes that in discussing historiography, there must be a particular record/writing. Historiography has a lot to do with and is indeed inextricable from the writing of history,

¹¹ - Irfān Shāhīd, Arabic Literature to the End of Umayyad Period, Review Article *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 106, No.3 (July – September 1986), pp. 529- 538

¹² - Suhaib Hassan, *An Introduction to the Science of Ḥadīth*, Al Qur'an Society, London, n.d. p. 34

¹³ H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers (ed.) *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Leiden, 1953),

¹⁴ - Smith, H. C. F. An Introduction to Historiography, Unpublished paper read to members of Sudan Historical Society on 30th September, 1953, p. 2

¹⁵ - Smith, H. C. F. An Introduction to Historiography, Unpublished paper read to members of Sudan Historical Society on 30th September, 1953, p.4

the practice of methodology and study of the practice of the methodology of history and, more importantly, the interpretation of history and the study of that interpretation with a view to obtaining the objectivity in historical writings.

More than a collection and edition of historical sources and evidence put together in a literary form, historiography embraces the craft of writing history. As an art of historical writing, it is the means for communicating in writing what the historians think they know about the past. For instance, while it is practically impossible to put down graphically all that happened in the past as history so also it is not all that happened is required to be written as past events. It is, however, presupposes that historians have to apply a kind of technique or art in selecting what should be put down as history. This art, however, varies from one historian to the other.

Osokoya sees historiography as 'the writing of history'. In a more lucid form, it is 'the art of writing history'. As a historian, for instance, there must be a kind of skill, consciously or otherwise, in selecting and deciding from the multifarious 'facts' and 'evidence' available which actually deserves to be written down as history. Here, certain issues come into play: objectivity, prejudice, lucid presentation, correctness of the facts and evidence, analysis, collection and collation, and narration, to mention a few¹⁶. Carr's conception of historiography may mean a kind of scientific approach to history writing, which involves the collection of evidence and critically analyzing and or interpreting the evidence without prejudice¹⁷. Historiography here is no more than the development of art or science of history writing. It also refers to the corpus of historical accounts, as noted earlier.

It is instructive to note here that in this art of historical writing, there was a development which brought some issues into play. For instance, the idea of accuracy in historical writing, criticism and methodology formed basic features of the Graeco – Roman historiography. While Herodotus, for example, was the first historian to write a comprehensive historical account as well as the first constructive artist in the field of history writing, Thucydides has been acclaimed as the first historian to state the 'pragmatic' value of writing and study of history as his historical account was characterized with more scientific than Herodotus¹⁸. Other dimensions in the study of historiography reveal that the subject is all about the exposition of more truth, a more complete account of the past, a greater selection of the subjects undertaken by a historian/historiographer to treat as well as of the individual facts which he requires for its treatment, and a more pleasing external form, an elegant presentation!

Historiography sometimes concerns itself with historians reconstructing the events of the distant past from a study of the documents available in the realm of criticism and methodology. This is done with a view to setting forth a historical work which should depend more upon the accuracy of its statement than upon the entertainment furnished by narrative. Perhaps this lends credence to the alleged pragmatic value of the writing and study of history according to the ancient Greek historian- Thucydides, who said, "The accurate knowledge of what has happened will be useful, because, according to human probability, similar things will happen again.

Thus, the idea was not only sifting sources but also basing the narrative upon accurate documentation, organizing and correct interpretation of materials. This requires a thorough understanding of the problems of historical causation, recognizing and treating remote as well as immediate causes and possession of astuteness in psychological analysis. This defines the ideas of continuity of human life, of an intimate logic of things, and of interdependence among nations.

In historiography, as the case in the task of obtaining correct and sound information *Ḥadīth* literature, true historical accuracy requires a consideration of the genesis and cultural setting of a situation as certainly as it does the more formal truth of such facts as are narrated. It is worth mentioning that the major practical value of history resides in the provision of accurate historical facts, which might help to guide the administration of public affairs in the present. The same is true of the prophetic traditions, which require that the true divine guidance could only be obtained in sound *aḥādīth* representing the exemplary life of the prophet. Hence, systematic collections of historical sources, formal techniques of scholarship as well as looking beyond primitive and superstitious outlooks constitute aspects of historiography.

5. A Study of the Arabic Historical Texts *Infāq al Maysūr* and *Tārikh Mai Idrīs Alūma waghazawātuh* under *Mustalah al Ta'rikh*

Apart from the oral tradition and archaeology, Arabic writings constitute a significant source for the early history of Africa, particularly south of the Sahara. It contained invaluable materials for the reconstruction of some Northern Nigerian States such as Kanem-Borno and Hausaland. These Arabic sources enable us to reconstruct the general image of the communities during a period for which we have no other written records and equally provide some interesting linguistic materials.

In spite of the tremendous significance of the Arabic writings to the reconstruction of early African history with particular reference to Kanem-Borno, historiographers have observed some limitations embedded in these literary works, which constitute a kind of problem of authenticity of the writings.

¹⁶ - Osokoya, O.O. *Writing & Teaching History: A Guide to Advanced Study*, Ibadan, Laurel Educational Publishers, 1996

¹⁷- Carr, E. H. *What is History*, London, 1961

¹⁸ H. E. Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, Dover Publications, 1963, p. 15

A critical study of the local Arabic writings, which contain information on the historical traditions of Kanem–Borno, indicates a kind of emotional inclination toward the people they were writing about. The work of Ibn Fartuwa and Bello, for instance, indicates strong bias and prejudice in their reports. Such a bias engenders inaccurate historical information, as rightly pointed out by Ibn Khaldun. It is equally important to note that the manuscripts used in the work of Fartuwa seem to be a comparatively recent date, and whether the older copies from which they were derived are preserved is less certain. There is total absence of chronology in the writing (Sirajudeen, 2010).

The only available text of *Infaq al Maysur* depended upon are the edition of C.E.J. Whitting, London, 1951, or an edition privately printed in Cairo, 1964. Neither edition makes any pretense of being critical, and in both, gross inaccuracies abound. However, it is pertinent to note that some of the writers are giving firsthand information except that the timing of their writing was not almost immediate, which also gave room for forgetfulness (Sirajudeen, 2010). It is true, however, that both Ibn Fartuwa and Bello's systematic approach show a kind of historiographical perspective, which makes the texts in question to be reliable references to some extent. An attempt is made to avoid the storytelling method, thus excluding myths and legends. This has divorced the works from epic prose, and a definite theme is selected for historical enterprise. The works, especially *Infaq*, seem to have reconstructed the available materials and accounts in the realm of criticism and methodology with a view to setting forth a historical work, which should depend upon accuracy rather than upon the entertainment furnished by narrative (Sirajudeen, 2010).

A thorough knowledge of the origin of the historical traditions of Kanem–Borno, for instance, is an essential part of the Nigerian Arabic Literary history. The then ruling dynasty (*Sayfuwa*), which was established very early, was first converted to Islam in the early days of Islam. Kanem was one of the first states that were known to the outside world as identified by the earlier geographers and historians. (Sirajudeen, 2018)¹⁹

6. Conclusion

I had identified relevant source materials in the Arabic literary heritage of Africa and subjected same to thorough study with a view to sifting them critically, thereby establishing their authenticity and credibility. In this case, the critical analytical approach was employed, which dwells on studying some manuscripts and examines critically the methods of historical documentation. Also, the styles, structure, and themes in these Arabic writings are studied. The theoretical framework of criticizing *Hadith* literature (*Mustalah al-Hadith*), which has hitherto given birth to the idea of *Mustalah al-Tarikh* as adopted here in this study, as stated earlier, is employed. This is also supplemented by the selected basic questions that are usually considered in historiography. The study equally reconsiders the intellectual value of the Arabic materials as veritable historical evidence, which was justified for the purpose of authenticity and credibility.

It was also found that most of the literary writings belonging to the period beginning from the fall of Baghdad in 1259 C.E. to the inception of Napoleonic invasion in Egypt in 1798 are generally characterized by imitation and compilation, which were not scrutinized. A number of scholars during this period produced dictionaries, local and universal histories and commentaries. More so, these Arabic writings lack originality as they are copied and assembled without any serious attempt to evaluate them and often without acknowledgement of the sources (Sirajudeen, 2012).

It was observed that not all the authors had their aim to impart geographical or ethnographic knowledge, while those who had such pretensions were just repeating copiously from the older references. It was also noted that most of the Arab geographers and travelers accounts are not firsthand information. Many of them were mere armchair encyclopedists from where only a handful of truly firsthand accounts of Sub–Saharan Africa could be gleaned. Most of the information from these writers came partly as a result of their personal observations and not their practical experiences or eye – witness (Sirajudeen, 2010).

Again, the fact that the primary object of the Arab geographers' writings was the response to the needs of the Muslim rulers who were interested in acquiring information that would assist them in handling commercial and political relations within the vast area in which Islam established itself must have accounted for the characteristic features of their writings. The implication of this is that a substantial part of their information is but collections by authors comprising various travelers, seamen, and merchants who must have visited the areas whose history is narrated (Sirajudeen, 2012). It presupposes that only a portion of those sources has an original character, while the majority of the information on the African countries and their peoples are no more than recasts of older relations or compilations of different sources and epochs.

6.1 Prospects: Limitations and Further Research

¹⁹ Adam A.Sirajudeen, *et al* (eds.) New Paradigms in Arabic & Islamic Studies in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Professor Muslih 'Tayo Yahya (pp. i-184).

Regardless of the fact that much of the information collected has its limitations as truncated and incomplete, as observed by historiographers, these literary writings allow for interesting linguistics materials. It also allows for the reconstruction of the general history of the people during a particular period for which written records seemed unavailable.

It should be noted that the lack of originality and the preponderance of limitation and compilation without scrutiny, which characterized the features of these literary writings, notwithstanding the works have contributed to our knowledge of that period and have helped to preserve valuable historical materials, which would otherwise have been lost.

There is yet to come to light, i.e. satisfactory edition of *Infaq al maysur* of Muhammad Bello, for instance; nevertheless, scholars are optimistic that this lamentable situation will soon be rectified by the labours of writers like M. A. al Hajj. It is our contention here that while these materials are tainted with unreliable elements, they nonetheless still contain the substance of truth, which can only be obtained through a critical study of not only the writings but also the authors.

It is instructive to note here that this research does not receive any funding opportunities from neither an individual nor group. All the efforts in gathering necessary information are exclusively personal to the authors. Hence, "This research received no external funding" nor funded by anybody.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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