

**THE AESTHETICS OF ARABIC CALLIGRAPHIC  
EMBELLISHMENT OF MOSQUES IN KANO,  
NIGERIA**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation entitled, “The Aesthetics of Arabic Calligraphic Embellishment of Mosques in Kano, Nigeria” has been written by me as a record of my own research. It has never been presented previously in any form for the award of a degree or diploma. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. All quotations are indicated by quotation marks or indentation.

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Date

## CERTIFICATION

This dissertation entitled **The Aesthetics of Arabic Calligraphic Embellishment of Mosques in Kano, Nigeria** by Muhammad Aliyu meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to the less privileged who could not afford to acquire Western education

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## **ABSTRACT**

Attempt is made in this study to investigate the aesthetic embellishment inherent in the Arabic calligraphy of mosques in Kano, Nigeria. Attention on the research was stimulated by the way scholars overlooked this expressive art form particularly amongst the non-Arab speaking Muslim *Ummah*. In the course of doing that, the study traced the historical evolution of Arabic calligraphy, the arrival of Islam into Kano, and what informed its usage on the mosque's inner and outer walls. The study also appreciated its usage within the context of aesthetic. Literature was therefore available on the subject in such regions within the stated periods and was thus reviewed. This is coupled with oral interview conducted, visits paid to certain mosques, questionnaire administered on the artists and Mallams/Imams. Basically, the study adopted and utilized the qualitative and historical method of research. Data collected for the study were analysed based on Feldman's recommendation to be taken in analyzing artworks. The steps are descriptive, formal analysis, interpretation and judgment. From the findings it was discovered that out of the six renown Arabic calligraphic styles, (*Kufic, Thuluth, Nasakh, Riq'a, Farsi and Deewani*) only three of the Arabic calligraphic styles were frequently used by the Arabic calligraphers within the studied areas. The Arabic styles include *Kufic, Farsi and Nasakh*. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were given as to how Arabic calligraphic embellishment will be better understood and appreciated, especially among the non-Arabic speaking Muslim *Ummah*.

# CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
Title Page-----	i
Declaration-----	ii
Certification-----	iii
Dedication-----	iv
Acknowledgements-----	v
Abstract-----	vi
Contents-----	vii
List of Figures-----	ix
List of Plates-----	x
List of Maps-----	xi
List of Appendices-----	xii
Maps-----	xiii
<b>Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION-----</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction-----	1
Background to the Study-----	6
Statement of the Problem-----	12
Aim and Objectives of the Study-----	13
Justification of the Study-----	14
Significance of the Study-----	15
Scope of the Study-----	15
Limitation of the study -----	15
Conceptual Framework-----	16
Definition of Terms-----	19
<b>Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW-----</b>	<b>22</b>
Introduction-----	22
Historical Evolution and Development of Arabic Calligraphy-----	22
The Arrival and Spread of Islam in Africa-----	27
Mosque Embellishment-----	33
Arabic Scripts-----	47
Early Arabic Calligraphers-----	52
Types of Arabic Calligraphy-----	54
Calligraphic Materials-----	64
<b>Chapter 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE-----</b>	<b>66</b>
Introduction-----	66
Source of Data-----	66
Pilot Study-----	67
Field Trip-----	67
Population-----	68
Photographs-----	68
Data Analysis-----	68
<b>Chapter 4: DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS OF ART WORKS -----</b>	<b>70</b>

Introduction-----	70
Discussion on the Historical Evolution of Arabic Calligraphy-----	70
The Intrinsic and Extrinsic Uniqueness of the Artworks-----	75
Mural-----	76
Plastic-----	108
Engraving-----	114
Etching-----	124
Wood-----	126
Metal-----	128
Aluminium-----	131
<b>Chapter 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS-----</b>	<b>133</b>
Introduction-----	133
Summary of Findings-----	133
Discussions-----	135
Findings-----	137
Recommendations -----	140
Notes -----	142
References-----	148
Appendices-----	153

**LIST OF LIST OF FIGURES****Page**

Figure 1: Dome of The Rock-----	3
Figure 2: A mosque <i>Qibla</i> -----	4
Figure 3: Hagia Sophia-----	5
Figure 4: Topkapi Palace-----	6
Figure 5: <i>Kufic</i> -----	55
Figure 6: <i>Maghribi</i> hand written <i>Qur'an</i> -----	56
Figure 7: <i>Thuluth</i> -----	58
Figure 8: <i>Nasakh</i> -----	59
Figure 9: <i>Rig'a</i> -----	60
Figure 10: <i>Ta'aliq</i> -----	61
Figure 11: <i>Deewani</i> -----	62

**LIST OF PLATES****Page**

Plate I: Zawiyya Sheikh Bashir bin Zayd Friday mosque, Dala-----	75
Plate II: <i>Allahu, Jalla Jalaaluhu</i> Tudun Wada Friday mosque, Nassarawa -----	76
Plate III: <i>Jalla Jalaaluhu</i> Tudun Wada Friday mosque, Nassarawa -----	79
Plate III(c): Tudun Wada main mosque-----	80
Plate IV: <i>Al-Fattah</i> Tudun Wada Friday mosque, Nassarawa -----	81
Plate V: <i>Al-Iklas</i> Dorayi Babba Friday mosque, Gwale-----	83
Plate VI: <i>Gairil magzubi alayhim wa laz-zaaliin</i> Jami'u Maulana Sheikh Aliyu Harazimi Friday mosque, Ungogo-----	86
Plate VII: <i>Bismillaahir- Rahmanir- Rahim</i> : Jami'u Maulana Sheikh Aliyu Harazimi Friday mosque, Ungogo -----	88
Plate VIII: <i>Hasbunallah Wani'ni'im al Wakhil'</i> Jami'u Maulana Sheikh Aliyu Harazimi Friday mosque, Ungogo-----	91
Plate IX: Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam Friday mosque, Kumbotso, -----	93
Plate X: <i>Allahu</i> : Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso-----	94
Plate XI: <i>Muhammad</i> , Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso, -----	96
Plate XII: <i>Abubakar</i> : Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso -----	98
Plate XIII: <i>Umar</i> Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso -----	100
Plate XIV: <i>Usman</i> : Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso -----	102
Plate XV: <i>Ali</i> Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso-----	104
Plate XV(c) Murtala Muhammad main mosque-----	105
Plate XVI: <i>La'illaha illallahu Muhammadu – Rasulullah Ali ibn Abi Talib</i> Friday mosque, Tarauni-----	106
Plate XVII: <i>Hasbunallahu wa Ni'nimal-Wakiil</i> , Sheikh Inyass Friday mosque, Gwale -----	108
Plate XVIII: ' <i>Allahu</i> ', Sheikh Inyass Friday mosque Gwale -----	110
Plate XIX: ' <i>Muhammad</i> ' Sheikh Inyass Friday mosque, Gwale-----	112
Plate XIX(c) Sheikh Inyass main mosque-----	113
Plate XX: <i>Bismillaahir- Rahmanir- Rahim</i> , Umar Farouk Friday Mosque, Nassarawa -----	114
Plate XXI: <i>Allahu Muhammad</i> Sharada Central Friday mosque, Municipal -----	116
Plate XXII <i>Muhammad Rasulullah</i> Sharada Central Friday mosque, Municipal: -	118
Plate XXIII: <i>Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam</i> Abdulkadir, Sharada Central Friday mosque, Municipal -----	120
Plate XXIV: <i>La'in shakartum Laazi dannakum</i> Sharada Central Friday mosque-----	122
Plate XXIV(c) Sharada main mosques-----	123
Plate XIV: <i>Bismillaahir- Rahmanir- Rahim</i> -----	124
Plate XVI: Verse 40, Chapter 143-----	126
Plate XVII: <i>La'illaha illallahu Muhammadu – Rasulullah</i> , Tokarawa Friday mosque, Nassarawa, -----	128
Plate XVII: <i>Allahu Kamsu</i> Friday mosque, Dala-----	131

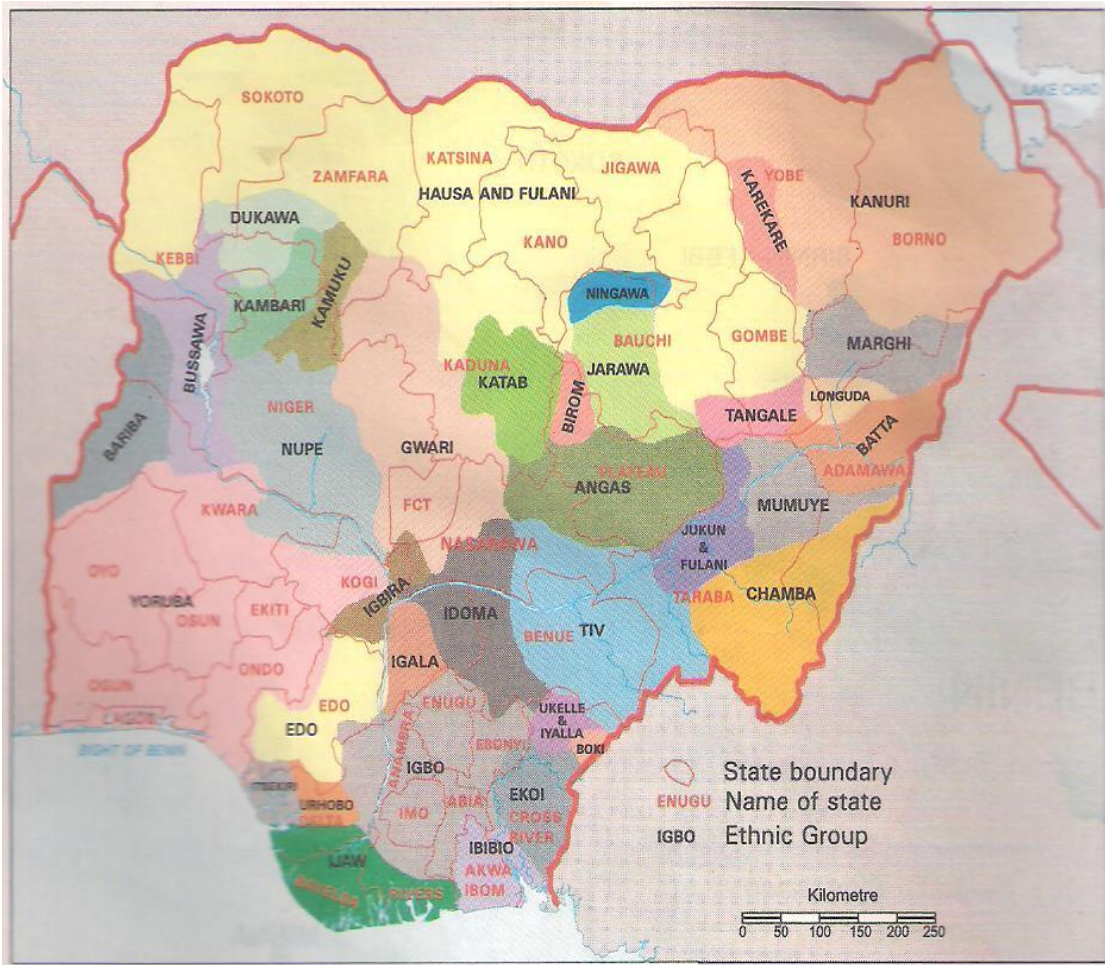
## LIST OF MAPS

	<b>Page</b>
Map 1: Map of Nigeria Showing the 36 States including The Federal Capital, Abuja---	xi
Map 2: Map of Kano State Showing 44 Local Government Areas-----	xii

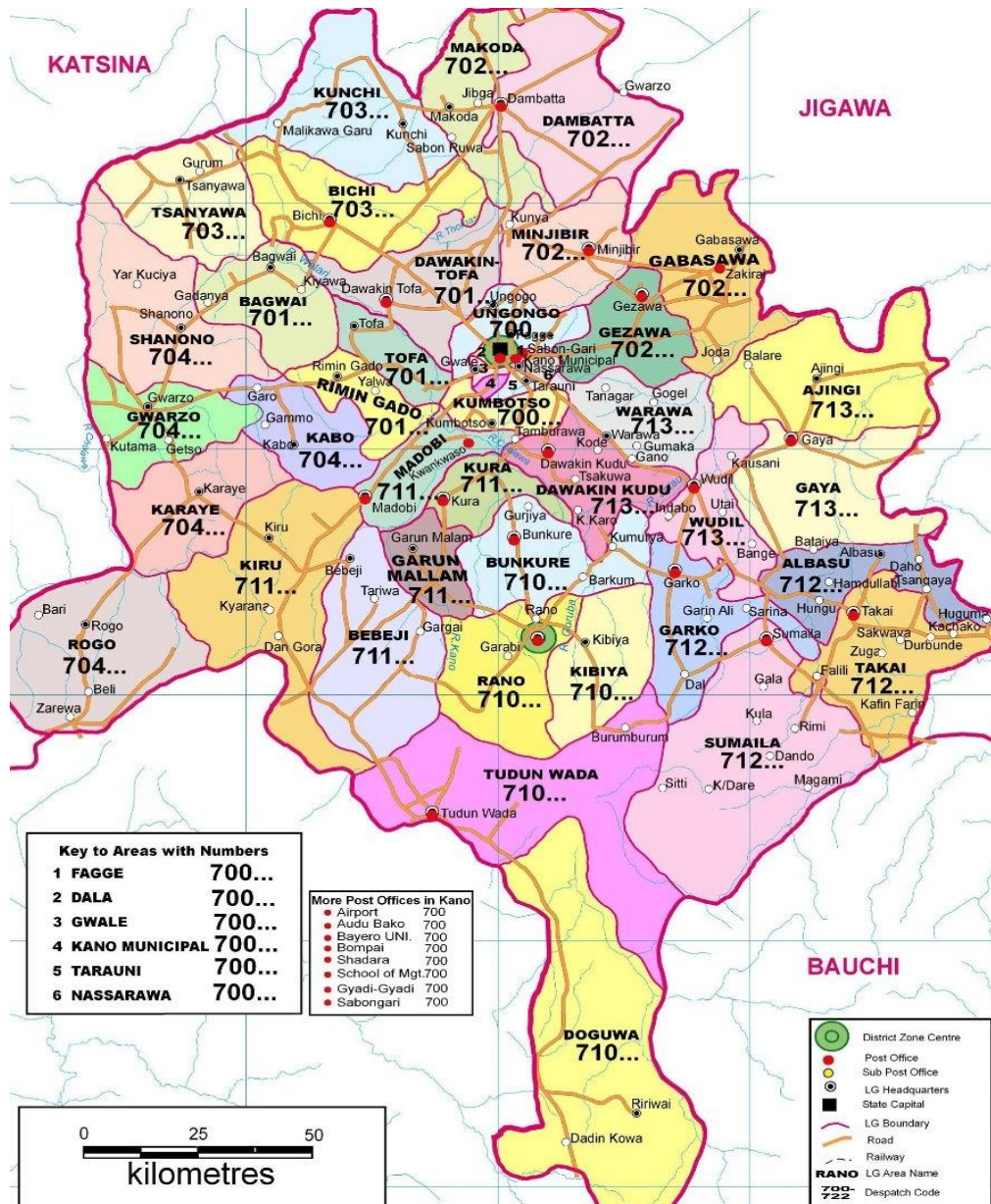
**LIST OF APPENDICES**

**Page**

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Mallams within the Metropolis-----	153
Appendix II: Questionnaire for Calligraphers within the Metropolis-----	154
Appendix III: Interview held with Mallams within Kano Metropolis-----	155
Appendix IV: Interview held with artists within Kano Metropolis-----	159
Appendix V: A female artist executing a commissioned work-----	164
Appendix VI: Interview with an art enthusiast-----	166
Appendix XVII: Other Arabic calligraphy in certain mosques-----	168
Appendix XVII: Smearred/defaced Arabic calligraphy-----	174



Map 1: Map of Nigeria Showing the 36 States including The Federal Capital, Abuja  
 Source: Olayinka Y. Balogun (2000) Senior Secondary Atlas (Second Edition)



Map 2: Map of Kano State Showing 44 Local Government Areas  
 Source: Ministry of Land and Survey, Kano State

# CHAPTER ONE

## **Introduction**

One of the basic needs of human beings which compliment their lives, apart from air, food, water and cloth, is shelter. All these living essentials are derived directly from the environment. By implication, it can be said that the environment determines and informs where and how humans should subsist<sup>1</sup>. Having discovered the importance of shelter, the early humans began to utilize caves for protection, from the harsh weather and wild animals. In the prehistoric time, humans were wanderers, they kept changing shelter from one base to the other. When they became organized, they made some progress. They began to overcome nature, through the development of agriculture, clothing and shelter. They became food producers rather than gatherers. Since they were more inclined to farming, the beginning of agriculture meant also the beginning of homemaking. Farmers need permanent homes near their fields. The remains of the Stone Age, found by archeologists, show clearly that many people then, lived in villages of wooden huts, sometimes built over lakes. Basically, the wooden huts were functional<sup>2</sup> structures with artistic<sup>3</sup> attributes.

Some modern examples of such shelters include domestic shelters, which include places to sleep in, prepare food, eat and perhaps, work; commercial shelters which could serve as warehouses, banks, exhibition halls and garages. Others include recreational shelters such as theaters, auditoriums, museums and libraries. The religious shelters include temples, shrines, synagogues, churches and mosques. While shading light on the significance of the mosque and the specific function it serves, Dallal (2007) states that,

The mosque is a shelter that serves as a functional structure where Muslim faithfuls worship. The mosque is also said to be the most important place for the Muslims' expression of Islamic and communal identity. A mosque is a physical manifestation of the public presence of Muslims, and serves as a point of convergence for Islamic spiritual activities. Furthermore, the mosque is seen as a place where Muslims foster a collective identity and attend to their common concern through prayers.

The mosque can be built bare without embellishment and still serve the purpose for which it is intended. However, many mosques are embellished with Arabic calligraphy, on either the exterior or interior walls. On this note therefore, it is not surprising to see some mosques bearing Arabic calligraphic embellishment, which gives a rich splendor to the structure. A good example of this is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the *Umayyad*<sup>4</sup> Great mosque in Damascus. The Dome of the Rock is embellished on its surfaces (inside and out) with amazingly elaborate embellishment of marble and glazed ceramic tiles in mosaic patterns. On the upper part of the octagonal shape, just before the Dome, are Arabic calligraphic inscriptions (Fig 1). Similarly, the *Umayyad* Great mosque in Damascus has decorations of mosaic designs on both the exterior and interior of the building, which depict floral and tree motifs. The *Umayyad* mosques of Jordan offer a wealth of embellishment. The walls are covered with mosaics, stucco and stone ornament. The interior of Suleimaniye mosque, Istanbul, Turkey<sup>5</sup> is also decorated with Arabic calligraphic inscriptions, although the mosque is renowned for its decorative ceramics. Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin mosque, Brunei has a golden-domed structure, marbled floors and walls. The mosque also has Arabic calligraphic embellishment.

Apart from its religious significance, Arabic calligraphy has its artistic attraction. This can be noticed in the Gao mosque tomb of Askia the Great in Mali, and Larabanga mosque in Ghana<sup>6</sup>.



Fig 1: Dome of The Rock, source: Art Through the Ages, Klener and Mamiya (2005)

The embellishment in the mosques in West Africa, to which Nigeria belongs, is simple. The main motifs<sup>7</sup> are usually deeply incised in vertical lines, triangles and circles on the piers, and horizontals on the underside of the arches, which together help to emphasize and complete the main patterns. The most decorative parts of the mosques are usually the *Mihrab*<sup>8</sup> walls, towards the *Qiblah*<sup>9</sup> (Fig 2) the direction pointing to the *Ka'abah*<sup>10</sup> in Mecca.

Indeed, the *Mihrab* and the *Minbah*<sup>11</sup> in the *Masjid-al-jami* (Friday mosque) in the ancient Zaria<sup>12</sup> city, bears mud relief patterns, which are pleasing to view in the interior of the mosque. The mud/clay patterns are sober, formal, dignified and different in form and character from the arabesque-like spirals, interlacing knots and repeated chevrons of the ancient Zaria (Nigeria) Friday mosque,.



Fig 2: A mosque *Qiblah*, source: Art through the Ages, Klener and Mamiya (2005)

The depiction of Arabic calligraphic inscriptions of *Qur'anic* verses and other words of wisdom on mosques can be seen as having a strong religious significance. It is assumed that the verses of the Holy scripture, inscribed on the walls of the mosque create in the believer, a sense of humility, when in prayers in the mosque, before his/her Creator. A good number of such mosques bearing one form of Arabic calligraphic inscription or the other for embellishment purpose include the mosque of *Ibn Tulun*<sup>13</sup> in Cairo and the Sultan Hassan mosque in Tunisia amongst others. According to the Encarta (2008), “other examples of such Arabic calligraphic embellishment and mosque design can be seen in the Nunju mosque, Peking; the mosque of the shrine of Ali, the *Mazar-i-sharif* in Afghanistan; Central mosque, Abuja; King Abdullah mosque in Amman, Jordan; Sultan Ahmad Shah mosque Malaysia”. The Encarta maintains that “Hagia Sophia Istanbul (Figure 3) Ginah mosque, in Trinidad and Topkapi palace, Istanbul (Figure 4) are also embellished with Arabic calligraphy”.

To a large extent, it is observed that, the desire for decoration is irresistible and universal. The attitude and zeal of the Arabic calligrapher, as regards responding to this Instinct will never cease to amaze the beholder. The Arabic calligrapher overlays the bare surface of the mosque with intricate variety of patterns in delicate fancy, leaving behind a cultural and artistic legacy. It is on this basis, therefore, that this study seeks to investigate the Arabic calligraphic embellishment inherent in Kano mosques.



Fig 3: Hagia Sophia Istanbul, source: Art Through the Ages, Klener and Mamiya (2005)



Fig 4: Topkapı Palace, Istanbul, depicting the *shahādah*, or Muslim profession of faith: “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” source: Encyclopedia Britanica

## **Background of the Study**

The researcher makes no pretense to give a comprehensive history of the early settlers of Kano, as this will amount to writing another dissertation, because of Kano’s long standing history. The information under this sub-headings are somehow skeletal, however, it is hoped, to serve as an eye opener, on the views that follows. Ado (2009) avers that “Kano State is one of the thirty-six states of the Federation, which make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria”. Being one of the thirty- six States, in the context of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, it is located between latitudes  $13^0$  N in the North, and  $11^0$  S in the South and longitude  $8^0$  W in the West and  $10^0$  E in the East. In line with this, the 1996 projection in Mohammed (1998) states that, as a state, “Kano formally came into being on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1968. It shares boundaries with the states of Jigawa on the north-east, Bauchi on the east, Kaduna on the south and south-west respectively, while with Katsina state on the north-west”. According to the official Population and Housing Census (2006) report, “Kano State has a population of over 12 million inhabitants. The

total land area of Kano State is 20,760sq kilometers”. Presently, Kano is made up of forty four Local Government Areas, namely: Ajingi, Albasu, Bagwai, Bebeji, Bichi, Bunkure, Dala, Dambatta, Dawakin Kudu, Dawakin Tofa, Doguwa, Fagge, Gabasawa, Garko, Garun Mallam, Gaya, Gezawa, Gwale, Gwarzo, Kabo, Karaye, Kibiya, Kiru, Kumbotso, Kura, Kunchi, Madobi, Makoda, Minjibir, Kano Municipal, Nassarawa, Rano, Rimin Gado, Rogo, Shanono, Sumaila, Takai, Tarauni, Tsanyawa, Tudun Wada, Tofa, Ungogo, Warawa, and Wudil.

According to Hanga (2005), “Kano State has a daily mean temperature of 30<sup>0</sup> C to 33<sup>0</sup>C between March- May. The lowest temperature is 10<sup>0</sup>C during the autumn months of September to February”. Just like any other state, with its peculiarities of climatic condition, Kano has a rainy season, which varies from year to year but which, usually starts from May and ends in October each year. The dry season, on the other hand starts in November and ends in April. Ahmed (2010) concur that “the climate is determined by the movement of two air masses, a moist, rather cool southerly mass, known as south- westerlies and a hot and dry northern air, called the north-easterlies”. The author further states that, “the moist southern air forms a wedge under the lighter dry air and the region where the two air masses meet is primarily an area of pronounced moisture gradient. The humidity gradient is called the inter-tropical discontinuity (ITD)”. When the weather changes due to the movement of the ITD, it resulted into four seasons: *rani*, *damina*, *kaka*, and *bazara*.

***Rani***: This is the season when the ‘false’ start of rain is recorded in May. The weather is hot and dry, during *rani* season. ***Damina***: This is the humid period when surface runoff is available for stream flow and soil moisture, sufficient for plant growth. Over ninety percent of the annual rainfall is recorded in this season. ***Kaka***: This is the harvest season, between October and November, when farmers are busy harvesting

crops and traders are buying what is offered. *Bazara*: This is the cool season called ‘Harmattan’ between December and February. The skin dries up during this season and special care is needed for protection against cold.

Abdu, (2010) reports that, “Kano came into being probably about four hundred years or thereabout after the death of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). However, the year 999A.D appears to be the unanimously agreed period, during which Bagauda Kingdom was established. However, that is not to say communities did not co-exist in Kano before the aforementioned date”. He further reports that “evidence shows that, Kano as a settlement of heterogeneous communities began to be noticed in the historical records of human existence on earth as far back as the Century in which Prophet (P.B.U.H) emerged”. A tale was given on how Kano came into being, which dates back to pre-Islamic era. On this note, therefore, Abdu reports that,

There is a fable, which is commonly read to a circle of children that, Kano could have been the *Ka’abah* point and the residence of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) if a black dog had not passed in front of the Prophet at the time he was leading a congregational prayer around Dala hill.

Fresh as this fable is still in the minds of adults, it simply suggested the belief in the importance and religious (spiritual) relevance of Kano, as far back as, the medieval era or assumes that its evolution was, as early as, the antecedent in the establishment of *Ka’abah* or at least the appearance of the Prophet.

Additional inquiry besides this, may not concur, even with the least common fact in the chronicles of the spiritual past of *Ka’abah*, the origin, the birth and the household of the Prophet. The apparent fact, which is obviously told in the prevailing accounts on the evolutionary past of Kano, is that, the latter was first settled by varied groups coming from diverse parts of Africa. Nonetheless, Abagayawa, a black smith ethnic group from Gaya, were repeatedly reported as the leading prominent settlers and acclaimed founders of Kano. It is also possible that, there were other groups, for

instance, of potters, farmers and hunters, to which Dala belonged, settling before their arrival. The subjugation of these groups by Bagauda in 999A.D brought about a centralized political authority, headed by the conqueror, hence the commencement of the first kingdom in Kano. It was on record that Bagauda clan ruled Kano up to the period of Jihad in 1804.

Musa (2010) reveals that, “at the end of the tenth century A.D, a group of hunters settled on the hills of Kano. These hills are presently known as Dala, Gwauron Dutse, Magwan and Fanisau. Their population increased rapidly, due to the fertile land”. Musa also discloses that “they had no specific political and social system, as what is obtainable presently. However, they had a chief, who was very often the strongest among them. These people had a shrine, which housed the idol Tsunburbura. Barbushe, the servant of the idol, was the chief priest”. The author maintains that “it was through him, the idol communicates to the people. Every year, the Chief Priest would enter the tent of the shrine, to receive the yearly message of the idol to the people. The people would then gather round him, to receive the message”. Musa concludes that “then they would circumnavigate the shrine, nude, and after that sacrifice some sheep and dogs to the shrine before returning home”.

Ado-Kurawa (2010) reports that, “...settlement at Kano dates from the seventh century A.D, by which time Hausa peoples of the area were already engaged in smelting irons. The initial immigrants were identified as Abagayawa who voyaged from Gaya and settled at Dala hill. Their forebear was known as Kano”. The author further reports that “...they lived in groups commanded by their paramount priests. The renowned paramount priest was Barbushe and he was a grandson of Kano who lived around Dala where the celebrated shrine of the people was located”. Ado-Kurawa maintains that “...the people deified spirits, just like the Maguzawa, who are still found in some areas

of Kano. They depended on hunting and gathering. Barbushe was a great hunter and he established the Tsunburbura cult, which remained the divine attention of the community until the dawn of Islam”. The author concludes that “on annual basis, Barbushe chaired over a ritual at a shrine during which, the spirits informed him of the happenings of the subsequent year and beyond”.

Bello (undated) argues that “ample evidence refutes the idea that Bagauda was the founder of Kano. For instance, there existed late Stone Age and Iron-Age civilizations as exemplified by rock paintings at Birnin- Kudu and the archeological evidence of iron- working around Dala Hill dated about 700 A.D”. Bello continues that “the most significant aspect of this era is the phenomenon of giant – hunters symbolized by Dala, who was said to be dwelling around Dutsen- Dala. The outstanding figure of this epoch was Barbushe. There existed eleven great chiefs who seemed to have been occupational and communal chiefs”. The author concludes that “Gijigiji was the head of black-smiths and Maguji the head of miners amongst others. Some of the communal chiefs were Danbutuniya, who was said to be the head of Kurmawa and Maguji, the head of Maguzawa”.

Bello further argues that, “there were several settlements around Dala during this period. Some of these settlements have been identified as Gazarawa, Fangon-Daura, Dunduzawa, Shariya, SHEME, Ganden–Giji and Tokarawa”. Bello also writes that the Kano Chronicle, a richly detailed manuscript compiled in the eighteenth and nineteenth century A.D, states that, “Barbushe succeeded his forefathers in the knowledge of the lore of Dala, for he was skilled in the various pagan rites”.

In effect, Olofin (1987) in Salisu (2006) reveals that, “a thermoluminescent dating of some man-made relics conducted at United Kingdom for Bayero University’s History department suggests that man was actively engaged in iron smelting culture in

Kano, at about 329-389 A.D. So conclusively, people must have been there for more than thousand years, to develop such skills of iron smelting”. This is to say that the historical facts of how Kano originated are quite abundant.

Similarly, the author notes that “agriculture is the dominant source of livelihood of the people of Kano, based on its geographical location and features. Larger inhabitants of perhaps sixty-percent of the people are agriculturalists, cultivating lots of crops such as millet, guinea corn, maize, cassava and groundnut, to mention but a few”. Salisu concludes that “...besides that, people are occupationally classified as hunters, fishermen, butchers, dyers, weavers, builders, wood workers, black smith, tanners, leather workers, and traders of various kinds, apart from being farmers”.

Olofin (1987) in Salisu (2006) also reveals that “the availability of different raw materials within Kano has brought the emergence and dominance of specialized cottage industries ranging from smiting, which includes extensive use of iron ore for the production of farming implements”. He writes that, “others include household utensils, women ornaments, dyeing of clothes to different colours, tanning and leather works through the processed animal hides and skin, weaving, pottery and embroidery”.

From the foregoing, it is evidently clear that, all the versions on the early settlement of Kano, attest to migration and establishment of settlement at the foot of some hills, particularly Dala hill. It was established that, a group of iron smelters and blacksmiths, known as the Abagayawa settled around Dala hill under their leader Gaya, in search of iron ore. It was also established that the arrival of hunters, who inhabited the area, mostly residing around the hills, under their leader, a giant ancestor named Barbushe, gave birth to the early settlers of Kano. Kano thus, began as a communal settlement under a head. It later developed to hamlet, village and perhaps, with the coming of Bagauda the first dynasty was established, around the Dala area.

The Hausa<sup>14</sup> Muslim artistic features are displayed either in building motifs, engineered products<sup>15</sup> which are the outcome of craft skills, or in other motifs on clothes. The State (Kano) under study has a homogenous culture, in spite of the different ethnic groups and races<sup>16</sup> that settled within it. The various migratory trends of peoples from far and near have brought about the incursion of various skills, crafts<sup>17</sup>, wealth and wisdom, which directly or indirectly have had bearing on the prosperity and ways of life of the people.

Thus, Hausa art forms are essentially geometric patterns and lattices, reproduced on a variety of media, from calabashes, gourds, textiles, metals, potteries, and buildings. Others<sup>18</sup> include the instrumental art-forms; the court praise singers' art-forms; music and dance art-forms and folk comedies. Some amount of impetus has therefore, been gained by assimilating other traditions/culture into the Hausa ways of life. One of such can be attributed to the Islamic practices of the Hausa, who are mostly Muslims and more inclined to Islamic practices, art practices inclusive. By and large, the development and activities of Muslim scholars, particularly in the northern part of the country, brought forth a wide range of symbolic expressions. One of such expressions is calligraphy, derived from *Qur'anic* scripts, which serve as the source of inspiration for decorative objects.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the northern part of Nigeria, several people in the society are usually carried away by the artistry of the calligrapher, who embellishes the mosques, to the extent that the *Ummah* contemplate the innate talent of the calligrapher. For instance, Baba Nasidi of Fagge quarters, acknowledged the awesomeness of the embellishment in the Friday mosques at Fagge, Kano. In a chat with Mallam Kamal, it was obvious that, the embellishment meant nothing to him, other than its manifest beauty. There are several

others, like Baba Nasidi, who are ignorant of the abundant aesthetic qualities of such embellishment. Their comprehension and appreciation of such art works, are focused only on the creativity of its makers.

There is much written history also about arts and craft in Kano. For instance, there is information and written records on traditional architecture, wall decoration, traditional pottery, leather work, weaving and embroidery, to mention a few. It is therefore, probable that previous researchers, have overlooked mosque embellishment in both the interior and exterior parts, due to similar mind set, like that of Baba Nasidi. In view of this, therefore, the problem of this study is the need, for a written document/in-dept study on the Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano. Hence the intent and focus of this study.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to investigate the aesthetic embellishment inherent in the Arabic calligraphy in Kano mosques with a view to highlighting its environmental influence on mosque design culture, while the objectives are to:

- i. trace the development of Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano.
- ii. examine the presence of this art work in the mosques within the context of aesthetics
- iii. identify the artists commissioned to execute the embellishment
- iv. describe in detail and document the artworks.
- v. Identify and discuss the Arabic styles employed in the calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano.

## **Justification of the Study**

At present, due to modernity<sup>19</sup> and the tide of technological advancement, traditional mosques in Kano are beginning to give way to modern structures. These traditional mosques bear Arabic calligraphic embellishment both in relief and/or mural. However, they are being demolished and replaced with modern structures. Similarly, during renovation of the mosques (modern inclusive), the Arabic calligraphic inscriptions<sup>20</sup> and designs are smeared<sup>21</sup> with paint, making the mosques bare and devoid of their former beauty. Arabic calligraphic embellishment on modern mosques, especially on the exterior walls, fades away due to harsh weather or technique of application. Again, some of such calligraphic embellishments produce in relief forms, are in different states of dilapidation<sup>22</sup> which, if not documented, will phase out from existence.

The usage of calligraphic inscription for embellishment purpose in mosques is partly due to the fact that, Arabic calligraphy has been an indispensable art form in the Islamic religion. In view of its role in recording the words of *Allah*, Arabic calligraphy is considered as one of the important aspects of Islamic arts. Nearly all Islamic buildings especially mosques, have some types of surface inscription in stone, stucco, marble, mosaic and, or painting. The inscription might be a verse from the *Qur'an*, lines of poetry or names and dates. An inscription might be contained in a single panel. Sometimes single words such as *Allah* or Muhammad (P.B.U.H) are repeated and arranged into patterns over the entire surface of the walls. In view of this development therefore, the need for a detail study and documentation<sup>23</sup> in the context of Islamic art and documentation of such inscription for study and analysis, is necessary.

## **Significance of the Study**

The study will educate and broaden the minds of non-Arab speaking Muslims, in appreciating the artistry of Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano. The study will add to the body of knowledge on Arabic calligraphic studies and serve as additional literature in art history. The study is also significant, in that it will motivate artists to learn about Arabic calligraphic embellishment, the end result of which may lead them to be self-reliance<sup>24</sup>

## **Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study is the eight Local Government Areas that constitute Kano metropolis. The reason for selecting the metropolis is not far fetched; there is a large number of mosques in these areas. Nassarawa, Fagge, Tarauni, Gwale, Dala, Kumbotso, Ungogo and Municipal Local Government Areas constitute the metropolis. Owing to the numerous mosques in Kano, the scope is delimited to Friday mosques, within the metropolis. The choice of Friday mosques is because they are monumental in terms of variety, sizes and also display of elaborate embellishment and architectural design.

## **Limitation of the Study**

Initially, the researcher wanted to examine the religious function of the Arabic calligraphic embellishment, but because of the religious sensitivity<sup>25</sup> of it, the study is limited to the aesthetic aspect. Similarly, some Mallams who were consulted during pilot and field work, who were also the custodians of specific mosques, would not discuss the embellishment with the researcher. Rather, they referred the researcher to other Mallams who they believed would give strict religious interpretation of such. The research work was also limited to some selected Friday mosques, because not all the Friday mosques in Kano metropolis are embellished with Arabic calligraphic

inscription. This is as a result of the varied interest and views held by different tradition on Islam.

Furthermore, some of the Friday mosques visited during fieldwork were usually under lock and key, unlike what was obtainable before. On further inquiry; it was revealed that since the issue of Boko Haram insurgency in Kano, strict security measures have been taken, to ensure maximum security. The mosques are only open at prayer time from *Zuhr* (12.30 pm- 2.00pm) unlike before, that people (especially hawkers) do take siesta at the mosques, in the afternoon.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In other to articulate the conceptual frame work for this study, it is imperative to put into cognizance relevant views of some scholars which are important foundation in creating a conceptual frame for this work. According to George (1971), “aesthetic is the study of values in the realm of beauty. Aesthetic values are usually difficult to assess because they are likely to be personal and subjective. A particular work of art evokes varying responses from different people”. Dakyes (2009) supports this view and states that, “aesthetics is not easy to understand, it is complex to be understood. It is however, seen as the theory of having the ability of feeling and to express sensation, it is equally a theory of beauty”. In addition to this, Ada (2013) says that, the concept of aesthetics can refer to “the sense as appreciation of beauty in any aspect of artist’s work”. The author also argues that, “aesthetics is a difficult concept to be understood and appreciated by many individuals, yet aesthetic cannot be ignored in the field of appreciation of art works”. The position of Preble, Preble and Frank (2002) on aesthetics is that, “it refers awareness of beauty or to that quality in a work of art or other mandate or natural form which evokes a sense of elevated awareness in the viewer”.

In her study on ‘Beauty and Islam: Aesthetic in Islamic Art and Architecture’, Gonzalez (2001) collaborates the preceding view and informs that, “the aesthetic language implemented in Arabic calligraphic works remains difficult to grasp while considering their relationship with the visual media”. The author further informs that “in the Alhambra for example, the medium itself constitutes a distinct aesthetic entity with which the decorative writings maintains a meaning-specific link, based on communication of semantic properties of both the textual and the visual significance of the work of art”. Gonzalez also states that, “aesthetics is the study of texts through which one defines the concept of beauty and the doctrine of the creation of art, and the direct observation of artistic forms as meaningful things and the experience they induce”.

In line with the above views, Ford (2009) concurs that “aesthetic is the philosophical branch of inquiry concerned with beauty, art and perception”. The author maintains that “in a more general sense, aesthetics as a philosophy refers to the study of sensory values. This means the judgment or evaluation by the senses and through time has come to refer to critical or philosophical thought about art, culture and /or nature. ” Ford concludes that, “from its philosophical roots in ancient Greece, where thinkers like Socrates and Plato considered the inherent meaning and beauty of things, aesthetics is also used to refer to the critique of art and design”. The term aesthetics, according to Mark (2009), “was coined in the early eighteenth century A.D by a German Philosopher named Alexander Boumagarten. He derived the word from the Greek word for perception, and he used it to name what he considered to be a field of knowledge. The knowledge gained by sensory, experience combined with feelings”. Mark further argues that “like art, aesthetics existed long before now. Just like cultures around the world and across time, have created what is now call art, so they have thought about

nature and purpose of their creations and focused on certain words for evaluating and appreciating them”

Further conceptual framework, which is indispensable in this study is that of Lamei, Abd-El-Alim and Zeinhum (1996), which seeks to address the concept from Islamic point of view, and argue that “Islam encourages the Muslim *Ummah* to adorn and embellish structures on the condition that this should be done in a simple way, provided the embellishment is not lavishly done”. The authors also state that “Islam urged humans to look and contemplate the aesthetic feature of the universe thus ...have they not observed the sky above them, how We have constructed and beautified it and how there are no rifts therein” (*Qur'an*, Chapter 50: Verse 6). The authors further state that “the *Qur'an* also wakes (up) in humans the ability to recognize the aesthetic values entrusted by the Creator in the universe through numerous verses” (Chapter 16: Verse 8, 13, 14 and Chapter 53, Verses 27-28).

Lamei, et-al (1996) concludes that “the Holy *Qur'an* has been a source of inspiration and awakening of human’s perception through recognizing the styles of form such as diversity and variety of colour, material, texture and shape of the surroundings... also in accordance with unity and symmetry”. ‘Have thou not seen that *Allah* causeth water to fall from the sky, We produce therewith fruit of diverse hues, and among the hills are streaks white and red, of diverse hues and others raven-black, and of men and beasts and cattle, in like manner, diverse hues.’ (Surah 35-Verse 27-28).

From the preceding concepts on aesthetics, it is clear that many other views of aesthetic works exist. In other words, the concepts on aesthetic over the years, has metamorphosed into different perspective. The perception on aesthetics varies, and it is subjective differing between people and culture. For instance, Cheryl (2003) in Ada (2013) “looked at aesthetics in the direction of dress fashion of the eight Century A.D

styles worn by people in Europe as aesthetically built. Aesthetics can also be viewed as production with beauty of art and the understanding of beautiful things’. Two of the examples the author gave, include: “landscape made in artistic way, and beautiful scene to look at, the next example he gave, was colour combination”.

It is in that sense that this study relied on the conceptual articulation of George, (1971), Dakyes (2009), Ada (2013) and Lamei et-al (1996) on aesthetic. The first three are used in describing the aesthetics of the art work, for instance, colours used, repeat patterns, shape of the entire work and form displayed. In other words, the content of the art work is discussed. The last author’s view discussed and interpreted the religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy, for instance, benedictory praise, pious names, attributes of *Allah*, prayer and quotations from Holy *Qur’an* and *Hadith*. Lastly, the conceptual framework of this study was inspired, adopted and analyzed according to the *Hadith* that states: “*Allahu Jamaal Yuhibuul Jamaal*”, meaning “*Allah the Utmost Beauty loves Beauty*”

## **Definition of Terms**

**Rani**, a Hausa word which means hot and dry season.

**Damina**, a Hausa word which means warm and wet season.

**Kaka**, it is also a Hausa word that has dual meaning: first, it means a word used to refer to grandmother. Secondly, it is used within the context of this study to mean warm and dry seasons.

**Bazara**, another Hausa word for cool and dry season

**Maguzawa**, a term used by the Hausa to designate all Hausa-speaking non-Muslims.

**Wangarawa**, a collection of ethnic groups from Mali namely Bambuk, Baure, Sieka, Malinke, Mande and Soninke.

**Tsunburbura**, a spirit that is worshiped by Barbushe

**Ummah**, A people, a community or a nation, in particular the nation of Islam which is the equivalent of before the days of modern Western –style nationalism

**Umayyad**, this is the first dynasty of Islam which began with the reign of Mu'awiyah in 41/661 and ended with that of Marwan II in 132/750. The family name is that of a clan descended from the Umayyah of the Quraysh

**Mihrab**, A niche in the wall of a mosque to indicate the Qibla, the direction of Mecca towards which all Muslims turn in prayer. It also provides a reflecting surface so that the voice of the Imam is clearly heard by those behind the minbar.

**Minbar** also written and pronounced mimbar. It is a pulpit in a mosque used by the Imam for preaching the Friday sermon (Kutbah). It is actually a movable staircase. A speaker's podium has come into use in some places instead of the minbah.

**Ibn** Arabic word for son, hence son of Tulun

**Ka'abah** A large cube stone structure, covered with a black cloth, which stands in the center of the Grand mosque of Mecca. Neither the stone nor the Ka'abah are objects of worship, but they represent a sanctuary consecrated to Allah and it is towards the Ka'abah that Muslims orient themselves in prayer, thus the Ka'abah is a spiritual center, a support for the concentration of consciousness upon the Divine Presence.

**Qur'an** the Holy Book of Muslims is also spelt Koran al-Qur'an (the reading) or (the recitation). It is also known as al- kitab (the Book), adh-dhikr (the remembrance). In formal speech it is called al-Qur'an al-Kareem (the Noble Koran) or al-Qur'an al-majid (the Glorious Koran).

**Hadith**, speech, report, account specifically traditions relating to the deeds and sayings of the Prophet as recounted by his companions.

**Abbasids** the second dynasty of Islamic Empire which succeeded the Umayyad in 132/749

**Fatimids** the Fatimid's were the Isma'ilis, direct descendants of the early Shi'ites from whom the Twelve – Imam Shi'ites are an off shoot.

**Ottomans**, also called Osmanlis, they were the clan of the Ghuzz (Oghuz) branch of Turks, descended from a chieftain of the thirteenth century A.D called Ertoghrul, whose son Uthman ( alternate spellings are Othman, Osman and Usman) founded a principality in Asia Minor. The clan controlled Western Anatolia.

**Sahn** (courtyard)

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reviewed relevant views, expressed by different authorities, to this research. The study benefits from the review of several related works, which include information found in the *Qur'an*, *hadiths*, canonical books, theses, dissertations, reports, newspapers, and the internet,<sup>26</sup> where vital information were accessed, so as to establish a foundation on the topic under study. The reviews specifically focus on the under listed sub- headings:

- I. Historical Evolution and Development of Arabic Calligraphy.
- II. The Arrival and Spread of Islam in Africa.
- III. Mosque Embellishment.
- IV. Arabic Script.
- V. Early Arabic Calligraphers.
- VI. Types of Calligraphy.
- VII. Calligraphic Materials

#### **Historical Evolution and Development of Arabic Calligraphy**

The term calligraphy, according to Encarta (2009) “is derived from Greek *kalligraphia*, meaning ‘beautiful writing’, and applied to individual letters as well as to entire documents; it also refers to an aesthetic branch of paleography”. In a related study, Nasruddin (2004) reveals that, “the art of calligraphy, as it is known presently, finds its origin in cave paintings. In the days when communication was a series of grunts, the written word was a mere pictorial representation of significant events in a caveman’s life”. Here, the author also admits that “as humans developed the art of drawing, pictures became quite highly developed and reached heights, under the

direction of the Egyptians. About 3300 BC, the Egyptians created the highly stylized hieroglyphics for which, they are so well known. These symbols were incised inside tombs or painted with brushes across papyrus paper”

While discussing about the origin of calligraphy, Zakariya (2002) states that, “one cannot precisely ascertain or described how the early writing looks like, but the earliest written forms can only be guessed. Inscriptions on stone suggested both unconnected and connected letter alphabets were in use. The connected letter alphabet is recognizable as the true Arabic alphabet”. Zakariya continues that “it was on record and established that fewer people in the Prophet Muhammad’s (P.B.U.H) lifetime knew how to read and write. He also had scribes, to write for him, as he was unlettered”. There is no doubt, from Zakariya’s statement that the early writing and its physical features is uncertain, hence its speculation. Indeed, from the remains of finds of Arabic letters, especially the formulated writing with dots indicates the correct alphabets which helps shed more light on this study.

Welch (1979) reports that “the *Qur’anic* revelation came to a halt when Prophet Muhammad died in 632 A.D. The content of the Holy *Qur’an* was passed from lip to lip by *huffaz* (those who memorized and recited the content of the *Qur’an by heart*)”. Unfortunately, during the war that ensued at that time, the author reveals that “many of the *huffaz* were killed in the battle that followed the death of the Prophet... Umar *ibn al-khatab*, one of the disciples of the Prophet, urged the Caliph Abubakar to put the Holy *Qur’an* in writing”. In view of the urge by Umar *ibn-alkhatab* to articulate the Holy *Qur’an* in written form, Welch further states that, “Zaid *ibn Thabit*, who served as a secretary for the Prophet, was assigned to compile and collate the revelations into a book. The first versions of the *Qur’an* were written in the script of *Makki* and *Madani*, named after the city of *Makki* for *Makkah* and *Madani* for *Madina*”. By and large, the

committing of oral *Qur'an* to writing was informed by the death of those who memorized it. From the little that is known, picture images of a practical, old fashioned writing system that was available to the scribes was the cursive, 'soft', produced with a blunt pen tip. Just possibly another version existed for very particular use, as hard, 'dry' script which would have been written with a chisel-edged pen on prepared animal skin (parchment or vellum). According to Siddiqua (2011), "calligraphy, known as 'khatt' in Arabic, is an outstanding example of such blending of form. From the grandest of mosques with their expertly carved stuccos to the simplest of mural mosques with few *Qur'anic* verses painted on their walls". The author upholds that "one can see the strong influence of *Qur'anic* calligraphy that has attached itself to the expression of Islamic art. *Qur'anic* texts are selected for inscriptions in mosques, but quotations from the *Hadith* and other pious phrases are also found".

David (1989) concurs that "the history of Arabic calligraphy began in the seventh century A.D. in a script from that of the Nabataeans, a Hellenized Arabic-speaking people from west of River Jordan, the builders of Petra in Jordan and Madain Salih in Saudi Arabia". The author maintains that, "these ethnic groups (the Nabataeans) were producing rock inscriptions, in an alphabet, recognizable as the one which would later be used to copy the first *Qur'anic* text the early scripts in which the *Qur'an* was written were bold, simple and sometimes rough". Here, the author perceived that "initially, they lacked the short-vowel indications, so that a reader had to rely on context to know which vowel to insert, in a given syllable". David concludes that "the scripts were also without the system dots, placed above or below certain characters, that distinguish *s* and *sh*, for example or *t* from *b*, and so on. Again, only context could guide the reader in distinguishing certain similar letters from each other".

Waterman (2009) position on the preceding is that “Arabic calligraphy flourished under many Arab dynasties. During the time of the Mamluks, decorative art really took off. Everyday objects began sporting calligraphic designs, thereby increasing the need for experienced Arabic calligraphers. The art form itself was no reaching a larger audience and thus experiencing a deeper appreciation”. The author further posits that “during the Timurid dynasty in fourteenth century Persia, an emphasis was placed on written materials. As to be expected, calligraphy’s importance was emphasized during this time; in the following reign of the Safavids, *Ta’liq* and *Nasta’liq* (two Persian scripts) were developed and used extensively”. Waterman maintains that “coinciding with the Safavids, the Mughals in India built the world-renown Taj Mahal. This massive mausoleum displays cursive style *Qur’anic* sayings throughout the exterior and interior of the building. The Ottoman dynasty (1444-1923) is where we see a huge resurgence in Arabic calligraphy”. The author concludes that “during this time, many new styles develop including *Tughra* and *Diwani*. *Jali Diwani*, a highly intricate style of calligraphy that is still used today in royal circles, was born during the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, during this time period, Arabic calligraphy was considered paramount”.

Undoubtedly, the *Qur’an*, the holy book of Muslims, was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) in the Arabic language and later written down in the Arabic writing. The spread of the religion facilitated the spread of the writing throughout the Muslim world. Perhaps, the Arabs, before Islam, had hardly any art except poetry, which had been developed to full maturity, and in which they took great pride. As with other forms of culture, the Muslim Arabs borrowed their art from Persia and Byzantium. Whatever elements the Arabic Arabs borrowed however, they were Islamized in a manner that fused them into a homogenous spiritual-aesthetic complex. Arabic became a basic component of Islamic culture because it was the ‘language’ of the *Qur’an*.

Arguably, Arabic calligraphy was considered to be the highest art form in Islam for many reasons: Muslims believe that *Allah* used the Arabic language to reveal the *Qur'an* to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and for that reason, when the *Qur'an* is copied the writing should be as beautiful as possible.

According to Khaleelullah (2006), “the first movement to reform the Arabic language and writing system came during the *Umayyad* era. For instance, the *Umayyad* period was a transitional stage for Arabic scripts. Writing in *Kufic* scripts became a profession. In *Abbasid*<sup>27</sup> period, Arabic scripts developed and flourished”. Khaleelullah maintains that “Abu Ali Ibn Muglah, a Vizier to three *Abbasid* caliphs, developed the first script to abide by strict proportional rules without using geometrical instruments. During the *Fatimid*<sup>28</sup> period, Arabic calligraphy took a new facet”. The author adds that, “*Fatimid* caliphs employed calligraphy and scripts in the decoration and adornment of their palaces, mosques and thrones. The *Fatimid* period was known for the founding of a profession for teaching scripts and the establishment of calligraphy schools.” Khaleelullah concludes that “during the *Ottoman*<sup>29</sup> period, and following the Ottoman occupation of Egypt, the Turks, who had been writing with Greek and Urdu letters, adopted and excelled at the *Naskh* script. As Islam expanded into Asia, Arabic letters and scripts were adopted by Russians, Afghans and Moguls”.

Yasin (1978) in Saliu (2013) writes that, “the primacy of the word in Islam is reflected in the virtually universal application of Arabic calligraphy. Writing is given pride of place on all kinds of objects: of everyday use as well as entire wall surfaces, mosque furniture, the interiors and exteriors of mosques, tombs and *Ka'abah*”. Like the icons of most other faiths, script also represents power. Its preeminent use is the writing of divine message of the *Qur'an*.

In a related study, Khalid (2000) avers that, “Arabic calligraphy is a primary form of art for Islamic visual expression and creativity. Throughout the vast geography of Islamic world, Arabic calligraphy is a symbol representing unity, beauty and power. The aesthetic principles of Arabic calligraphy are a reflection of the cultural values of the Muslim world”.

### **The Arrival and Spread of Islam in Africa**

The arrival and spread of Islam in Africa was probably as a result of the discovery of natural resource (gold) by the Arabs. Peter (1978) informs that, “Abu-bakr (Abubakar), the first Caliph (632-634A.D) and successor to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) completed the task of bringing together Arabia, under Islamic rule and pushed forward into Palestine. Umar, his successor and Caliph from (634-644A.D) advanced as far as Damascus in Syria, winning victory over the Roman armies at the battle of Yarmuk in 636 A.D”. Further statement by the author shows that “the victory opened the way for the Islamists to advance east, to Mesopotamia and west, to Asia Minor. By 642-3 A.D Iran (Persia) to the east, had been overrun, and to the west, Alexandria in Egypt was occupied”. The author further reveals that “from Egypt the Muslim forces marched on into the one time Greek and then Roman North Africa province of Cyrenaica, reaching as far as Tripoli before their progress was held up by the Berber resistance”. Peter (1978) concludes that,

With the occupation of the important sea port and dockyards of Alexandria in 642 A.D, Islam, had the potential for becoming a formidable force at sea. The process began of building up of a great naval and military base at Kairouan, as well as being an important centre of Islamic learning and missionary activity. North Africa was an integral part of the classical Mediterranean civilization. From the mid seventh century A.D Muslim armies pushed westward from Egypt across the region called Ifriqiya by the Romans and the Maghreb.

According to Larkin (1974), “Islam arrived and spread to north and east Africa and to the Sudan, partly by conquest and partly by trade. It established itself in these

areas in two main waves, the first in the seventh century A.D and the second in the eleventh”. This wave of change, according to him “cut off North Africa from the Mediterranean civilizations and replaced both Christianity and paganism with Islam as a new religion”. Again, he writes that “big cities such as Rabat, Fez, Tunis, Tripoli, and Tangiers in the north, and Mogadishu, Brava, Mombasa and Mozambique in the east, arouse in the new style of architecture of domes, minarets, and Moorish shaped arches of mosques”.

Larkin (1974) further stresses that, “the Arabs were great seekers after knowledge, they were also avid traders. They brought to Africa their skill in trade, crafts, money-changing, banking and writing”. Otite and Ogiunwo (1994) corroborate this point when they report, that “Islam reached West Africa as early as the eleventh century A.D, but was not well established until after 1800”. Agreeing with the above, Sharman (1975) adds that, “in the seventh century A.D, some Muslims had already settled in Morocco, in North Africa. They spread the teaching of the Prophet, and traded with the neighbouring ethnic groups”. The Muslims did not only settled there, From Morocco, the author continues “the Muslims marched south, through the deserts with their camels, until they came to a town called Sijilmasa, where they traded their copper, cotton, tools, swords and their strong Arab horses for gold, ivory and slaves”.

In addition, Sharman (1975) reveals that “one of the greatest rulers of Mali, Mansa Musa, went on pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 A.D. On his return, Mansa Musa brought with him many Arab scholars and artisans”. Arguably, when the Arab scholars and artisans arrived in Mali with their help, Mansa Musa attempted a systematic conversion to Islam of the sub-Saharan population, built splendid mosques and palaces of brick (instead of the usual clay) of his cities of Timbuktu and Jenne. These two towns

became centres of learning in the same way as Baghdad, Cordova and Cairo had become.

Although Sharman (1975) gives a vivid historical account of the impact created by Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca, the author does not mention whether the palaces and mosques walls were embellished or not with Arabic calligraphic ornamentations. It was only revealed that the new structures bore Asian architectural flavour, and that Musa was instrumental to spreading Islamic law and civilization which subsequently spread to other parts of Africa. Similarly Larkin (1974), as well as, Otite and Ogionwo (1994) did not say anything on Arabic calligraphic embellishment of either houses or mosques in their accounts.

Peter (1978) opines that, "a number of accounts show that West Africa's first contacts with Islam, were made in the seventeenth century A.D, but it is more likely that West Africa's first contacts with Islam were made in the eighth century A.D" According to his account, "during the first half of the eighth century A.D, Islam began to walk its way across the trans-Saharan trade routes from North to West Africa". Further accounts, according to the author, show that "not long after the Arab conquerors had overrun North Africa, the *Umayyad* rulers there began organizing military expedition and slave raids into the southern regions of Morocco and as far as the boundaries of Ancient Ghana". Peter maintains that "one of such raiding expeditions seems to have been organized between 734 and 740 A.D, by the then Governor of Ifriqiya, Ubayd Al-Habib, and placed under the point command of his son, Ismail, and General Habib Abi Ubayd".

The end result of his expedition according to Sharman, (1975) "did not only return to North Africa with slaves, but also brought back large quantities of gold. It was this gold supplies that prompted the Umayyad Governor to find ways and means of

acquiring continuous supplies of this precious metal from West Africa”. Sharman writes that, “the way to do this, the Governor decided, was to develop and make more efficient and secure the trans-Saharan trade leading from southern Morocco across the Western Sahara to West Africa”.

According to Peter (1978) “the next stage in the process which led to the early contacts between West Africa and Islam came as Muslim merchants, the majority of whom were of Berber stock, stepped up their interest in trade with West Africa, attracted by the prospect of obtaining plentiful supplies of gold”. Peter also upholds that “prior to the eighth century A.D, North African merchants had been involved in trade with the peoples of the Sahara and with West Africans, from Ghana and Kanem-Borno regions”. Peter also observes that “the main interest of North Africans at that time was in obtaining slaves and foodstuffs in return for cloth, salt and horses”. Interestingly, Peter exposes further that “thus North African Muslim merchants came in ever increasing numbers to settle in the commercial centres along or at the termini of the trans-Saharan trade routes. During the eighth century A.D, therefore, the situation developed in which the Salhaja of the Western Sahara came increasingly under the influence of Islam”. According to Peter, “it is probable that by the tenth century A.D, some of the latter had themselves become Muslims. Moreover, West African merchants were also in contact with both Salhaja and the Muslims merchants from North Africa”. The author concludes that, “by the late ninth century A.D, some of the latter had to establish Muslim quarters in the capitals of the West African states of Gao, Ancient Ghana and Takrur”

It is clear, from Peter’s account that the emphasis was on trade, hence no attempt at discussing whether these trade movements, accounted also, for the embellishment of mosques around these areas. Nevertheless, one can deduce that, because of the holistic

nature of Islam as a way of life, it is possible that among the trade merchants, some might have sponsored the embellishment of the mosques, to upgrade them to standards of those they were familiar with. Consequently, such mosques have helped in the spread of the culture and its environmental influence in several places, Kano inclusive.

Levtzion (2000) in Schulze (2010) also reiterate this claim when she argues that, “Islam as a religion was introduced to present day northern Nigeria in the thirteenth century A.D by the Wangarawa Muslim traders and clerics from the kingdom of Mali. Subsequently, the rulers of the Hausa states converted to Islam, the first being the king of Kano, Yaji dan Tsamiya (1349-85)”. Gumi (2013) makes similar point on the arrival of Islam in northern Nigeria, when he adds that “Islam came to Kano through Maghreb, Libya, Agades and finally Niger”. Abdu, (2010) argues that “individual traditional scholars have at various preaching or public lecture sessions, expressed opinion as regards the period in which Islam was first noticed in Kano”. Abdu adds that “a number of traditional scholars (*Ulamas*) believe that Islam was present in Kano as it was in the Arab land during the period of the first *Sahabah* (Caliphs) of the Prophet”.

Usman, (2005) argues that, “available evidence shows that Islam was introduced into Kano during the reign of Usman Zamna Gawa (1343-1349) prior to the arrival of Wangarawa scholars and traders. The tradition might be regarded as instructive, since the name “Usman” is the very first Muslim name that appeared in the list of Kano Kings”. It can be argued that, Islam was further reinforced in Kano during the reign of Sarki Yaji<sup>32</sup> whose real name was given as Ali.

There is no known date ascribed to the origin or usage of Arabic calligraphy for any purpose in Kano. However, it is established that, the usage has been as a result of the socio-cultural, political and religious interaction that existed between the Hausa communities of Kano in particular and northern Nigeria at large and the Arab traders

along the trans-Saharan route. Thus, Islamic activities commenced in those areas, as people, particularly children, were sent to *Qur'anic* teacher(s) (*Mallam/Mallamai*) to learn how to read and write the *Qur'an*. *Kolo (wa) or almajiri (rai)* (young learner/s) usually go out to beg for food, after school hours, or engage himself/themselves in menial work, while the *titibiri or gardi/gardawa* (adult learner/s) engage themselves on various crafts in order to sustain themselves. A point worth mentioning here is that before the arrival of Islam in Africa, particularly West Africa and finally Kano, the people of Kano were already engaged in various kinds of art practices. These include calabash decoration, scarification, and potting, smiting, leatherwork and tanning, as well as house building. Apparently, art works, particularly their buildings were produced without any significant influence.

In this regard therefore, it will be safe to infer here that, the embellishment of walls of mosques with Arabic inscriptions and designs in Kano, in the fourteenth century A.D, was due to the activities of Muslim clerics from Mali and Lebanon. The trend of embellishing structures later extended to domestic shelters (living houses) due to Islamic influence. From various studies on wall decoration in the northern part of Nigeria (Green 1963, Lawal 1963, Fatuyi 1972 and 1980, Ogar 1988, Sani 1995 and Rekot, 1998), for example, it is evident that traditional architecture is highly embellished with striking wall decoration, to the extent that, the decoration has formed a permanent feature of the Hausa architecture. The researcher notes that, in the northern part of Nigeria (some parts of West Africa inclusive), it was Muslim scholars who initiated the idea of using Arabic calligraphic writing, to embellish their houses. Halilu (2001) in Dawani (2002) submits that “Muslim scholars also applied or utilized some parts of *Qur'anic* verses and attributes of *Allah* to embellish facades of houses”.

This practice subsequently paved the way for the development of an artistic representation of *Qur'anic* verses and forms of symbolic signs on walls. Not only the Islamic teachers, rich merchants and indigenous people cultivated the habit of embellishing their houses, with such inscription in order to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

From the preceding reviews, it is clear that, Africa was influenced by foreign invasion, particularly from a religious point of view, hence the assimilation of Arabic writing in learning and propagation of Islamic teaching, specifically in Kano. Thus, the employment of Arabic calligraphy as an art form, among the people of Kano became indispensable. This review also exposes that in Kano, it was Muslim scholars who initiated the idea of using Arabic calligraphic writing to embellish the mosques as well as their houses, relying on certain sections of the Holy *Qur'an*, for justification.

### **Mosque Embellishment**

The first example of the use of Arabic calligraphy in Islamic architecture according to Siddiqua (2011) is “the mosaic inscription which winds around the summit of the octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock. It presents an angular script with perfectly calibrated letters, which follow each other on a rigorously horizontal path”. Siddiqua also writes that “the early mosques that were built, were limited to the angular lettering, (*Kufic*), since it was the only style of Arabic script in general use during the early Muslim period”. Siddiqua further sheds light and adds that “later on, with the development of round hands and the definition of calligraphic proportions leading to the sanctification of the classic round scripts in the tenth and eleventh centuries A.D, *Thuluth* became more and more the calligraphic style par excellence for *Qur'anic* inscriptions and epigraphy, particularly in monumental settings”.

It is in the light of this, that Siddiqua says the “angular Kufic with its myriad variations was always retained, but over time it became more and more attractive with the incorporation of foliation, and knotting into the letters”. Siddiqua further says that “Arabic calligraphy has varied forms that are as simple, as possible, with no extraneous embellishment of the writing, to the indescribably ornate”. The author also gave instance of this embellishment thus: “a good early example of utter, stark simplicity is the Great mosque at Sousse, Tunisia (850ad), which has a single unornamented band of *Qur'anic* Arabic in *Kufic* script running around the courtyard”. He goes further to say that “in later times perhaps nowhere has calligraphic starkness been used to such effect as in the Eski Cami, Edirne, where an entire bay is filled by the single word *Allah*. It is as stark and striking - and as modern-looking - as anything one is likely to find”.

Even though Siddiqua provides valid information on the first mosque that bore Arabic calligraphic embellishment, and the subsequent mosques which had similar traits, and mentioned the early style of Arabic calligraphy used. Siddiqua also made an attempt to describe the form of the embellishment in the mosques; however, Siddiqua did not categorically give highlight on the aesthetic significance of the art work in all the mosques he mentioned.

Siddiqua further says that “the Friday mosque in Samarqand is elaborate, which is completely covered inside and out with writing in brickwork and on tiled surfaces”. The author maintains that “another, but very different type of ornate writing can be seen on the interior walls of the Ulu Cami in Bursa (completed in 1400), which are covered with masterful, and sometimes rather playful specimens of Arabic calligraphy, particularly of ‘aynali’ (mirror image) type, which was popular in later centuries”. Saddiqua, (2011) observes that,

The *Qur'an* or any part thereof, in and on a mosque's wall provides the viewer with a message and focus of meditation. It may incidentally be ornamental, but a *Qur'anic* inscription has value in and of itself. Inscriptions are always in some sense appropriate to the locations in which they are found. A good example of agenda in the selection of *Qur'anic* inscriptions is found on the Buland Darwaza, the huge ceremonial gateway into the mosque complex at Fatehpur Sikri built by the Mughal Emperor Akbar c.1575. Carved in low relief, the *Thuluth* inscription consists of Surah 39:73-75, 41:53-54 and 41:30-31. The first section includes phrases like 'and the gates thereof shall be ready set open' and across the top of the gateway is 'hereafter we will show them our signs in the regions of the earth' (41:53) all particularly appropriate for a monumental gateway

Conclusively, the author reveals that “many *mihirabs* contain one of two *Qur'anic* quotations containing the word '*mihrab*', either 3:37 ('whenever Zacharias went into the *mihrab*') or 3; 39 ('while he stood praying in the *mihrab*')”. Additionally “other popular inscriptions for *mihrab* are the *Qur'anic* imperatives to perform prayer, example, 11:114 ('pray regularly morning and evening; and in the former part of the night'), as in the congregational mosque at Bistam, Iran (1302). Tomb mosques often have Surah 36, '*Ya Sin*', which is also recited at funerals”. An example is the Taj Mahal: across the four arches of the main building extends Surah '*Ya Sin*' in its entirety. It is this type of creative Arabic calligraphic embellishments that this study seeks to observe and document, as being practiced in Kano.

While reporting on the interior embellishment of the Holy *Ka'abah*, Muzammil (1998)<sup>33</sup> narrates that “the interior wall of the Holy *Ka'abah* is mounted with beautifully decorated coloured marble”. Muzammil adds that “it is also covered with a pink silk curtain, woven in white, with the testimony ‘There is no god but *Allah*, Muhammad is the messenger of *Allah*’, together with some of the Divine Names of *Allah* in the shape of a zigzag”. Again, the author says that “there are eight marble stones inscribed in the *Thuluth* calligraphic style, and one stone inscribed in the *Kufic* calligraphic style. The *Kufic* plaque has letters made of coloured marble pieces in an inlaid base”. The author maintains that, “on the eastern wall and between the door of the Holy *Ka'abah* and

*Tawbah* door, there is a document from the custodian of the two Holy mosques (may *Allah* protect him) inscribed on a marble plaque, indicating the date of the renovations of the Holy *Ka'abah*". Muzammil concludes that "these plaques are detailed with different Arabic calligraphic designs that are praising *Allah*, revealing His awesomeness or describing His abundant benevolence to humanity".

Agreeing with the above, Muhammad (2004) adds that, "The interior walls of the Holy *Ka'abah* are covered with solid coloured marble bearing attractive Arabic inscriptions and engravings". The author further adds that "there are also green curtains on the walls and roof on which the following is written (*Suratul Al Imran*: Verse 96): 'The first House (of worship) appointed or men was that at *Bakkah (Makkah)* full of blessing and of guidance for all the worlds'. The other one according to Muhammad, is "(*Suratul Bakarah*, Verse 144) written thus: 'We see the turning of thy face (of guidance) to the heavens: now shall We turn thee to a *Qibla* that shall please thee. Turn then thy face in the direction of the sacred mosque: wherever ye are, turn your faces in that direction". Muhammad concludes that "the people of the book know well that is the truth from their Lord, nor is *Allah* unmindful of what they do".

Muhammad (2004) also writes that "the *Qur'anic* verses inscribed on the door of the Holy *Ka'abah* highlights the generous and exalted status of the place. At the same time, the verses convey words of mercy, admonition and encouragement to every person coming to the illustrious door". The author further writes that "the verses also reminds the visitor that he has to the door of One Who is extremely forgiving, compassionate and benevolent, Who showers His mercies on people and from Whose door no one returns empty handed". This is to say, that the verses according to Muhammad "echo the message that this is the place where one can allow one's empty lap, with the

boundless mercies and blessings of the Most Kind and Most Merciful. It bids people to present themselves in this great court to express their needs with humility”.

The employment of Arabic calligraphy as embellishment on Islamic buildings, particularly mosque, according to Abdulwadoud, (2000) “had a definite aesthetic appeal”. The author goes further to state that, “geometric patterns make up one of the three non-figural types of decoration in Islamic art, which include Arabic calligraphy and vegetal patterns. The combinations of the three patterns in an abstract design not only adorn the surface of the monumental Islamic architecture, but also function as the major decorative element”. Thus, this study will reveal whether Abdulwadoud claim, apply to the mosques embellishment done in Kano metropolis.

Similarly, Vildan (2007) explains that, “literary texts are the ways of expressing the architects’ desire to attain immortality of the edifice. In this regard, the art of writing becomes the main significant component of embellishment in Islamic art”. This is to say that many of the Islamic architectural edifices have different forms of literary texts carved either in the inner or outer surfaces. The author further explains that “in Turkey, for instance, each structure carries a certain type of text in accordance with the function and symbolic meaning. For example, the *Qur’anic* verses, which are written in mosques or religious buildings, are carefully selected to match the particular situation”. Vildan maintains that “the words, the texts provide clues about the significance of a particular building and the meaning of that edifice. Such type of inscription is seen in Suleimaniye masjid, which is one of the important, of the immortal *Ottoman* architectural edifices, if not the most important one”. The author further clarifies that “the Dome of Suleimaniye mosque was also inscribed with the verse *Allahu yumsikus samawati wal-ard*, meaning, ‘He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and earth’ in a beautiful Arabic calligraphic manner. Additionally, different inscriptions were placed over each gate of

the mosque”. Vildan claim that “these inscriptions were prepared by the most talented calligraphers and then engraved by engravers and inscribers on stone. *Ayat-tul- Kursi* is inscribed on Sultanic mosque, Turkey. The reason for this is not far-fetched, as the word “*Kursi*” symbolizes *Allah*’s power, strength and knowledge”. The author concludes that “by adding that, pious inscription, which contains passages from the sayings of Prophet Muhammad or those of the four great Caliphs: Abu-Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali, as well as the prayers that are inscribed on the interiors of mosques can be a commemorative one”.

Based on the elaborate explanation given by Vildan on the functions the literary texts serve, one question comes to mind. How does this explanation conform to the other Muslim *Ummah* who doesn’t accept Arabic calligraphy as embellishment in mosques? The answer to this question could probably be given thus: they should overlook such mosque with this embellishment or be silent about it since they have their own view on this art form, therefore carry out their worship in mosque that is devoid of any art form.

Thompson (2008) shares a similar view when he reports that “the importance of Arabic calligraphic embellishment and the form of the mosque are ultimately related to the Islamic faith, and were developed in the early days of the religion. Islamic religion uses art to create an effective environment and to stimulate a sense of worship”. In addition to this, Abdulhamid (2004) states that, “embellishment has been the specialty of the Muslims and that among their ornamental schemes, Arabic calligraphy has claimed their best attention, whether in architecture or in the minor arts of domestic embellishment”. The author further states that “the highly decorative Arabic script was applied to all materials used: stones, plasters, woods, ceramics, glass, textiles, and metals amongst others”.

Lamei, Abd-El-Alim, et-al (1996), cite the example of Arabic calligraphic embellishment, when the authors reveal that “*Al-Hakim* mosque in Egypt, shows the decoration of the window, which bears an Arabic calligraphic inscription. An intertwined leaf-like figure, which bears a beautifully mirrored pattern, plant decorations of inter-twined halves of stylized palm fronds, with simple geometric patterns are also portrayed”. The authors conclude that “this kind of embellishment can also be noticed in Imam Al-Shafe’i mosque. The windows in the left wall are decorated with a red looped band forming circular and rectangular areas”. In a related study, Adams (1999) reveals that “the seventeenth-century A.D Luftullah mosque in Isfahan, Iran shows the skill of Muslim artists in creating shimmering, jewel-like surfaces composed of intricate floral and Arabic calligraphic tile work”. It will therefore, be interesting to investigate, if the ones in Kano share affinity to these ones being described.

Doi (1984) in Dawani (2002) states that “the most interesting example of the Nigerian mosque designs are the mud mosques. Such mud mosques, which display beautiful art forms, are however, being replaced by the modern cement concrete structures”. The statement made by Doi in Dawani as perceived by this study as a good reason for documenting the art works so that the works won’t suffer the same fate. While discussing the Arabic writings on mosque walls, Schwerdtfeger (2007) emphasizes that “Arabic writing on walls of mosques, are indications of, the limitation of, humans and the glory of *Allah* and verses from the *Qur’an*. For instance, words like ‘No one is perfect but *Allah*’ and ‘*Allah* is the best planner’ are common words that are inscribed”. Schwerdtfeger gave a clue on the kind of Arabic writing found on wall of certain mosques; however, he did not specifically discuss the aesthetic aspect of the Arabic calligraphy, or mentioned the styles used thereby creating a yawning gap as far as this study is concerned.

While it is true that some mosques are more aesthetically appealing in the interior, the central focus of Friday mosque in Delhi, India, is on the exterior. The Microsoft Encarta (2008) admits that, “the singular balance of design and intricacy and the beauty of the detailed decorative work, makes it one of the first buildings with such grandeur ever created in India”. It is pertinent at this point to add that, an example of the Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosque exteriors can also be seen on 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Army Barrack central mosque, Sokoto. Similarly, the *Ansarud-deen* Society of Nigeria central mosque, Sokoto bears some Arabic calligraphic inscriptions on the outer walls. Perhaps, this study will reveal similar exterior designs or Arabic calligraphic embellishment in Kano mosques.

There are many ways of embellishing the mosque, Ismail (2010) submit that, “one of them is the written word, applied using Arabic calligraphy. The script is so ornate that the onlooker may even mistake it for abstract designs. Usually the Arabic calligraphy records passages from the *Qur’an*, but examples of quotations from the Hadith and other pious phrases may also be found”. The author concludes that “in effect, the word of the *Qur’an* is the Islamic equivalent to the Christians icon, having value as a visible representation of supernatural reality, even though many of these inscriptions are so ornate, so high to the wall or located in obscure places, that they are actually unreadable”.

Ozolua (2012) adds that “the embellishment of monuments with art works gives such structures soul an identity. Monuments are among the magnificent and emblematic buildings around the world. They are natural treasures that showcase a country to the rest of the world”. Similarly, Williams (1983) recounts Arabic calligraphic embellishment in Egyptian and Iranian mosques, when she states that, “the mosque of Sultan Barquq is also one of many mosques in Egypt built during the *Mamluk*<sup>35</sup> period

(1250- 1517 A.D). All around the top of the *Sahn* runs a band of Arabic inscription, consisting of verses from the *Qur'an*, and ending with the year in which the mosque was completed". Williams further recounts that "a band of inscription running around the swelling of the Dome records its restoration. It is also observed in Friday mosque of Isfahan, Iran that inscription bands are utilized in decorating the mihrab. It is done mainly to record the reign of Shah Tahmasp (reg. 1541- 32) and Shah Abbas II (reg. 1642- 67)". The author maintains that "there is reference to the rule of Uzun Hassan, the ruler of Aq Qoyuniu dynasty, dated from 1475-76 and mentioning the magnificence of the mosque and later restoration of the iwan's ceiling. Two words are dominant in these inscriptions: tamir (to restore) and taz'yin (to decorate)". Williams concludes that, "these inscriptions come from *Qur'anic* passages praising the power of *Allah*, or venerating the names of Shiite imams, and therefore mostly date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries".

In line with this, Tahir (2008) states that, "Wazir Khan's mosque of Lahore, in Pakistan occupies a unique place in typical Mogul architecture on account of its eye catching and absorbing display of Islamic art, particularly Arabic calligraphy, which is not restricted to the interior, but also displayed on the exterior walls as well". Furthermore, Tahir states that, "an interested mind cannot escape, without being touched and wholly absorbed into the eye catching and intricate designs of the mosque. These designs are geometric patterns, symmetrical, and floral shapes. It also contains hexagonal /octagonal stars and curvilinear intertwined decorations". The author concludes that, "the red plastered walls of the mosque bear Arabic calligraphy in fresco, of an excellent durability".

Grabar's (1990), view on the preceding shows that, "the *mihrab* of Isfahan Friday mosque is composed of an external framed arch within which is inscribed a

smaller recessed framed arch, almost half in height and width”. The author describes the embellishment found on this mosque thus: “these two arches, including their frames and their columns, which do not have a structural function, are all ornamented with carvings of Arabic inscriptions and patterns. The most external frame takes the delicate treatment to an extreme”. Grabar maintains that “the inscription band, as it recessed in the wall, spatially curves as if written on a convex surface; the florally-decorated and perforated background make the inscription appear to be floating in the air”.

Moreover, Williams (1983) informs that, “some recent contributions to the study of Islamic architecture indicate that a monument’s iconography and the reading of its inscriptions can provide new perspectives for social or political history, as well as, for the historians. A case in point is the monuments of the *Fatimid* period (358-56/969-1171) in Cairo”. Furthermore Williams observes that,

Over the entrance to the Mashhad of Badr al- jamali is the panel containing the foundation inscription. It begins with two verses from the *Qur’an* chapter 72 verse 18 (The places of worship are for *Allah* (alone), so invoke not, anyone along with *Allah*) and Chapter 9 verse 108(A masjid that was founded upon *Allah*-fearing from the first day is worthier for thee to stand in, therein are men who love to cleanse themselves, and *Allah* loves those who cleanse themselves).

Additionally, Williams (1983) informs that “the main embellishment of the interior is concentrated on a splendid stucco mihrab which dominates the sanctuary and consists primarily of bands of *Qur’anic* inscription”. The author also writes that “on the exterior frieze of the mihrab is another *Qur’anic* inscription, Chapter 24 verse 11 ‘thus who come with the slander are a band of you, do not reckon it evil for you, rather it is good for you’. She concludes that “every man of them shall have the sin that he has taken upon himself the greater part of it; him there awaits a mighty chastisement”.

In a related study, Stone (1977) observes that, “in the name of *Allah* the Compassionate, the Merciful are some of the frequently used words in the Arabic language. The Holy *Qur’an*, the word of *Allah* as revealed to Prophet Muhammad

(P.B.U.H) begins with them, and so does every Surah or chapter”. The author maintains that “Muslims say these words before beginning any undertaking, before eating, opening a book, or pray. Muslims write them at the heads of letters, inscribe them on coins and also print them at the beginning of chapters in books”. Stone states that “the Prophet Muhammad said he who writes Bismillah beautifully obtains innumerable blessings”.

Stone (1977) stress further that, “these words are so important not only to every Arabic speaker, but to Muslims everywhere. That, it is not surprising, that over the centuries, they have come to be written in a special way, Arabic calligraphy”. There are outstanding phrases that are used in embellishing wall of mosques. The author mentions such expressions particularly invoking the name of *Allah* thus: “*Insha Allah*, ‘*Allah* willing’, ‘*Masha Allah*, ‘As *Allah* wills’, *Huwa Allah*, ‘He is *Allah*’, and *Al-hamdulillah*, ‘*Allah* be praised.’ are represented using Arabic calligraphic writing”. Stone says that, “the mosque architecture of Iran and central Asia also gives Arabic calligraphy a new dimension literally. There, architects wrapped vast raised inscriptions many feet high around the domes of mosques, and on the walls at the gates they made what looked like labyrinths, blue, yellow and white tiles”. The author concludes that “these inscriptions might be made up of the name of *Allah*, the name of the Prophet, the *shahada*, or even Surah in the *Qur’an* repeated over again in an infinite elaborate pattern”.

In line with the aforementioned, Flood (2005), states that, “there are two registers of Arabic letters carved in *Naskh* style on a sandstone plaque on the eastern entrance through which one enters Bada’un mosque. It was a sort of praise with Arabic calligraphic inscription, which read thus: ‘Enter in peace safely’. Other registered Arabic letters according to Flood, includes “the magnificent Sultan, the most exalted

shahinshah, the Lord of the neck on the people, the sun of the state and religion, the help of Islam and Muslims, the most just of the kings and sultans, the victorious”. The concluding Arabic letters according to the author reads thus:

The helper of the commander of the faithful, may *Allah* perpetuates his kingdom, in this month of the year 620H (A.D 1223)’. Likewise, the framing epigraphic bands on the kiblah stone panels are inscribed with *Qur’anic* quotations, verse 2, chapter 238 which contains the *Khalimah* ‘Be wakeful of your service of prayer, and the midmost service, and honour *Allah* by standing before Him in devotion.

Moreover, Baroun (2006) opines that, “the Dome of the Rock is in many ways a unique building. The interior embellishment which has been largely maintained in its original state is remarkable. The lower sections of the walls are faced with patterned stone slabs”. The author further notes that, “above that point, the walls are covered with mosaic on gold background, representing a garden. Most of the mosaic embellishment inside the Dome of Rock consist representations of trees, plants and fruits”. Baroun maintains that, “for the first time in Islamic building, the Dome of Rock contains a monumental Arabic inscription in what is known as *Kufic* script running in a band of mosaic above the arcades around the inner ambulatory. The various sections of text all come from the Holy *Qur’an*”. The author further discusses that “a brief quotation describes *Allah* as the Creator, the one God, who has no family. The text describes the Prophet Muhammad as the last of the line, the seal of the Prophets”. Baroun concludes the discourses that “thus the embellishment here served a purpose, by visually imposing the surrounding population, as a magnificent statement of Islam, and the reinforcement of a belief system through its elaborate texts”.

Cyril (2005) agrees with the above position when he adds that, “Arabic calligraphic inscriptions, characteristic of much of Islamic art, majestically dominate the Dome of the Rock. The two hundred and forty yards/meters of inscription famed for their beauty, are in *Kufic* style within, and *Ta’liq* on the outside”.

The interior embellishment of the Great mosque (Damascus), according to Creswell (1950) “resembled that of the Dome of Rock. Its lower area representing a stream of water with mighty fruit-bearing trees up to seven meters high against a golden background growing in its banks”. Creswell adds that “the Great mosque of Damascus is another renowned mosque of the Muslims, which is thought to have had the largest surface area of gold mosaic to be found in any building in the world, covering about 4000 square meters”.

Again, Popadopoulo (1980) in Baroun (2006) emphasizes that, “on a closer look on the walls, it is observed that, these mosaics show a world where no birds perch in the branches of the trees and no fish play in the water of the river”. By implication, therefore, the mosaics were intended to embellish a mosque. It has been pointed out that these mosaics had distinct meaning for the beholder of the time, celebrating the golden age of peace that began with the rule of Islam.

According to Baroun (2006), “India has already been partially conquered by the Arabs in the eight century A.D”. She also writes that “this first contact was maintained and eventually in the late sixteenth century A.D, the larger part of the country came under the rule of Mughal emperors, descendants of the Timurids of Central Asia, and a unified Indian Islamic culture was created”. The author further states that “at the beginning, Islamic art and architectural embellishment was totally dominated by Hindu forms of building materials. Temples were converted into mosques or Hindu buildings are dismembered and stone pillar mosques erected from the ruins” Baroun concludes that “although very little of these early structures and their ornamentation survived, for they were destroyed by Mongols in their invasions of 1241 A.D”.

Perhaps, the world’s most beautiful and beloved structure is the crowning jewel of Indo- Islamic architecture, the Taj Mahal<sup>36</sup>. In this regard Brend (1991) states that

“the Taj Mahal has restrained pieta Dura embellishment that forms lining floral design. Above these beautiful floral patterns are extensive Arabic calligraphic inscriptions in black lettering. Most of the text is short verses from the *Qur’an* emphasizing eschatological themes, particularly the Day of Judgment”. In a related study, Okada and Joshi (1993) write that, “the *Qur’anic* inscription on the southern façade of the main gate gives unequivocal credence to the comparison of the Taj Mahal with the Garden of Paradise, when the appeased souls of the dead find their ultimate refuge”. The authors also maintain that “the Holy *Qur’an* surah Al-Fajr 89:27-30, says: ‘To the righteous soul will be said)’ ‘Oh (thou) soul in (complete) rest and satisfaction!’ ‘Come back thou to thy Lord-well pleased unto Him! ‘Enter thou, then, among My Devotees! ‘Yea, enter thou My Heaven”.

On further description of how the embellishment look like, Okada and Joshi describes that “the sinuous and austere letters in black marble inscribed with heraldic precision on the walls of the mausoleum heighten the whiteness of the marble and undeniably contribute to the ornamental richness and beauty of the edifice”. On further description of the Arabic inscription for embellishment purpose, the authors says that “on a closer look one will observe that there are 22 different *Quranic Surahs* or verses inscribed on the tomb, more than on any other monuments built during the reign of Shah Jahan. Thus makes the Taj Mahal an extremely exceptional funeral monument”. The authors maintain that “also adding beauty to the Taj Mahal is the extraordinary delicacy of the floral motif that embellishes the marble surface. These floral motifs are sculpted in marble in sober relief or with semiprecious stones that produce incandescent reflections”.

Salisu (2010) mentions and appreciated some historical sites and monuments in Kano, particularly the mosque. The author mentions Kano Central mosque, gave its

background history, and appreciated its ornate traditional Hausa structure and the outlook of its Islamic/Arab taste. Salisu mentions further that, “the Sokoto Jihad led by Usman Danfodio in 1804-1808 A.D, left some important living legacies in Kano”. Additionally, Zaharadeen (1983) in Salisu (2010) explains that “the Jihad leaders in Kano belong to various Fulani clans. These leaders had built some area mosques within Kano city<sup>37</sup> to serve as meeting points of various Jihad groups. In addition, they used their mosques in disseminating information and scholarship”. Some of these mosques of historic importance include the followings: Yolawa mosque, Bebeji mosque, Dambazau mosque, Galadanci mosque, Jalli mosque, Wudilawa mosque and Hausa mosque.

Of all the above mentioned mosques, Salisu (2010) affirms that, “Yolawa mosque plays an important role, in that, all the Emirs of Kano, since Jihad, are turbaned in this mosque, before they proceed to the palace to await a formal inauguration”. Apparently, Salisu gave a lucid historical perspective of these mosques and brought to fore the roles each play. The author does not indicate in anyway whether the mosques bear some Arabic calligraphic embellishment or not. Bello (2010) on his part, states that “the central mosque in Kano, built to its modern form by Emir Abdullahi Bayero after his pilgrimage to *Makkah* and *Madina* in 1945, had been a great centre of attraction for Muslims in Nigeria”. Like Salisu, (2010) Bello (2010) did not categorically give any clue on the Arabic calligraphic embellishment on either the interior or exterior walls.

### **Arabic Scripts**

Welch (1979) in Khalid (2000) states that, “Arabic writing starts from left to right. The Arabic letter can be a flowing continuum of ascending, verticals, descending curves, and temperate horizontals achieving a measured balance between static perfection of individual form, paced and rhythmic movement”. The author further states that, “there is great variability in form: words and letters can be compacted to a dense

knot or drawn out to great length, they can be angular or curving, small or large. The different styles of writing used in calligraphy are called scripts”. Waterman (2009) shares similar view when he states that “Arabic is written and read from right to left. There is no distinction between upper- and lower-case letters, though shapes of letters usually vary depending on whether they are in an initial, medial, or final position in a word. Punctuation marks were not adopted until the twentieth century”. Waterman further states that “short vowels, represented by a set of marks below or above the letters, aid in the pronunciation of a word, these are usually only written in the *Qur’an*, where correct recitation is important, and in texts for novice readers”.

In the same vein, Zakariya (2002) states that, “each script has distinct visual characteristics and follows specific rules. Once one begins to recognize these characteristics, one will be able to tell one script from the other. For instance, works of calligraphy in Arabic, Turkish or Persian, can look very different from each other”. Zakariya ends his statement when he points out that “some scripts stood the test of time, while others became obsolete. The scripts that best responded to the needs of a particular time and place were the ones that lasted”. For example, the Kufic script lost its early popularity, because it proved difficult to write. The best scripts were refined by calligraphers over centuries.

Khaleelullah (2006) affirms that, “Arabic script is derived from the Aramaic Nabataean alphabet. The Arabic alphabet is a script of twenty eight letters and uses long but not short vowels” The author maintains that, “the letters are derived from only seventeen distinct forms, distinguished one from another by a dot or dots placed above or below the letter. This is to say that the short vowels are indicated by small diagonal strokes above or below the letter”. The author also reveals that “the Nabataeans were semi-nomadic Arabs who dwelled in an area extending from Sinai and North Arabia to

southern Syria. Their empire included the major cities of Hija, Petra and Busra". Khaleelullah concludes that "although the Nabataean empire ended in 105 A.D, its language and script would have profound impact upon early development of Arabic scripts".

Similarly, Hilti (1958) reiterates that, "Arabic script was derived from the Aramaic via the Nabataeans cursive script. The Arabic script is identified with the Arabians, the modern Huwaytat Bedouins being regarded as their descendants, the Nabataeans spoke Arabic as an everyday language but used the Aramaic characters of their northern neighbours". While dwelling on the other aspect of its importance, the author adds that "Arabic was used by them as the language of learning and trade, the surviving inscription of the word betray the Arabic vernacular of their authors- the Nabataeans". The author concludes that "this Nabataean cursive script was taken from the Aramaic development in the third century A.D, into the script of the North Arabic tongue, the Arabic of the *Qur'an* and of the present day". More particularly, it was transformed into the round Naskh script in distinction to the angular Kufi and was used almost exclusively for the *Qur'an* and early official documents and coins.

Moreover, Zakariya (2002) reports that, "Arabic language spread with the Islamic religion, and with it, the Arabic alphabet: twenty nine letters written from right to left like Hebrew, Aramaic, Syrian, and other languages from the same family". Other languages such as Persian, Turkish and Spanish, soon came to be written in versions of this versatile alphabet as well. The author ends his report thus: "in any case, at a very early Hijri date, a dichotomy was born: a swift, practical script for daily use and formal occasions came to fore. The first would eventually evolve into the modern Arabic calligraphic styles, the second into the broad-pen *Qur'anic* calligraphic scripts labeled Kufic". Apparently, the scripts were made to serve many purposes; it was in view of the

need for these purposes, which informed Zakariya (2002) to say that “scripts were created for diverse purposes and needs. A script used for the *Qur’an*; for example, needed to be legible and serious. Gracefulness was important in a script used for poetry. Personal correspondence required a script that was easy to read and write”. He also says that “scripts used by royalty needed to appear official as well as be complex enough to prevent forgery. Some scripts stood the test of time, while others became obsolete”. This is to say that some scripts are still being used, while others are old fashioned and perhaps outdated. In view of this therefore, this study will investigate the scripts been used in Kano and also ascertain the ones that are out fashioned.

In the same vein, Salloum and Peters (1996) and Salloum (2001) in Uba (2010) reveal that, in the seventh century A.D, “Arabic immortalized in the language of the Holy *Qur’an* and Islam became inseparable. As Islam spread through North Africa, then through the Iberian Peninsula and eastwards from the Arabian heartland to the heart of Asia, the tongue of the Arabs rapidly spread as a part of the new religion”. The author further reveals that “within a limited period of its establishment, Arabic language became a leading world language and the intellectual medium, which united most of the civilized world”. Uba also maintains that “soon enough, the Arabic script began to be adopted by the languages of the people who had been converted to Islam in much the same way the English Roman script in imperially controlled lands, and Cyrillic in Soviet sphere became used as basis for literacy”. The author adds that “the spread of Arabic script was quite rapid. Within a few centuries, Kurdish, Persian, Pashto, Turkish a number of tongues in the Indian sub-continent and languages like Berber in North Africa and Spain, began to utilize the Arabic script”. Salloum and Peters (1996) and Salloum (2001) in Uba (2010) concludes that,

Its embracement by a great number of non-Arab Muslim tongues formed a cultural boundary, which demarcated the Islamic world from other lands. Later,

a good number of the Malayo- Polynesian dialects, the vernaculars of the Muslim peoples in West and East Africa, some of the languages of Central Asia, the Indian sub- continent, and a few Slavonic tongues in Europe, adopted the Arabic script.

In line with the above, the Encyclopedia Britanica (2012) notes that “there were two distinct scripts in the early centuries of Islam: cursive script and *Kufic* script. For everyday purposes a cursive script was employed: typical examples are to be seen in the Arabic papyri from Egypt”. Its daily usage according to the Encyclopedia “later formed the basis for its prompt implementation, the script does not appear to have been subject to formal and hard rubrics, and not all the surviving examples are the work of professional scribes. Kufic script, nonetheless, appears to have been developed for spiritual and official purposes”. In the same vein, Abdulwadoud (2000) states that, “the use of Arabic script as a decorative element was essential in producing beautiful illuminated manuscripts. Arabic script was developed to such perfection that it has become the central element in Islamic art”. The author maintains that “there are various Arabic scripts which are all governed by strict rules are all characterized by structural elegance”. In a way “the play of horizontal lines, right-angled serifs and graceful loops in different Arabic scripts produces an effect of rhythmical and dynamic structure intensified by the position of the letters whose succession seems to suggest an awareness procession”.

According to Al-Baba, (1964) “the scripts were created for various purposes. Some of the scripts were used to write the *Qur’an*, while others were used for court documents. Small scripts were created to send mail by pigeon post, while large scripts were developed for architectural inscription” Furthermore, Al-Baba state that “there are particular regions in the Islamic world that are said to have played a key role, as far as, the growth of Arabic calligraphy is concerned”. The author concludes that these regions

include “the Arab world (from Morocco to Iraq), the Ottoman Empire (present day Turkey and beyond), and Persia (present day Iran and beyond) are good examples”.

Arguably, the embellishment of mosques’ walls with Arabic calligraphy in Kano began in the late thirteenth century A.D and early fourteenth century A.D. Unfortunately, the researcher was not able to see the earlier Arabic calligraphic embellishment in certain mosques in the studied areas due to the constant renovation by as earlier mentioned. However, in an interview with Sheikh Baharah Abdulrahman, the chief Imam of Sharada Central mosque Kano during field work on the 8 September 2013, he revealed that his first encounter with such Arabic calligraphy for embellishment purpose was that of Kano Central mosque, in Municipal Local Government Area, close to the Emir’s Palace about fifty years ago. On his part, Sheikh Muhammad Auwwal Badamasi, revealed to the researcher during field work on the 1 September 2013 that, he first came across Arabic calligraphy as an art form in Isiyaka Rabi’u Friday mosque in Dala Local Government Area, Kano about thirty years ago.

### **Early Arabic Calligraphers**

Zakariya (2002) reveals that “one of the leading calligraphers at the inception of this artistic expression is Abu Ali Muhammad *Ibn* Ali. He is popularly known and addressed as *Ibn* Muglah. *Ibn* Muglah was born in 886A.D in Bagdad, present day Iraq and died in 940 A.D”. Zakariya claim that, “the contributions to Arabic calligraphic art was immense that Ibn Muglah is reputed for inventing the cursive style of Arabic lettering, the Naskh script which eventually replaced the angular *Kufic* as the standard of Arabic calligraphy”. Additionally, Zakariya points out that “*ibn* Muglah also introduced the rounded forms and curved lines that in later styles were refined to give Arabic writing the flowing beauty for which it is renowned. Initially, the usage of *Naskh* was intended for use in copying the Holy *Qur’an*”. By the eleventh century A.D, it was

used widely for royal and common correspondence as well as for architectural embellishment. *Ibn Muglah* also developed the *Tawqi* and the more elegant *Thuluth*, in Arabic it means “one third”, it is written on the principle that one-third of each letter slopes. It is a large elegant, cursive script, used in medieval times on masjid embellishment.

Next to *Ibn Muglah* in the mastery and artistic rendition of Arabic calligraphy who also distinguished himself is Abu Al-hasan Ali Ibn Halil Ibn Al- Bawwab. Zakariya (2002) adds that “he is *Ibn Muqlah*’s contemporary and immediate successor. He is commonly known and address as *Ibn al- Bawwab*. *Ibn al- Bawwab* literally means ‘Son of the door keeper’. Like his predecessor, Al- Bawwab was also born in Iraq in tenth century A.D probably died between 1022-1031A.D. In comparism with his immediate predecessor, al-Bawwab has also left an artistic legacy as far as Islamic art (Arabic calligraphy) is concern and it still prevails. Zakariya concludes that “he is reputedly known to have invented the cursive ‘Rayhani’ and ‘Muhaqqaq’ scripts. One of the beautiful in the Rayhani script is the Laheli mosque in Istanbul, Turkey. *Ibn al- Bawwab* equally refined several of the calligraphic styles that was invented a century earlier by *Ibn Muglah*”. During his life time, *Ibn al- Bawwab* was known to have produced sixty four copies of the *Qur’an* by hand.

Zakariya (2002) states in the following extracts that “the third master calligrapher was Yuqut al- Mustasim (d. 1298), a house slave of the last Caliph of the *Abbasid* time in Baghdad. He was a eunuch, possibly of Anatolian origin. He radically altered the method of *ibn al-Bawwab* and brought a new consistency, fluency and elegance of the art of calligraphy”. Another notable Arabic calligrapher according to Abdulhamid (2004) is “Mahmud Khaleeludeen. His date of birth is uncertain, but he is known to have been born in Daghistan and have arrived in Istanbul with his father

Sheikh Murad Effendi at a very tender age. He was said to have created an individual style of his own in Thuluth” Abdulhamid also states that, “Mahmud’s wife, Esna Ibret Hanim was also a calligrapher of great merit”

Having mentioned some of the early Arabic calligraphers, it will be safe to state here that, it is not within the confines of this research to identify all the early Arabic calligraphers, who are seen and regarded as the early masters of this artistic tradition. They are highly regarded artists in Islamic societies. However, for the purpose of establishing the early Arabic calligraphers in the history of Islamic art and Arabic calligraphers, and what they have done. The researcher mentioned some of the renowned master calligraphers, and gave a cursory discussion on each of them. It will therefore be imperative to also do same to the ones found in Kano and see whether or not they have followed what the earlier masters have done or not.

### **Types of Arabic Calligraphy**

Waterman (2009) opines that “there are many different scripts of Arabic calligraphy, with various different styles associated within a script. Only seven influential styles that impacted the Middle East, Persia, and Northern Africa are mentioned. The scripts vary by cursive/straight lines, the amount of slanting, and in letter creation”. Nasruddin (2004), shares similar view when he says that “in the third century of Islam (ninth A.D), ibn Muglah, invented new rules in calligraphy and limited the variations to six styles. The under listed are primary styles that are frequently utilized by Arabic calligraphers”. They include the followings:

- I Kufic/Kufi,
- II Thuluth
- III. Naskh/ Nasakh
- IV. Riq’a

V. Ta'liq/ Farsi and

VI. Deewani/ Diwani.

### **Kufic/ Kufi**

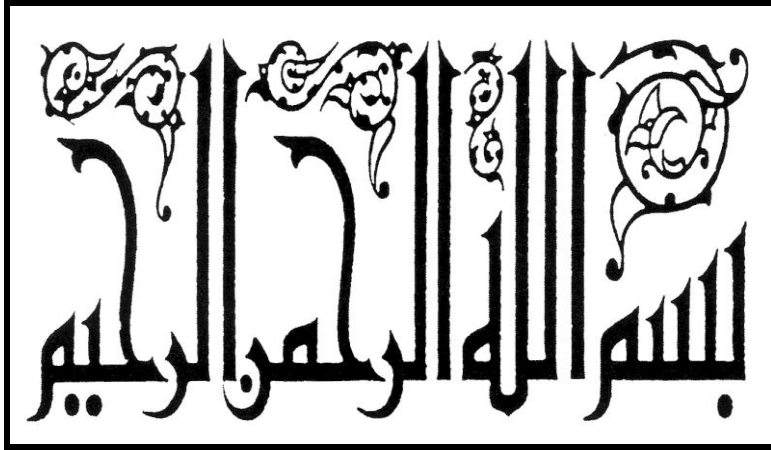


Fig 5: *Aya'at Basmallah* (The Opening)

The first formal calligraphic style is called *Kufic* style named after the city of Kufah in Iraq (Fig. 5). Nasruddin (2004) affirms that “*Kufic* had by the ninth century A.D became more ornamented and was influential in Arabic calligraphy generally. It was created after the establishment of the two Muslim cities of Basra and Kufah in the second decade of the Islamic era (eight century A.D)”. He upholds that “it was used in many early *Qur'an* manuscripts and for inscriptions, including those at the Dome of the Rock. Confusingly, the same name is also commonly used for a second major group of script styles, which came to prominence in the 10th century A.D”. Interestingly, Nasruddin notes that “these new, more angular styles came to include many fanciful variants such as foliated *Kufic* (decorated with curling leaf shapes) and floriated *Kufic* (decorated with flower forms)”. The author further notes that, “this second group of *Kufic* styles was used in contexts as varied as *Qur'an* manuscripts, coinage, architectural inscriptions and the decoration of ceramics”.

It is, in the light of this, that the author affirms that “while this second type of *Kufic* was being developed in the Middle East, probably in Baghdad, a new style was developed far to the west, in Muslim-ruled Spain or Morocco. The Arabic name for this western region is al-Maghrib, and so the new style was called Maghribi” (see figure 6).



Fig 6: *Maghribi* hand written *Qur'an* probably copied in the 13 century

Nasruddin adds further that “some calligraphers in the region still use this *Maghribi* style presently. In the Eastern Islamic world, however, the *Kufic* styles had more or less died out by the thirteenth century A.D, replaced by the range of more rounded styles in use now”.

Nasruddin says that “it may be that, the new, more fluid styles developed in the East, because paper had replaced parchment and papyrus as the main medium for important manuscripts and documents”. The author further states that “the surface of the

paper could be sized (coated with starch) and rubbed with a stone until extremely smooth and glossy”.

Nasruddin (2004) continues his statement and adds that “the first copies of the *Qur’an* were written. *Kufic* is a form of script consisting of straight lines and angles. The script has specific proportional measurements, along with pronounced angularity and squareness. It became known as *al-Khat al-Kufi* (*Kufi* script)” The author describes the *Kufic* scripts thus: “*Kufi* script had a profound effect on all Islamic calligraphy. In contrast to its low verticals, *Kufi* has horizontal lines that are extended. The script is considerably wider than it is high. This gives it a certain dynamic momentum. The script is often chosen for use on oblong surfaces”. He concludes that “with its obvious *Handasi* (geometrical) construction, *Kufi* could be adopted to any space and material, from silk squares to architectural monuments. *Kufi* script was not restricted to strict rules; calligraphers employing it had virtually a free hand in the conception and execution of its ornamental forms”.

The author ends his statement when he claims that “the composition is based on the intertwining of geometric shapes including circles, squares, and triangles with words. These ornamental *Kufic* versions were applied to the surfaces of artistic and architectural objects including surfaces of stucco, wood, tile, metal, glass, ivory, textiles and bricks”.

## Thuluth



Fig 7: *Aya'at Basmallah* (The Opening)

According to Nasruddin (2004), *Thuluth* script (Fig. 7) “was first formulated in the seventh century A.D during the *Umayyad* caliphate, but it did not develop fully until late ninth century A.D”. The author also attests to this point and states that, “*Thuluth* is popular for ornamental inscription. The name means ‘a third’ perhaps because of the proportion of straight lines to curves, or perhaps because the script was a third, the size of another popular contemporary script. Arguably, it is rarely used for writing the Holy *Qur'an*”. In his words “*Thuluth* has enjoyed enormous popularity as an ornamental script for calligraphic inscriptions, titles, headings, and colophons. It is still the most important of all the ornamental scripts”.

Lastly, the author says that “*Thuluth* script is considered by letters, written with barbed heads. The letters are linked and sometimes intersecting, thus engendering a cursive flow of ample and often complex proportions. *Thuluth* is known for its elaborate graphics and remarkable smoothness”.

## Naskh/ Nasakh



Fig 8: *Aya'at Basmallah* (The Opening)

*Naskh* (Fig. 8) Siddiqua (2011) admits that, “*Naskh* is relatively easy to read and write, this is because it was a frequently used script for writing *Qur'an* after it was re-designed in the tenth century A.D by *Ibn Muqlah*. It was derived from *Thuluth*, by introducing a number of modifications resulting in smaller size and greater delicacy.” The author further acknowledges that “this subsequently paved way and made it gained admiration after being redesigned by the famous calligrapher *Ibn Muqlah* in the tenth century A.D because of *Muqlah's* comprehensive system of proportion; *Naskh* style displays a very rhythmic line”. He maintains that, “*Naskh* was reformed by *Ibn al-Bawwab* and others into an elegant script worthy of the *Qur'an*, more *Qur'ans* have been written in *Naskh* than in all the other scripts. Since the script is relatively easy to read and write, *Naskh* appealed particularly to the Muslim *Ummah*”. Siddiqua concludes that, “in terms of its application, “*Naskh* is usually written with short horizontal stems and with almost equal vertical depth above and below the medial line. The curves are full and deep, the uprights, straight, vertical and words are generally well spaced”.

## Riq'a



Fig 9: *Aya'at Basmallah* (The Opening)

According to Waterman (2009) “*Riq'a* is actually an everyday style of writing, often used in modern printings of books and magazines. It is characterized by small, neat lettering in straight lines or curves. *Riq'a* is usually the second script that Arabic children learn, after *Naskh*”. The author maintains that “stroke marks used in *Riq'a* tend to be very short and crisp, as characterized by the size of the downturns in letters. Both Turkish and Arabic make use of the *Riq'a* script”.

Waterman concludes that “*Riq'a* is a style that has evolved from *Nasakh* and *Thuluth*. It is noted for its simplicity and its short horizontal stems. The word *Riq'a* means ‘a small sheet,’ which could be an indication of the media on which it was originally created”.

## Ta'liq/ Farsi



Fig 10: *Aya'at Basmallah* (The Opening)

According to Siddiqua, (2011) “*Ta'liq* (Hanging) script (Fig. 9) was developed by the Persian (Iran) calligraphers in the ninth century A.D from an early and little known. Arabic script called Firamuz, and it continued to be used for monumental purposes even after a refined variant *Nastaliq*”. *Ta'liq* is also called *Farsi*; it is an unpretentious cursive script apparently in use since the early ninth century A.D.

The author stresses further that, “there emerged another Arabic calligrapher who also contributed in shaping the growth of *Ta'liq*. One of such artist/calligrapher was Abd al-Hayy, from the town of Astarabad, seems to have played an important role in the script's early development”. Siddiqua concludes that, He was encouraged by his patron, Shah Isma'il, to lay down the basic rules for writing of *Ta'liq*. The script is presently in great favour with Arabs, and it is the native calligraphic style among the Persian, Indian and Turkish Muslims”.

## Deewani/Diwani

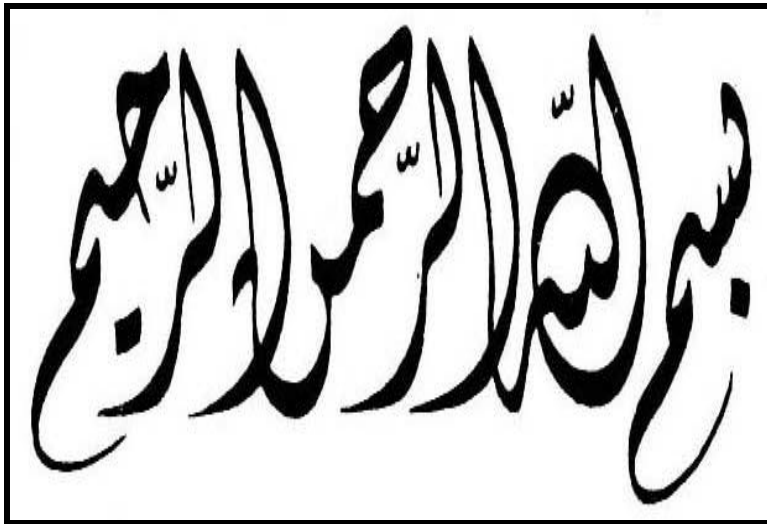


Fig 11: *Aya'at Basmallah* (The Opening)

Waterman (2009) states that “*Deewani / Diwani* script (Fig. 11), and its variant *Jali*, were developed during the Ottoman Empire. This style is probably the most decorative form of Arabic calligraphy. The letters are very close to each other, making it hard to read, in some cases even by those that are fluent in Arabic”. Waterman notes that “the style is highly ornamental and decorative. Pieces of *Diwani* style are often adorned with minute details as to showcase a calligrapher’s skill level. *Diwani* script for a long time was kept a secret to only a talented few, and was used as a royal calligraphy form”.

While writing about Arabic calligraphy and Design, Kristyan (2012) states that, “the Ottoman dynasty held the Arabic script and its calligraphic traditions in high esteem. They assimilated them, developing them with both devotion and great imagination, mastering the already existing styles as well as developing new styles of their own”. In terms of patronage, the author states that “the Ottoman sultans patronized the most talented artists of the day/time, which led to the rise of a very large number of skilled calligraphers”. The author adds that “one of the most important derivative styles of this period was the *Diwani* script, which was developed in the late fifteenth century

A.D by Ibrahim Munif, and later modified and refined by the celebrated Turkish calligrapher Shaykh Hamdullah”. Kristyan maintains that “it is a cursive script based on the *Ta’liq* style, ‘written on a less dramatically hanging baseline, though its letter connections are vertical and slanted’” . The author continues when he states that “it is characterized by dramatically curved undotted letters, which are joined together in an unconventional fashion, and by ending swashes that often extend below the baseline of letters. *Diwani* is written without vocalization marks”. Kristyan also shed light on its usage when he says that, “it was practiced primarily in the council chambers (Arabic: *Diwani*) where it was used for all of the official correspondence of the Sultans”. The author maintains that “the *Jali*<sup>38</sup> *Diwani*, an ornamental variant which is highly admired to this day, is characterized by large geometric shapes created by the small, delicate embellishments, which fill all the gaps between the letters and words”. Kristyan concludes that “it was used for long names and the titles of the Sultans”.

Nasruddin (2004) adds that, “like *Riq’a*, *Deewani* became a favourite script for writing in the Ottoman chancellery. *Deewani* is excessively cursive and highly structured with its letters undotted and unconventionally joined together. It uses no vowel marks, *Deewani* also developed an ornamental variety called *Deewani Jali* which was known as Humayuni (imperial)”. The author concludes that “the development of *Deewani Jali* is credited to Hafiz Othman. The spaces between the letters are spangled with decorative devices which do not necessarily have any orthographic value. It is highly favoured for ornamental purposes”.

From Nasruddin (2004), Siddiqua (2011), Waterman (2009) and Krystyan’s (2012) statements on the types of Arabic scripts/calligraphy that, it is obvious the emphasis was on the styles of Arabic calligraphy created by earliest masters in this profession and how they are being re-modified. It is also apparent that emphasis was

placed on its usage in some parts of the Muslim communities around the world. However, no mention is made on the type of Arabic calligraphy that is used to embellish mosques in Kano. Consequently, this has created a gap which this study hopes to fill.

### **Calligraphic Materials**

Museum and Museum (2011) says that “designs with calligraphy were created out of many different materials. Yet calligraphy often imitates the technical effects of pen on paper, even when it appears on other media”. Museum and Museum also adds that “it is possible to see, for example, the graceful range from thick to thin line and the square shape of superscript dots written with a square-cut pen nib. Artists often made their designs by copying from prepared templates written out (on to paper) by a calligrapher”.

Similarly, the Encyclopedia Britanica (2012) states that, “Arabic calligraphy also comprises the Arabic scripts utilized in materials other than parchment, papyrus, and paper. For instance, verses from the *Qurʾān* were inscribed on the walls in religious buildings, for the edification of the faithful”. The Encyclopedia adds that, “they could either be engraved in stone or stucco or executed in faience tiles. Religious supplications, dedications, and benedictory phrases were also presented into the embellishment of handy objects. Usually, there is a close affiliation between these and the scripts correctly used on the conventional writing materials”. The Encyclopedia concludes that, “it was often the practice for a skilled penman to design monumental inscriptions”. While Al-Baba (1964) upholds that “the content of calligraphy varies greatly, and can include any of the following: *Qurʾanic* verses, Hadith, Poetry, Proverbs, Royal Decodes, Court Documents, Stories and Salutations”.

From the above, it will be safe to infer that, some of the materials that were used in articulating the artistry of writing Arabic calligraphy are many and they vary.

For example, the materials that were used at the cradle are quite different from the ones that were used presently. At the beginning, the materials that were utilized are now out fashioned. Presently, the materials have changed: forms, car paint, spray paint, kerosene, cement, brushes (of different sizes) ply wood, and plastic cut-out are utilized.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE**

#### **Introduction**

This study is an investigation into the aesthetics of Arabic calligraphic ornamentation of mosques in Kano, Nigeria. In order to carry out an effective investigation, the researcher designed a procedure that guided and eventually led the study to fruition. The qualitative research procedure was adopted, using a historical approach. Sambo (2005) stresses the usefulness of qualitative method in research because “it describes social phenomena or events as they occur to individuals in particular or to culture in general”. The researcher also employed the historical method in the discussion of data for the study. Through historical method, the researcher was able to establish an in-depth knowledge of how Arabic calligraphic embellishment began to appear on mosques in Kano, and also how they were artistically executed. Furthermore, the method enabled the researcher to give logical assessment of contemporary calligraphic embellishment on mosques in Kano, as well as predict the possible future direction of mosque embellishment.

#### **Sources of Data**

In collecting data for this study, both primary and secondary sources were consulted and vital information extracted through field work. Oral interviews based on structured/unstructured questions were administered to selected Arabic calligraphers and Muslim scholars, particularly the custodians of specific mosques. This is in order to obtain reliable and valid information on Arabic calligraphic embellishment in Kano mosques. Furthermore, the researcher identified, interviewed and obtained information

from people who have commissioned such art works. In other words, the general patrons among the Muslim *Ummah* who ensures that these embellishments are made where identified and consulted.

### **Pilot Study**

Emphasis was placed on pilot study, because it prepares the foundation on which the research proper is built. Urji (2009) in Sarti (2013) stresses that, “in order for a research design to be able to position itself, to effectively achieve the stated objectives, some appreciable prior knowledge of the topic understudy to be surveyed is imperative”. Based on the above, a pilot study was conducted outside the Local Government Areas of the metropolis. By so doing, the researcher was able to ascertain for himself the Friday mosques that have Arabic calligraphic embellishment, in other words, the mosques that are aesthetically appealing to the viewer and those that may not have Arabic calligraphic embellishment. Similarly, the pilot study helped the researcher to validate or invalidate instrument to be used. For instance, instruments like tape recorder and digital camera. The pilot study also helped the researcher positively, to establish a possible outcome for the research.

### **Field Trip**

Field trip or visitation is the main means of getting information from the target population, such as calligraphers, patrons and Islamic scholars. Others are *Imams*<sup>39</sup> and the Muslim *Ummah*. In this regard, the researcher paid visits to mosques that have Arabic calligraphic embellishment on the walls, and observe critically the artistry of the calligraphers. During such trips, discussions were held with the aforementioned audience, mainly through formal and informal interviews. In the process, a population was arrived at and photographs taken. The details are as follows:

**Population** The population of this study was drawn from the eight Local Government Areas that constitute Kano metropolis and, this consisted of Friday mosques. The large number of mosques is overwhelming, numbering up to seven hundred. In this regard, the researcher categorized the population into two, for more effective inquiry. These are mosques with elaborate Arabic calligraphic embellishment, and those with minimal Arabic calligraphic embellishment. In this regard, twenty number of Friday mosques with elaborate Arabic calligraphy were sampled, while thirty one, with minimal embellishment were also sampled. The purposive sampling was used for the sampling. The selected Friday mosques formed part of the larger population. Similarly, forty one Arabic calligraphers are interviewed as well as fifty two Mallams/Imams and sixty three patrons respectively.

**Photographs** in addition, the researcher took photographs of Arabic calligraphic embellishment found in mosques in Kano, during the field trip. Photographs help scholars and researchers in analyzing different aspects of art works. This mode of visual representation serves the purpose of documentation. The pictures were used in order to facilitate the analysis and discussion of the artworks. All inscriptions were recorded, studied and analyzed.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher adopted the historical approach, using Feldman's (1970) recommendations on the steps to be taken in any scholarly discussion on art. Here, the steps taken included the description, formal analysis, interpretation and judgment. The adoption of the descriptive method is for effective description and interpretation of art forms. Quite a number of scholars, particularly art historians, have equally adopted same method in discussing their data and achieved desired objectives. Formal analysis is an explanation of visual structure, of

the ways in which certain visual elements have been arranged and fraction within a composition. Interpretation is a statement about a work of art that enables the visual observations we have to fit together and make sense. Similarly, an interpretation is a statement of the problem that the work seems to be trying to solve.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF ART WORKS

#### Introduction

This chapter on discussions and analysis of art works is in two folds: The first covers the discussion on the historical evolution of Arabic calligraphy for embellishment purpose of mosques in Kano. Similarly, this chapter identified the artists/Arabic calligraphers and discussed about them. The discussion on the historical evolution of Arabic calligraphy in Kano is short, but it is concise. This is done in order to tackle the objectives of the research. The second sub-heading analyzes the artworks accordingly and they are categorized according to their intrinsic and extrinsic qualities and interpreted descriptively, taking into account their artistic and aesthetic qualities. Jessup (1988) in Yohanna (2000) “highlights the aesthetics and expressed contents in artworks as significant characteristics by which they should be evaluated”. Similarly, the analysis is also based on Feldman’s (1970) methods of analyzing artwork.

#### Discussion on the Historical Evolution of Arabic Calligraphy in Kano

Based on the discussion held with Mallam Liman Madabo during field work, it was established that Islamic activities, initiated by the Wangarawa (before the Arabs) paved way for people to acquire *Qur’anic* knowledge. Hence Madabo is the first point of call that served as a transit, where they settled and began to propagate Islamic religion under the auspices of their leader, Abdurrahman Zaiti. The Wangarawa were said to be heading to Mecca in order to perform pilgrimage when they had a stopover in Madabo. In terms of the acquisition of *Qur’anic* knowledge, the emphasis was always placed on children, as they were sent to *Qur’anic* teachers to learn how to read and write the *Qur’an*. This system of learning is called ‘makarantar *allo*’ (slate school) because the writing surface was *allo*, a wooden slate (unlike book) where the writing is

on paper. The discussion also revealed that the early Friday mosque in Kano were bare without any sort of Arabic calligraphy for embellishment purpose. A good example of this is seen in Plate I. As at that time, the Hausa community only converged in the mosque to address their common concerns, particularly through prayers. Its later usage (Arabic calligraphy) on wall of mosques emanated from the high esteem<sup>40</sup> held by the Muslim for its role in recording the words of *Allah*. In view of this development, the Arabic writing began to appear on wall of mosques. At first, the Arabic embellishment is produced on the inner wall of the mosque. The reason for this was to avoid rain water from having any effect<sup>41</sup> on the Arabic embellishment. On further inquiry on this effect Mallam Siyuddi states that the colouring used at the genesis of the embellishment is non-permanent as the colouring materials are obtained locally and processed before desired colours are gotten. It was established that the period which the Arabic calligraphy emerged as an art form (creative endeavour) was in the early 1950 at the Kano Central mosque. Secondly, the Arabic calligraphic embellishment on the outer wall of the mosque gives credence to such mosque. In other words, the outer Arabic calligraphic embellishment directs and helps punctuate the religious importance of the mosque. Furthermore, it serves as information about such mosque and reminds one of *Allah's* infinity.

Mallam Gausu Nuhu Wali (Arabic calligrapher) in an interview sheds more light on the issue of non-permanent of the materials used by the artists and states that, “presently, modernity has brought forth new and improved colours, particularly for the purpose of the wall embellishment”. Gausu adds further that, “one of the commonest materials used by the artists/ calligraphers is the synthetic enamel paint. The synthetic enamel paint is a type of oil based paint with superior adhesive quality. Besides that, the

enamel paint is available and cheaper”. “The paint can be used for new, as well as, old surfaces, others are wood and steel”, Gausu concludes.

Gausu Nuhu Wali was born on the 2nd September, 1954 in Yakasai Quarters, Kano, Kano State. Between 1963 and 1969, Gausu attended Rimi City primary school, Kano. The artist had his secondary education at Government Teachers College (now Kano Teachers College), from 1970 to 1974. On competition, Gausu secured employment as a classroom teacher at Takai primary school, Takai Local Government, Kano from 1974 to 1976. He was transferred to Dan’agundi Primary School in Kano Municipal from 1976 to 1977. Gausu was later transferred to Masallaci primary school, Kano from 1977 to 1978. In 1978, Gausu worked with Ministry of Information and Home Affairs, Kano as Art Production Assistant. He left the Ministry in 1981 to Nigeria Television Authority, Kano as Designer I.

Gausu’s flair for art was as a result of the influence he had from his family who were equally art inclined. Specifically, his grandmother practises craft and has produced rich varieties of textile designs during her time. Mr. Owoleye, Gausu’s art teacher in Government Teachers College, Kano further enlivened Gausu’s decision to study art. The third person who spurred Gausu’s decision to opt for art was Mallam Usman who paid a visit to Kano at Gausu’s residence in Yakasai in the early 70’s. These three individuals, according to the artist, had tremendous impact on his artistic profession.

He also enrolled for National Diploma (ND) in Art and Design, at the Department of Art and Industrial Design, School of Technology, Kano State Polytechnic and graduated in 1985. Gausu left Nigerian Television Authority, Kano in 1991 and enrolled for his Higher National Diploma (HND) in Painting at the same School and graduated in 1993.

Kaltume Bulama Gana (Arabic Calligrapher) was born on 25 December, 1964 in Kano, of Kanuri parentage. Between 1970 and 1976, Kaltume attended St. Louis Primary School, Kano. She had her secondary education at Queens College, Lagos from 1976 to 1981 from where she proceeded to the School of Basic Studies (SBS), for her pre-degree programme in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria from 1981 to 1982. Kaltume also gained admission into Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria to read Fine Arts in the Department of Fine Arts where she specialized in painting and graduated in 1985. Kaltume's love for art was one of her greatest motivational factors in opting for art as a subject and field of specialization. This was also coupled with the first prize she won in the Intentional Year of the Child Art competition, on behalf of Queens College, Lagos in 1980. The Best Fine Art Student award won in 1981 was another motivating factor. In fact, these two prizes, according to Kaltume, greatly influenced her decision to study painting as a career. Coupled with the fact that her career guidance teacher at Queen's College, Lagos encouraged her in no small measure, and directed her thoughts towards considering a career in art, Kaltume's parents supported her enthusiasm to become a professional artist.

Early in 1987, the then Kano State Commissioner for Information, Alhaji Ujudud Sheriff offered Kaltume Bulama Gana an automatic employment in the ministry, at the Kano State History and Culture Bureau (HCB). Kaltume later enrolled for Master's Degree in Fine Arts (MFA), at the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1987 and graduated in 1989.

Mallam Ali Abubakar Bature (Arabic calligrapher) was born on the 12 October, 1954 to the family of Abubakar and Khadija. Mallam Ali had his early education from primary up to University levels in Cairo, Egypt. He had his conventional art training at Faculty of Arts, Helwan University of Technology,

Cairo, Egypt and graduated as an Interior architect designer. Ali Bature is basically a calligraphic artist, even though he trained as an interior decorator. Mallam Ali began his civil service career with the then City Television (CTV) now Abubakar Rimi Television (ARTV), Kano and later History and Culture Bureau. He served in various capacities, particularly in HCB from the base as Principal Graphic Arts Officer to the peak as Executive Secretary.

Mallam Aminu Isma'il (Arabic calligrapher) was born in 1986. Mallam Aminu had his early Islamic/Qur'anic education at Liman Dan Taura Islamiyya School, Brigade from 1996-2001, Kano Teachers College for his junior Secondary School between 2003-2005 and Kwakwaci Secondary School for his Senior Secondary between 2006 -2008 and respectively. Aminu's talent for art began to manifest at a tender age, this was coupled with the influence and training he received from his master, one Tahir. Aminu began to practice the art of Arabic calligraphy as a profession in 2009. Aminu claimed that, even though he executes Arabic calligraphy for embellishment purposes, but the bulk of which are wall hangings rather than wall embellishment and are commissioned by individuals which are kept in their homes.



Plate I: Zawiyya Sheikh Bashir bin Zayd Friday mosque, Dala. Source: photograph by the Researcher, 2013

### **The Intrinsic and Extrinsic Contents of the Artworks**

The intrinsic and extrinsic contents of the Arabic calligraphic embellishment can best be discussed in four folds: Mural, Plastic, Etching, Engraving, Wood, Aluminum and Metal. From the intrinsic stand point, the Arabic calligraphers in the studied areas have a common mannerism. A careful scrutiny and study of their individual artworks indicate that they all deal with socio-religious matters.

The contents of the Arabic calligraphy on most of the mosques are similar in media, style and forms. In some few instances, however, the styles differ due to individual taste or the taste of the patron who commissions such type of embellishment. The discussion will proceed with the intrinsic content first, before dwelling on the extrinsic content.

## Mural



Plate II(a): *Allahu Jalla Jalaaluhu*, directly in front of the Imam's showing position.



Plate II(b): *Allahu Jalla Jalaaluhu*. Ibrahim, Date Not Known; Tudun Wada Friday mosque, Nassarawa, (Mural) Enamel on Wall.

The picture frame presented in Plate II(b), is the detail of the artwork, titled *Allahu Jalla Jalaaluhu*. The artwork is done directly facing the Imam in the inner part of

the *Mihrab*, that is, the eastern part of the mosque. At first sight, one can imagine the impact of the big mural in front of him/her. The location of this artwork is also a thing of interest and leaves one to wonder why is it that such type of Arabic calligraphic embellishment is either located by the right/left part of the Imam or right in front of the Imam or a little above where the Imam stands to lead prayer? Perhaps, the surrounding location of the work is significant because it is the direction of *qibla* (the direction one faces when praying).

Black is applied at the background, which makes it graphically flat in an almost circle shape. The bold single pattern of Arabic writing (emphasizing the power of the name) in white, rendered in a free style of writing simply means *Allahu*<sup>41</sup>. If critically observed, one will see that the letters are smoothly rendered, and are somehow slanting in descending order, beginning from the right part of the work, to the left. The first letter that looks like ‘I’ which is *alif* stands horizontally, but a little bit tilted, while the second Arabic letter *LA* resembles the English letter ‘W’ attached with a seeming letter ‘C’ in reverse position. On the other hand, the letter ‘C’ also takes the shape of small letter ‘a’, and looks like the head of a camel with a curved neck. Below the word *Allahu* is an inscription in bluish colour that reads ‘*Jalla Jalaaluhu*’ meaning ‘The Supreme’. The emphasis was on the above inscription.

This is not a verse from the Holy *Qur’an*, but a sort of praise to *Allah*<sup>42</sup>. Hence the religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy. It also reminds one to remember the infinity of *Allah* and makes one to be remorseful thereby enhances religious practice. It also increases worship, hence He is *Allah* there is no deity but Him. He is the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible. He is the All-Merciful, the Most merciful. He is *Allah*, there is no deity but Him. He is the King, the Most Pure, the Perfect Peace, the Trustworthy, the Safeguarder, the Almighty, the Compeller, the Supremely Great. Glory be to *Allah*,

above all they associate with Him. He is *Allah*, the Creator, the Maker, the Giver of Form. To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Everything in the heavens and Earth glorifies Him. He is the Almighty, the All-Wise. (Surat al-Hashr, 59:22-24)



Plate III(a): ): *Jalla Jalaaluhu*. By tone of the mosque's entrance



Plate III(b): *Jalla Jalaaluhu*. Ibrahim, 1987;  
Tudun Wada Friday mosque, Nassarawa, (Mural)  
Enamel on Wall, 100 x 180 cm

The Arabic embellishment presented in Plate III (b) reads, *Jallah Jalaaluhu*, meaning The Superior or 'Great is His Majesty'. The work is positioned at the southern part of the inner mosque. The surrounding location of the work is significant to the

worshipper because it reminds one having *Allah* in mind even after observing his/her prayer and when leaving the mosque.

It is aesthetically represented using yellow colour against a flat blue background. The main Arabic inscription in thick *Kufic* style is enclosed with wavy broken lines. Two other broken oval shaped lines have been used to fortify the main inscription and by implication, they move in a cyclical pattern. The broken oval shape lines have the shape/form of an egg. A floral motif pattern is also represented at each corner of the picture frame. The entire work is seen in broken lines, which is a result of the stenciled technique applied during the initial sketch. Black is used, as the border, to enhance and project the work.

Actually, it is not a verse from the Holy *Qur'an*, but part of the ninety-nine Majestic attributes of *Allah*<sup>43</sup> which forms the basis to the religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy.



Plate III (c) Tudun Wada Friday mosque, where all the Arabic Calligraphy are found as seen in Plates II (a & b), III (a & b) and IV (a & b) 14/11/2014: source, Muhammad Aliyu.



Plate IV(a): *Al-Fattah*. (3 from right hand) by the left side of the Imam's position.



Plate IV(b): *Al-Fattah*. Ibrahim, 1987 Tudun Wada Friday mosque, Nassarawa (Mural) Enamel on Wall.

Plate IV (b) shows another Arabic calligraphic embellishment found in Tudun Wada Friday mosque in Nassarawa Local Government Area. It is a close-up of the eight similar design patterns on the eastern (inside) wall of the mosque, by the left side

where the Imam stands to lead prayer. The location of the work is significant, for it gives hope to the worshipper.

Only two colours are used: blue and yellow, even though white is used. The Arabic letters are placed within a perfect circle shape, rendered in yellow colour against a blue background. The first letter by the right, *alif* consists essentially of a single vertical stroke; it curves a little towards the end downwards, and takes the shape of a sword<sup>44</sup> symbolic to the Arabs. It also takes the shape of a cutlass which is common among the rural dwellers and utilized for many purposes in homes.

The second letter also goes vertically, coils a little and goes straight before ascending again. Within the gap, there is a coiled letter stylistically rendered. Two short white strokes and three diamond shapes are proportionately placed side by side. By interpretation, each letter is given a personality of its own, and eventually linked with *Allah*. For example, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, *alif*, by its verticality, symbolizes divine majesty.

Its literal meaning is ‘The Opener’, implying that *Allah* is the opener of all that is locked, tied and hardened. If *Allah* does not open the doors of His blessings, no force can make those doors open. The depiction of the Arabic which is also a sort of prayer, gives the art work its aesthetic appeal. Yahya (2004) attest to the aesthetic aspect of *Al-Fattah* (The Opener) thus: “Allah tests people with hardship. However, He does not impose an unbearable burden on anyone. When *Allah* sends difficulty to His sincere servants, He also opens a way out. Moreover, after each test He sends ease”. The Holy *Qur’an Surat al-Inshirah*, 94:1-6) sums it thus: “Did We not expand your breast and remove your load, which weighed down your back? Did We not raise your renown high? For truly with hardship comes ease; truly with hardship comes ease”.



Plate V(a): *Al-Iklas* directly in front of the Imam's position.



Plate V(b): *Al-Iklas*. Artist and Date Unknown: Dorayi Babba Friday mosque, Gwale, (Mural) Enamel on Wall

The picture frame presented in Plate V(b), is the detail of the artwork, titled *Al-Iklas*. The artwork is executed directly facing the Imam in the inner part of the *Mihrab*, that is, the eastern part of the mosque. The surrounding location of the work is important because it is the direction of *qibla* (the direction one faces when praying).

The composition is made up of long vertical lines that are either slanting or curved at the tail ends. The play with horizontal lines produces an effect of rhythm and

dynamism intensified by the position of the letters which succession seems to suggest a procession in a circular manner. The lines are creatively manipulated to show overlap and interweaving. The lines are all represented with brown colour against a cream background of the mosque wall. There are other strokes of diagonal lines introduced within and outside the letters. These are the Arabic vowels that give the letters their proper meaning, although, they appear to be textured.

The significance of *Al-Iklas* is inherent in the prayer of the Chapter from the Holy *Qur'an* (Chapter 112) in *Farsi* style which reads “Say He is *Allah* the One, *Allah* the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him”. A deliberate circle is created at the center of the picture frame; the circle has always been regarded as a symbol of eternity, without beginning or end. This circle is also where the beauty of this artwork lies, especially when it is attributed to the *Allah*. Again, it appears to be a rising sun from a distance; similarly, it takes the form of a sun flower and wind mill in motion.

During field trip, Bashir Saminu Ibrahim, the Mallam who led the *Zuhr* (2.00pm) prayer, and who also happened to be the son of the Chief Imam of the mosque, told the researcher that, “the mosque used to have several Arabic calligraphic embellishments on the four walls of the mosque. Unfortunately, during the course of general renovation of the mosque by the present administration of Governor Rabi’u Musa Kwankwaso, they were smeared<sup>45</sup> with paint, leaving the walls bare of their former beauty”. Fortunately Bashir observed, “they were replaced with few long horizontal boards containing a long verse from the Holy *Qur'an*, but broken into twelve segments, four each on the northern and southern parts of the mosque, and two each on the eastern and western parts”.

On further inquiry, Bashir Saminu Ibrahim confessed that “he did not know who the artist was, or who commissioned the Arabic embellishments which were smeared or the new ones which were commissioned and executed on boards”. Probably, the Arabic calligrapher seems to pick interest of a particular position when it comes to executing or mounting a piece of artwork. It is also possible that it is the decision of who commissions the artwork (Arabic calligraphy) to be done right in front of the Imam.



Plate VI(a): *Gairil magzubi alayhim wa laz-zaaliin*. By the left side of the Imam's position.



Plate VI(b): *Gairil magzubi alayhim wa laz-zaaliin*. Muhammad Mu'azam, 2013 Jami'u Maulana Sheikh Aliyu Harazimi Friday mosque, Ungogo, (Mural) Enamel on Wall.

Plate VI (b) presents another mural, executed on the wall of the mosque, by the left side where the Imam stands to lead prayer. The location of the work is significant, for it gives hope to the worshipper.

Vertical, thin, slanting, curve and wavy lines are placed above one another, while some are juxtaposed. Arabic vowels in triangular and circular shapes with white are also represented. There is adequate utilization of space going by the placement of the letters. The colour used is gold on a flat green background, while two very thick red horizontal lines, one at the top and the other at the bottom, further consolidated the design. A casual look indicates that they are swan birds in sea, floating westwards.

The religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy lies in the fact that, it is a quotation from the Opening Chapter of the Holy *Qur'an*, Verse 7. It reads: 'Those whose (portion) are not wrath, And who go not astray'. In other words, it is a prayer.



Plate VII(a): *Bismillaahir- Rahmaanir- Rahim*, directly in front of the Imam's position.



Plate VII(b): *Bismillaahir- Rahmaanir- Rahim*.  
 Muhammad Mu'azam, 2013 Jami'u Maulana  
 Sheikh Aliyu Harazimi Friday mosque, Ungogo,  
 (Mural) Enamel on Wall 70x150cm.

Plate VII(b) above shows detail and innovative work, which was executed with enamel paint. It measures 210cm x 70cm. The artwork is executed directly facing the Imam in the inner part of the *Mihrab*, that is, the eastern part of the mosque. The

sorrounding location of the work is important because it is the direction of *qibla* (the direction one faces when praying).

The letters, which are the main concern and centre of attention of this embellishment, are rendered in gold against a green background. There are portrayed five long vertical thick lines in chevron pattern, although four of the lines are interrupted by enclosing short cone-like circular shapes. The only vertical line that is not interrupted is the third line in the middle and is the letter *alif* which unites the words in the circle (*Allahu*) with the others downwards. The entire composition read, *Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahim Allahu*.

The artist<sup>46</sup> has utilized space, good balance and well structured Arabic letters. Additionally, the Arabic writings are integrated, and seem to dazzle the eye of the beholder as the eyes of the onlooker behold the curly exaggerated thin lines which run into one another aesthetically. A thin line of orange colour is used as border design.

The stylized Arabic letters of this work simply read, ‘In The Name of *Allah* Most Gracious, Most Merciful’ the religious importance of the Arabic calligraphy which is a verse, is that, it is expected of Muslims to say these words before beginning any undertaking, before eating, opening a book, or pray. Muslims write them at the heads of letters, inscribe them on coins and also print them at the beginning of chapters in books. It was reported that the Prophet Muhammad said he who writes Bismillah beautifully obtains innumerable blessings.

During the course of interview with Muhammad Mu’azzam, he revealed that Sheikh Isiyaka Rabi’u was his major patron. The design pattern is like an instrument used in the kitchen for pastries. It was used manually, although rarely seen presently due to variety of technological invention of electronically made kitchen utensils.

It appears that the artists commissioned to do the Arabic embellishment are fond of executing the artwork on the wall of the *qibla*, the direction where the Imam stands and leads Muslims in prayer. It means, therefore that this particular location means so much to either the artists or the Muslims, and that was why the artists found the location to be a good canvas to work on.



Plate VIII(a): *Hasbunallah Wani'ni'imal Waqil*, by the left side of the Imam's position



Plate VIII(b): *Hasbunallah Wani'ni'imal Waqil*. Muhammad Mu'azam: 2013 Jami'u Maulana Sheikh Aliyu Harazimi Friday mosque, Ungogo, (Mural) Enamel on Wall.

Plate VI (b) presents another mural; Plate VIII (b) shows embellishment in a mural form, executed on the wall of the mosque, by the left side where the Imam stands to lead prayer. The location of the work is significant, for it gives hope to the worshipper.

Red and dark blue are the two colours that the artist used against a cream background. The writing is characterized with varying thick, thin and narrow lines which interweave into one another. In this piece of artwork, the treatment of the Arabic letter began in a slanting manner; the artist made curves to echo and over-lap one another, resulting in a gentle, spectacular rhythmic motion.

The religious importance of the Arabic calligraphy is that it is a prayer. Another religious meaning of the word is that it shows the sign of one being thankful to his/her Creator. The generality of Muslim *Ummah* whose opinion was sought during field trip are of the opinion that, frequent recitation of this surah always brings succor to individuals. Not only that, it also enhance religious practice by way of protection against evil and it also brings good luck.

It was brought to the notice of the researcher by the Chief Imam of the mosque Uztaz<sup>47</sup> Muhammad Auwal Badamasi that “he was the one who commissions the artist (Muhammad Mu’azzam) to embellish the mosque with Arabic calligraphy. Uztaz Muhammad states further that he donated and single handedly built the mosque before the authorities of Ungogo Local Government assisted in completing the mosque in 2013”.



Plate IX: Artist and Date Unknown, Jami'atul Shiekh Mahmud Adam Friday mosque, Kumbotso, (Mural), Enamel on Wall 58 x 75cm

The only artwork (mural) found in Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam mosque, executed at the outer part of the southern entrance is shown in Plate IX above. Its transliteration is, “*Jami'atul Shiekh Mahmud Adam*”, meaning Sheikh Mahmud Adam mosque.

White is seen against green background with designs of flowery swirls at both sides of the mural. It is a single pattern of Arabic calligraphy. A casual observation shows that, the design of the flowery part is beginning to peel off, perhaps, due to harsh weather or technique of application, one of a justification for this study. The Arabic letters are produced in its curly nature, some slanting while some are represented in horizontal and vertical lines which create a fine movement.

The Arabic wordings are neither a verse from the Holy *Qur'an* nor a saying from the Hadith. It is rather an immortalization of the name of a prominent Islamic scholar who was said to have been assassinated while leading one of the daily prayers. In view of this, therefore, the Arabic calligraphy embellishment do not enhances prayer or religious practice.



Plate X(a): *Allahu*. Directly behind the Imam at the decking



Plate X(b): *Allahu*. Artist and Date Unknown: Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso, (Mural) Enamel on Decking.

Plates X (b) to XVI (b) are executed at the rear of the mosque and on the decking. Less emphasis is placed on the surrounding location of the artworks since they are executed at the rear and go unnoticed by most worshippers. The work portrays seven Arabic calligraphic embellishments which have the same format of design and colour

scheme, the only difference is in the content of the Arabic letters. This shows that the six roundels were probably produced by the same artist.

Plates XII-XV contains names of the four Caliphs in the early days of Islam. However, in Plate X (b), *Allahu* is emphasized. The Arabic letters are placed at the centre, executed with white against a green background. The green colour is stylistically rendered in a sun flower- like design pattern which also has the semblance of a mosque's dome and a pointed end. In between each presumed dome from the outer part, are some motif designs made with brown and orcher colours. The design futher enhances the broken circle shape of the art work. If critically viewed, the designs at the edge appear like birds flying in the air. This applies to other Plates that are subsequently analysed.

The first letter, *alif* is a bit tilted at the top. It is vertically placed at the right handside, as a small curved white strokes, followed by a "W" shape which meanders and ends up with the "V" shape. There is a stylised Arabic vowel that looks like a sword. Beneath the "W" shape, one can see a flowery design shape, while at the top of the same "W", another small 'w' and vertical line appear.

The high esteem accorded this Magestic name of *Allah* by the Muslim *Ummah* which is a praise form the religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy, it also form the basis of the aesthetics of the art piece. Apart from this, another aesthetic quality inherent in this praise is centered on the saying of the Holy *Qur'an* thus: "Have thou not seen that *Allah* causeth water to fall from the sky, We produce therewith fruit of diverse hues, and among the hills are streaks white and red, of diverse hues and others raven-black, and of men and beasts and cattle, in like manner, diverse hues." (Surah 35-Verse 27-28).



Plate XI(a): *Muhammad* Directly behind the Imam at the decking



Plate XI(b): *Muhammad*. Artist and Date Unknown, Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso, (Mural) Enamel on Decking.

In this picture frame shown in Plate XI (b), the word “Muhammad” is written in a stylistic calligraphic manner. There are two thin and tilted brush strokes of white lines with a small vowel in ‘w’ shape underneath the strokes. A single thick line runs down, meanders and goes back and forth in a zig-zag manner before it goes up and

finally runs down and terminates in a sickle shape. Another vowel is placed in the zig-zag area, in a crescent shape; a different vowel in clock-wise position like a flower and silhouette bird is also executed. An additional vowel in sword-like form is added just a little above it. The rendition of this Arabic letter with some vowels surrounding it appears like a sea horse. On a closer look, it takes the form of a praying mantis extending its forceps.

Undoubtedly, the entire Muslim *Ummah* regarded Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as a servant of *Allah* and also a saviour on the Day of Judgment. They also held his name with high esteem. In view of this, therefore, the name is of utmost importance to them, hence the pious name.



Plate XII(a): *Abubakar* Directly behind the Imam at the decking



Plate XII(b): *Abubakar*. Artist and Date Unknown: Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso, (Mural) Enamel on Decking.

Plate XII(b) presents a work which shows within the green sun- flower-like design pattern is the first Arabic letter *alif* which consists essentially of a single vertical stroke beginning from the right part of the embellishment. The second letter twists and

ends with a sharp narrow end. Space is properly utilized, as the letters are well arranged, although they are independently placed. The third letter is also manipulated like a canopy and terminates with a waivy line towards the left part of the picture. All the Arabic letters are executed with white. The artist succeeded in unifying the letters by way of arranging the Arabic letters in clockwise manner making up a coherent whole.

The Arabic text is neither a verse from the Holy *Qur'an* or saying of the *Hadith*, therefore, it did not enhance religious worship. Rather, It was the devotion and selfless help rendered by Abubakar, the first Caliph to the development of Islam the world over that earned him such reverence. The Muslims also held the name with due respect. In view of this, therefore, the name is of utmost important to them, hence the pious name.



Plate XIII(a): Umar. Directly behind the Imam at the decking



Plate XIII(b): *Umar*. Artist and Date Unknown: Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso, (Mural) Enamel on Decking.

Plate XIII (b) shows another mural portraying the name of Umar, the second Caliph, painted in white. The artist executed this Arabic letter by twisting the word, beginning from what looks like letter 'C'. It runs downwards and meanders upwards, with two small slanting strokes of thin coily lines. The central placement of the word

'Umar' gives this Arabic calligraphy a forceful, formal presence, as though it was a symbol of a striking cobra.

As mentioned in the last paragraph page 93, this is the same respect accorded to Umar being the second Caliph so also the beauty of the pious name. This is also applicable to the third and fourth Caliphs found in plates XIV (a) and XV (a).



Plate XIV(a): *Usman* Directly behind the Imam at the decking



Plate XIV(b): *Usman*. Artist and Date Unknown: Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso, (Mural) Enamel on Decking.

Usman, the name of the third Caliph, is artistically represented in this mural shown in Plate XIV (b). The painting shows some technical expertise in the placement of the Arabic letters at the mid part of the space. The sizes of the lines vary: thick, thin, narrow and irregular. One can also see three diamond shapes, with a saucer-like white

stroke just a little above them. Another diamond shape is at the left part of the other three. It is perhaps introduced in order to complement or balance the shapes. Others are Arabic vowels used to pronounce the name correctly.

In appreciating the part colour play in a work of art, Yahya (2000) state that “colours are one of the greatest blessings that *Allah* has bestowed upon people in the world”. Apparently, it was noted that just as a man who reflects, acknowledges the moment he looks at a painting that it has a painter, so will he understand that the multicoloured, harmonious and exceptionally picturesque environment around him also has a Creator.

This Creator is *Allah*, Who has no partner in creation, Who creates everything in full harmony, and Who placed us in this world overflowing with numerous beautiful things embellished with millions of colours. All the things *Allah* creates are in perfect harmony with each other. *Allah* describes the uniqueness of His artistry in creation in the *Qur'an* as follows: “He Who created the seven heavens in layers. You will not find any flaw in the creation of the All-Merciful. Look again-do you see any gaps? Then look again and again. Your sight will return to you dazzled and exhausted” (Surat al-Mulk: 3-4)



Plate XV(a): *Ali* Directly behind the Imam at the decking



Plate XV(b): *Ali*. Artist and Date Unknown, Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso, (Mural) Enamel on Decking.

Plate XV (b) presents another fascinating art piece, the sixth of the mural painting found in the interior of Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso. Like the earlier five found in the same mosque, it is neither signed nor dated. The Arabic calligraphy depicts 'Ali' the last Caliph. As the tradition of Arabic writing is, it

normally starts from the right. In this painting, a thick white line dominates with the exception of the thin vertical line that goes upwards. The thick lines are coily in nature. Viewing this Arabic letter, the form appears like a floating boat with its tall mast that helps control the direction of the wind.

The Imam of Murtala Muhammad mosque, Uztaz Kabiru Badamasi Dantaura, told the researcher that he was not aware of any Arabic calligraphic embellishment in the interior of the mosque. Notwithstanding, he permitted and also asked someone to accompany the researcher into the mosque. When the researcher was done with taking photographs, he showed the Chief Imam the photos, he was really surprised. The Imam was actually ignorant of these embellishments because, they were made at the rear of the mosque and on the decking. Besides, the Imam usually enters the mosque from the front to carry out his religious duties at the front.



Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Kumbotso Local Government Area 14/11/2014: source, Muhammad Aliyu.



Plate XVI (a) Ali Ibn Abi Talib Friday mosque,



Plate XVI (b) *La'illaha illallahu Muhammadu – Rasulullah* Artist Unknown, Date Unknown, Ali *ibn* Abi Talib Friday mosque Tarauni.

The work presented in Plate XVI (b) is executed on the wall by the right side of the Imam. The surrounding location of the artwork is important particularly to those who patronize the mosque.

The pigment used are yellow-ochre and black enamel paint applied on light and tone gray colour. Arrangements of vertical, slanting, curly, zigzag and twisted lines are employed in the embellishment. The Arabic letters are so juxtaposed that one cannot easily read the statements. It also makes it hard to ascertain which Arabic calligraphic style is used. The dominant letters are in vertical lines with few concentric ones. One can also see some 'w' shapes (vowels) which further help in balancing the placement of the letters.

Looking the knitting Arabic letters, one will appreciate that they are virtually of equal depth. In this regard, they function as the harmonious agent, binding all the letters together, and at the same time creating an optical pleasure in the work. The ascending and descending movements of the Arabic letters show the artist's understanding of the commonest movement rooted in Arabic calligraphy. A floral motif pattern is also represented at the picture frame. The whole work is seen in broken lines, which is a result of the stenciled technique applied during the initial sketch.

The religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy is the *shahādah*, Muslim profession of faith which means 'I Testify that there is no God, but *Allah* and Muhammad is His messenger'.

## Plastic



Plate: XVII (a) *Hasbunallahu wa Ni'nimal- Wakiil.* by the left side of the Imam's position



Plate: XVII (b) *Hasbunallahu wa Ni'nimal- Wakiil.* Muhammad Mu'azam, 2011 Sheikh Inyass Friday mosque, Gwale, Gold on Plastic 60 x 120cm.

This piece of work (Plate XVII) (b) is produced with plastic *cut-out*. It measures 60 x 120cm. The artwork can be found on the wall by the left part of the *Mihrab*. The surrounding environment of the art piece is important because it draws the attention of the worshippers on the importance of its content.

The Arabic calligraphic rendition is embellished on the plastic cut-out, using gold colour against a brown tone. The writing is characterized with varying thick, thin

and narrow lines which interweave into one another particularly at the middle of the letters. The lines slope and ascend, passing through coiled shapes. The letters are composed of small circles and strokes of vowel lines. In this piece of artwork, the artist has made curves to echo and over-lap one another, resulting in a gentle, rhythmic motion of sensuous *Farsi* writing style. A floral design is noticed at each corner of the frame which makes it aesthetically appealing to the eyes of the beholder. There is also a mirror-repeat-pattern of lines which accompany the floral design, and help to balance the art work. The use of golden colour here, unites<sup>48</sup> various elements of the work.

It is a prayer and quotation from the Holy *Qur'an*, Chapter 173: 200 ‘‘He is the best Guardian’’. It has been mentioned in page 93 of the study on similar artwork that, the religious importance of the Arabic calligraphy which as a verse, is that, the generality of Muslim *Ummah* whose opinion was sought during field trip are of the opinion that, frequent recitation of this surah always brings succor to individuals. Not only that, it also enhances religious practice by way of protection against evil and it also brings good luck.



Plate XVIII (a): *Allahu* by the right side of the Imam's position



Plate XVIII (b): *Allahu*. Muhammad Mu'azam, 2011; Sheikh Inyass Friday mosque Gwale, Gold on Plastic 50 x 80cm.

The artwork shown in Plate XVIII (b) is also executed with plastic *cut-out*. It measures 50 x 80 cm. There are two of these pictures looking exactly the same placed by the right and left sides of the Imam in the mosque. Perhaps, the surrounding location means so much to either the artist or the Muslims, and that was why the artists found the location to be a good canvas to work on.

The entire background of the picture frame is rendered in only one colour, brown. This is one of the commonest content found as far as Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques is concerned. It reads *Allahu*, stylistically rendered with thin lines. One stroke of line is vertically represented which cuts through the word *Allahu* downwards, placed at the center of the frame, thereby creating a balance of the Arabic letter *alif* and which seems to determine the size of other letters, according to the doctrine of proportion. *Allahu* is made in single repeat style and appears like English letters ‘W’ and ‘V’ joined<sup>49</sup> together.

Thirty three cone-like geometrical shapes enclose the subject with mirror-repeat-designs on the four sides of the embellishment. A floral design in petal form is executed at each corner.

The religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy is the praise. It is important to state here that, all of the beautiful names belong to *Allah*, for He is the Owner of infinite beauty and infinite sublimity. A person can know Him only to the extent that He introduces Himself, and can appreciate Him through the verses of the *Qur’an*. In one verse, *Allah* describes this name in the following terms: *Allah*, there is no deity but Him, the Living, the Self-Sustaining. He is not subject to drowsiness or sleep. Everything in the heavens and Earth belongs to Him. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they cannot grasp any of His knowledge, except for what He wills. His Footstool encompasses the heavens and Earth, and their preservation does not tire Him. He is the Most High, the Magnificent (*Surat al-Baqara*, 2:255).



Plate XIX (a): Muhammad by the left side of the Imam's position



Plate XIX (b): Muhammad. Muhammad Mu'azam, 2011  
 Sheikh Inyass Friday mosque, Gwale, Gold on Plastic,  
 50 x 80 cm

The works shown in Plates XVIII (b) and XIX (b) are similar in terms of material, technique of application and rendition of design. The only thing that differentiates them is the main Arabic writing which is 'Muhammad' and the other 'Allah'. The artwork is positioned at the northern part of the inner mosque. It is interesting to note that this artwork (Plate XIX b) is placed right in front of the

congregation. Apparently, its surrounding position tends to be important to the worshippers.

The artist made good use of space in placing the lines as well as the designs in the picture plane. A free flow and an exaggeration of *Farsi* Arabic calligraphic style is used to write 'Muhammad'. The writing goes forth and back, and forms a curved shape before extending upwards. The thick line is not interrupted from the start of the writing till the end. Brown and golden colours are employed to complement each other. The design pattern takes the form of a moving sea horse. Similar Arabic calligraphy for ornamentation purpose is also found in the opposite position.

Certainly, the entire Muslim *Ummah* regarded Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as a servant of *Allah* and also a saviour on the Day of Judgment. They also held his name with high esteem. In view of this, therefore, the name is of utmost important to them, hence the immortalization and beauty of the name.



PlateXIX (c) Sheikh Inyass Friday mosque, where all the Arabic calligraphy are found as seen in Plates XVII (a & b), XVIII(a & b) and XIX (a & b) 14/11/2014 : Source, Muhammad Aliyu.



Plate XX(a): showing the mosque where the Arabic Calligraphy is found 07/11/2014: source, Muhammad Aliyu

## Engraving

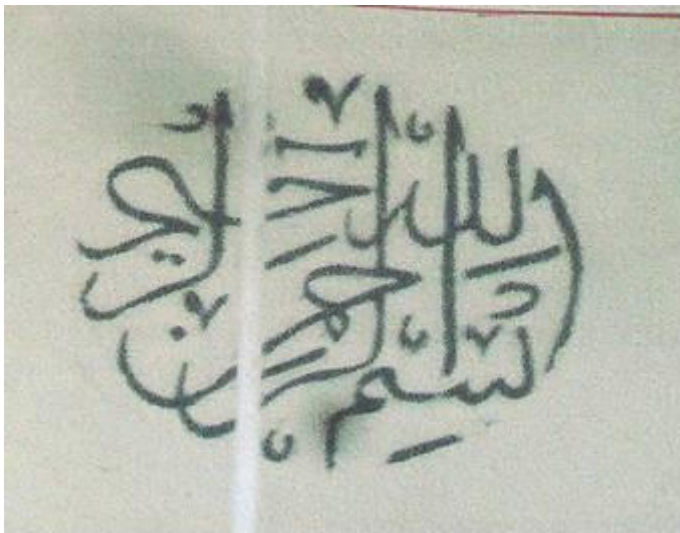


Plate XX(b): *Bismillaahir- Rahmaanir- Rahim*. Ali Bature, 2011: Umar Farouk Friday Mosque, Nassarawa, Engraving.

As mentioned earlier, majority of the works are strategically found a little above where the Imam stands to carry out his religious activities. It means, therefore that this

particular location means so much to either the artist or the Muslims, and that was why the artists found the location to be a good canvas to work on.

The Ta'aliq/Farsi style was used in executing this stylistic design in circle shown in Plate XX (b). It is an engraved Arabic embellishment on the eastern part of the inner mosque wall. Green was used to render the single pattern of the Arabic letters, against a cream background. The letters are manipulated in varying positions of vertical, curve, slanting, and wavy thin lines that overlap one another. It was conspicuously displayed above the position where the *Imam* stands, to lead prayers.

During the course of fieldwork, when the researcher asked Kaltume<sup>50</sup> Bulama Gana Kaltume some questions, she claimed that, it was Ali Bature who actually did the stenciling of the calligraphy, but he employed the services of some calligraphers who did the engraving on the wall. Kaltume was also part of the artists who produced the entire embellishment. This revelation buttressed what the mosque's *Imam*, Mallam Bashir Abdulkadir, told the researcher. He reported that, he was told by the person who built the mosque, Alhaji Umar Tofa,<sup>51</sup> that it was a woman that did the embellishment. There are other Arabic letters of Kufic style at the upper part of the building that surround the four corners of the interior wall.

It is imperative to state here that, the artists commissioned to do the Arabic embellishment appears to have keen interest in producing the artwork on the wall of the *qibla*, the direction where the Imam stands and leads Muslims in prayer. It means, therefore that this particular location is significance to either the artist, who commissions the embellishment or the Muslims, and that was why the artists found the location to be a significant medium to work on.



Plate XXI(a): *Allahu Muhammad*, by the left side of the Imam's position



Plate XXI(b): *Allahu Muhammad*. Abdulkadir, Date Unknown: Sharada Central Friday mosque, Municipal, Engraving.

This piece of Arabic calligraphic Plate XXI (b), embellishment is located by the left side of the Imam and right in front of the congregation. This buttresses the point that sometimes it is the artist that chooses whatever position, style or design pattern when

commissioned to produce Arabic calligraphy for embellishment purpose. Hence the significance of the position is best known to the Arabic calligrapher.

An engraved Arabic embellishment in cement painted golden brown and green background is shown in two words into a coherent whole are which read, '*Allahu Muhammad*'. The first Arabic letter '*alif*' is placed vertically followed with two other vertical lines joined at the bottom in a U-shape. The letter continues and meanders leftwards, and terminates like a sickle with a small dot within. Immediately after that, is another word in a zig-zag manner that also extends upwards like the English letter 'J'. The other engraved Arabic letters are Arabic vowels.

The second word which is 'Muhammad' is accurately placed in front of the first word '*Allahu*'. The rendition of Muhammad is similar to that found in Plate XIX (b). An efficient use of space and placement of the Arabic letters is evident.

Two circled lines enclosed the main Arabic letters; the first circle has a cone-shaped design in the same position. In between the design are some triangular shapes accompanied with three dots. The outer circle carries no design except for the dots that appear at regular intervals on the circles. The work can be interpreted to mean an inflated balloon floating in the air.

The Muslim *Ummah* have immense veneration to this Magestic name of *Allah* which is a praise, form the religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy, it also form the basis of the aesthetics of the art piece. Undoubtedly, the entire Muslim *Ummah* regarded Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as a servant of *Allah* and also a saviour on the Day of Judgment. They also held his name with high esteem. In view of this, therefore, the name is of utmost significant to them, hence the praise and pious name *Allahu Muhammad*.



Plate XXII(a): *Muhammad Rasulullah* behind the Imam's position by his right side



Plate XXII(b): *Muhammad Rasulullah*. Abdulkadir, Date Unknown Sharada Central Friday mosque, Municipal, Engraving.

Another engraved Arabic embellishment in golden brown on a black background is contained in Plate XXII (b) above. The work is significantly, placed on one of the pillars above the left side of the Imam's position.

Outwardly, black is the colour with least harmony of all, a kind of neutral background against which the minute shades of other colours stand clearly forward. In other words, it brings out other colours. Flow of movement is noticed on the first letter that is done in a zig-zag manner. The interlocking of the letters in curves and slanting way is also well placed, as balance is attained in the placement of all the letters within the given space. On the upper and lower part of the Arabic letters, one can see a mirror repeat relief design pattern that resembles symbol/ranking badge of the Nigerian Air Force. Other designs outside the circle are mostly associated with the royalty/palace.

The Arabic calligraphy is not a verse from the Holy *Qur'an* but praise; however the religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy is the respect which is accorded to the pious name.



Plate XXIII(a): *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* behind the Imam's position by the right side



Plate XXIII(b): *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*. Abdulkadir, Date Unknown: Sharada Central Friday mosque, Municipal, Engraving.

The engraved embellishment shown in Plate XXIII (b) is significantly placed on one of the pillars above the right side of the Imam's position. This beautiful embellishment is produced possibly by the artist who had the privilege of embellishing the Emir's palace walls, going by the design outside of the Arabic calligraphy. There is

a striking resemblance of designs in the Emir's palace, and the houses of those who matter in the helm of affairs in the palace. Some wealthy individuals in the society also patronize the services of masons or artists to produce such designs in their living houses. Most of such designs are associated with the palace.

It is not a verse from the Holy *Qur'an* but a sort of praise to Prophet Muhammad, which means "Peace be Upon Him". It has the same format of design, colour scheme, and manner of execution and about the same dimension with the ones shown in Plates XXI (b) and XXII (b). The only difference is the content and the Arabic letters. This shows that, the three engraved works are produced by the same artist, in free style, but has an affinity to the *Kufic* style. What is more fascinating is the balance in the placement of the engraved Arabic letters in oblong shape, beginning from the right to the left part of the picture. Vertical lines, a sickle shape, a dune shape, and curved lines are visible. Its religious significance is also in infirmity with that of plate XXII (b).



Plate XXIV(a): *La'in shaker-tum La-azii dan-nakum* behind the Imam's position by the left side



Plate XXIV(b): *La'in shaker-tum La-azii dan-nakum*.  
Abdulkadir, Date Unknown: Sharada Central Friday mosque, Municipal Engraving/

The engraved embellishment shown in Plate XXIV (b) is significantly, placed on one of the pillars above the right side of the Imam's position.

The letters appear to be made in curves and slanting lines all through. The manner of execution, colour scheme and good finishing are similar to those works

shown in Plates XXI, (b) XXII (b) and XXIII (b), which means that the works were produced by the same artist. The only difference is in the content. The effective utilization of space, placement of the Arabic letters and application of colours has further enhanced the beauty of the work. All the Arabic letters are placed in an enclosing circle. Red, blue and black colours are carefully applied.

The Arabic calligraphy presents a Verse from the Holy *Qur'an* Chapter 52, Verse 7 in bold *Thuluth* style meaning “if ye are grateful, i will add more (flavour) unto you” assuring humans by *Allah* to be contented and be thankful to *Allah*, He will add more to their yearnings. It enhances worship because it is an order which also motivates and encourages one to be contented with the little one has.



Plate XIV(c): Sharada Central Friday mosque, Municipal Showing the mosque where the Arabic calligraphy in Plates XX (b), XXI (b), XXII (b) and XXIII (b) are found. 14/11/2014: source, Muhammad Aliyu.



Plate XXV (a): *Bismillaahir- Rahmaanir- Rahim* by the main entrance of the mosque

### Etching



Plate XXV (b): *Bismillaahir- Rahmaanir- Rahim* Artist and Date Not Known: Emir Road Friday mosque, Fagge Etching.

Plate XXV (b) presents the only Arabic calligraphic embellishment found on Emir Road Friday mosque in Sabon Gari, Fagge Local Government executed just a little above the main entrance of the mosque, which was done in *Ta'aliq/Farsi* style. The

surrounding location of the artwork is significant not only to the artist that chooses whatever position, style or design pattern when commissioned to produce Arabic calligraphy for embellishment purpose, but to the worshippers too.

Blue is utilized in the rendition of the letters against a plain white background. Movement, which is the emphasis in this calligraphy, is seen in the usual thin, sensuous, wavy, slanting and curvilinear nature of the hanging *Ta'liq/Farsi* style. Basically, the work is the combination of short, thin, vertical lines with broad horizontal lines which normal length is exaggerated at the end of each word. The slanting letters seems to take the form of a rattle snake in motion.

It was brought to the notice of the researcher by the present custodian of the mosque (Mallam Abdulkadir) who stated that in the 80's, there used to be Arabic calligraphic embellishment on the interior walls, apart from the ones that were hung. In the course of subsequent renovations however, all the embellishments were smeared with paint, leaving only the existing outer Arabic calligraphic embellishment.

The work shown in Plate XXV (b) literally means 'In The Name of *Allah* Most Gracious, Most Merciful'. *Basmallah* is the expression '*Bismillaahir Rahmaanir - Rahim*' (in the name of *Allah*, the Compassionate, the Merciful) which appears at the head of every chapter of the Holy *Qur'an* (Muslims Holy book), with the exception of Sura al-Tawbah (Repentance, IX). The invocation of the *Basmallah* is considered to have a great benedictory power, and is therefore commonly uttered before any act in everyday life. This effect of the writing is that, it is a quotation from the Holy *Qur'an* which forms the basis for the aesthetic significance of the Arabic calligraphy.



Plate XXVI (a) Showing the main mosque where the Arabic calligraphy is found

### Wood



Plate XXVI (b) Artist Hassan Kwara, 2011 **Verse 40, Chapter 143** Shabbabul Friday mosque Nassarawa.

The surrounding location of Plate XXVI is placed at the edge by the left side where the Imam stands to lead prayer. In view of this, only few people can see it.

The measurement of this piece of art work is 93X 77cm. The artist used cut-ply wood on board. All the Arabic letters were cut separately before using evo stick (adhesive) to glue each word accordingly. Yellow colour is applied carefully at the background and makes it flat, except for the textured border that is meant to reduce its flatness. The Arabic letters, a combination of verses are seen in continuum of ascending vertical lines, descending curves, circular and diagonal lines which result into a rhythmic movement. The artist further integrated the writing with such effects as the balancing of positive and negative spots. The positive spots are where the Arabic letters are shown in blue colour, while the negative spots are yellow spots where the letters do not cover.

The religious meaning of the Arabic calligraphy is that, it is a quotation from the Holy *Qur'an*, Chapter 143: 40. The quotation enhances worship by way of stimulating one to carry his obligations diligently.



Plate XXVII (a) Tokarawa Friday mosque Nassarawa  
Where the main Arabic calligraphy was found.

## Metal



Plate XXVII(b): *La'illaha illallahu Muhammadu – Rasulullah*,  
Hassan Kwara, Date Unknown: Tokarawa Friday mosque,  
Nassarawa, Enamel on Metal

Plate XXVII (b) presents the only Arabic calligraphic embellishment found on Tokarawa Friday mosque in Nassarawa Local Government executed at the main entrance of the mosque's premise. The surrounding location of the artwork is significant

not only to the artist that chooses whatever position, style or design pattern when commissioned to produce Arabic calligraphy for embellishment purpose, but to the worshippers too. This is so because it is the *shahādah*, or Muslim profession of faith: ‘ I Testify that there is no God, but *Allah* and Muhammad is His messenger’.

An efficient use of space and placement of Arabic letters is glaring in the work presented in Plate XXVII (b). The content is Muslims profession of faith which means The pigment used is green enamel paint applied on plain white iron sheet welded to the south gate of the mosque. Arrays of vertical, slanting, curly, zig-zag and twisted lines are employed in the embellishment. The Arabic letters are so juxtaposed that one cannot easily read the statements. It also makes it difficult to identify which Arabic calligraphic style is used. The dominant letters are in vertical lines with few concentric ones. One can also see some ‘w’ shapes (vowels) which further help in balancing the placement of the letters.

Viewing the interlocking Arabic letters, one will see that they are almost of the same thickness. In this regard, they operate as the harmonious agent, binding all the letters together, and at the same time creating a visual excitement in the work. The ascending and descending movements of the Arabic letters show the artist’s knowledge of the commonest movement embedded in Arabic calligraphy.

Hassan (the artist) was a Lebanese (“Kwara” as they were called by the Hausa) who had spent most of his life in Kano. He was also a prolific and renowned Arabic calligrapher, who made his art work for one of the prominent Islamic scholar in Kano, Sheikh Isiyaka Rabi’u. Hassan also made this embellishment for interested members of the society, particularly the well to do. Unfortunately, the researcher was not able to see

or meet with this artist, for he died three months earlier as narrated by the custodian of Shabbatul Friday mosque Hadejia Road.

The religious significance of the Arabic calligraphy is the testimony (shahādah), Muslim profession of faith: ‘I Testify that there is no God, but *Allah* and Muhammad is His messenger’, which also enhances religious practice due to the conviction held by the Muslims on the *shahādah*.



Plate XXVIII (a) Kamsu Friday mosque Dala  
Where the Detail work in Plate XXVIII (a) is  
found. Also see Appendix VII page 170

### **Aluminum**



Plate XXVIII (b) Artist Unknown, Date Unknown,  
Kamsu Friday mosque Dala.

Plate XXVIII (b) is conspicuously displayed above the position where the *Imam* stands, to lead prayers.

It is a representation of the Creator's name without the accompanying Arabic vowels. It was executed with white against green colour. It measures 65cm x 50cm. Of all the Friday mosques visited during fieldwork, this was the only Friday mosque whose Arabic embellishment was done using aluminum frame.

The aesthetics of this piece of art work is inherent in the bold depiction of the Holy name of *Allah* in white colour, hence He is *Allah* there is no deity but Him. He is the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible. He is the All-Merciful, the Most merciful. He is *Allah*, there is no deity but Him. He is the King, the Most Pure, the Perfect Peace, the Trustworthy, the Safeguarder, the Almighty, the Compeller, the Supremely Great. Glory be to Allah above all they associate with Him. He is *Allah*, the Creator, the Maker, the Giver of Form. To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Everything in the heavens and Earth glorifies Him. He is the Almighty, the All-Wise. (*Surat al-Hashr*, 59:22-24)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter is the concluding part of this research, “The Aesthetics of Arabic Calligraphic Embellishment of Mosques in Kano, Nigeria”. In view of this therefore, the chapter includes the summary of the whole research work. Furthermore, the findings outlined as a result of the discussions and analyses in chapter four are highlighted as part of the conclusions. Similarly, recommendations are given based on the findings from the study.

#### Summary of Findings

The study is made to achieve the following objectives: (i), trace the development of Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano (ii), examine the art works in the mosques within the context of aesthetics (iii), identify the artists commissioned to execute the art works, iv, describe in details and document the art works and (v), Identify and discuss the styles employed in the Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano. Sequel to its role in recording the words of *Allah*, calligraphy is considered as one of the important aspects of Islamic arts. Nearly all Islamic buildings especially mosques, have some types of surface inscription in stone, stucco, marble, mosaic and or painting. The inscription might be a verse from the *Qur'an*, lines of poetry or names and dates. An inscription might be contained in a single panel. Sometimes single words such as *Allah* or Muhammad (P.B.U.H) are repeated and arranged into patterns over the entire surface of the walls. The scope of the study was the eight local government areas that constitute the metropolis. In view of the large number of mosques in these areas, the study was further delimited to Friday mosques. Initially, the researcher wanted to study the religious function of the Arabic

calligraphic embellishment, but because of the religious sensitivity of it, the study was limited to the aesthetic aspect.

The study benefited from the review of several related works including, Larkin (1974), Otite and Ogionwo (1994), Sharman (1975), Peter (1978), Dawani (2002), Nasruddin (2004), Schwerdtfeger (2007), Schulze (2010) and Kristyan (2013). For instance, in the review Peter (1978) traced the making of West African Muslim community over a period of some twelve hundred years, beginning with West African's first contacts with Islam in the eight century A.D and concluding with a study of the contemporary situation. Basically, the following research procedures were adopted: qualitative and historical. The qualitative method was adopted because it describes social phenomena or events as they occur to individuals in particular or to culture in general. Through historical method, the researcher was able to establish an in-depth knowledge of how Arabic calligraphic embellishment began to appear on mosques in Kano, and also how they were artistically executed. The purposive sampling was used for the sampling.

In this research, various instruments were used in obtaining data; these included the use of interview and questionnaires. Similarly, a multi-purpose digital camera was used in recording the Arabic calligraphic embellishment of some of the mosques visited; both the interior and exterior parts of the mosques' walls were captured. Other research instruments included laptop; the laptop was used in processing the data obtained from the questionnaires. In the analysis of data, the researcher adopted Feldman's (1970) recommendations on the steps to be taken in any scholarly discussion on art. Here, the steps taken included the description, formal analysis, interpretation and judgment.

## Discussions

The discussion of the artworks is also based on the objectives of the study. The study traced the usage of Arabic calligraphy for embellishment purpose of mosques in Kano in Shatsari. The study discovered one of the ancient mosques found in this area (Shatsari Quarters) in Dala Local Government Area, a location close to Dala Hill, the earliest settlement of Kano. The Friday mosque was built by Arab merchants and Islamic scholars from the present day Libya. Although the mosque is presently under the custody of some Mallams in the quarters, it is renovated by the Libyans from time to time. Other areas where the early Friday mosques were found include Madabo, Mandadan, Galadanci, Wudilawa and Sharifai.

Based on objective two of the study, it was discovered that one of the main reasons why mosques are embellished was to bring Arabic writing into higher level of visual expression, in other words it makes it artistic, hence the stylistic rendition of Arabic calligraphy creates visual expression in the work. The portrayal of Arabic calligraphic inscriptions of *Qur'anic* verses and other words of wisdom on the wall of mosques can be seen as having a strong religious significance.

Surprisingly, despite the visual expression created by the Arabic calligraphy, the Imam of Murtala Muhammad Friday mosque, Uztaz Kabiru Badamasi Dantaura told the researcher during field work that he was not aware of any Arabic calligraphic embellishment in the interior of the mosque. The Imam was actually ignorant of these embellishments because, they were made at the rear of the mosque and on the decking. Besides, the Imam usually enters the mosque from the front to carries out his religious duties at the front.

Aesthetic is about beauty and appreciating what is beautiful, therefore the aesthetic in Arabic writing lies in either the verse, praise, information, or

immortalization of the word, similarly, aesthetic is also accompanied in the flow of lines, that is, continuum of ascending vertical/horizontal lines as well as the structure of the design and colouring. In essence, the colour composition which provokes the imagination by the splendor pleases the eye and addresses the deeper feelings of the onlooker. Apparently, some colours are used more often than others because they reinforce the effect of the decorative composition, and create a unique attention intended by the artist. Red and orange, for example, are associated with fire and the sun and may therefore be used to suggest warmth and heat. Shades of green and blue by contrast, are associated with cold lunar development and may be used to suggest cold. If the artist decides to combine all the colours in one design, the effect will be that of skillful succession that suggests a sense of dynamism and remarkable luster.

In the stated objective three of the study, it was discovered that the identified artists commissioned to execute the embellishment are either artisans, who have learnt the art through apprenticeship system from their parents and experienced/skilled artisans or have acquired art skills and technical knowhow in conventional art schools. That is Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Universities that offer art courses.

In view of the stated objective four of the study, it was discovered that due to the constant renovation of some Friday mosques by the present administration of Governor Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso in the studied areas, some of the Arabic calligraphic embellishments are smeared with paint leaving no traces of their former beauty or documentation of such. In view of the issue of non-documentation of the artworks, the researcher documented the Arabic calligraphic embellishment of some Friday mosques in Kano metropolis through this study for posterity.

On the aspect of styles, in line with objective five, the study identified six major Arabic styles used in the calligraphic embellishment of Friday mosques in Kano. The

major six styles are *Kufic, Farsi, Nasakh, Thuluth, Riq'a and Diwani*. Out of these six, the study found out that only three: *Kufic, Farsi and Nasakh* were frequently used by the Arabic calligraphers. The Arabic calligraphers claimed that the three styles are friendly to manipulate and easier to read by the viewers.

## **Findings**

The findings exposed that in Kano, it was Muslim scholars who initiated the idea of using Arabic calligraphic writing to embellish the mosques as well as their houses. From the investigation carried out on the aesthetics of calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano, Nigeria it was established that the artists who were commissioned to do the embellishment with Arabic calligraphy on walls of mosques were art inclined. In other words, they were artisans who have acquired the art skills through apprenticeship system, while others have attained art training and acquired Diploma, National Certificate of Education or Degree certificates respectively. The function of the artists is that they add an artistic element to the characters of the writings, one that may express a particular feeling in keeping with the meaning of the words. Furthermore, the findings revealed that it was not only men that do the embellishment; women were also commissioned to embellish walls of mosques. One of such examples of the women's work can be found on appendix IV, pages 164 and 165 respectively. Others can also be found in Buba Marwa's<sup>52</sup> resident in Kaduna, Nepa (now PHCN) Headquarters Abuja and in a private resident in Jabi road, also in Kaduna. Besides, the artists had also acquired some level of Islamic/*Qur'anic* knowledge.

Surprisingly, one Muhammad Sani (a calligrapher) of Tarauni Quarters in Kano, one of the Local Government Areas studied, told the researcher that in most cases, he was not commissioned by anyone to embellish the walls of mosque. Rather, he did so out of sheer interest, and willingly stenciled a desired verse from the Holy *Qur'an* on

cardboard sheets and later transferred them onto the walls using dabbing technique. He also claimed that nobody had ever faulted or queried him for that. Another calligrapher, Gausu Nuhu Wali of Municipal Local Government Area also executed such kind of embellishment on mosque walls with Arabic calligraphy for gratis. Sometimes Gausu do receive commissions and charge for the services. On the contrary, Kaltume Bulama Gana (of Nassarawa Local Government Area) does her Arabic calligraphic embellishment based on commission in company of Ali Bature (now late).

Another discovery made by the study was that, some of the artists who executed these works seldom signed them, and in most cases the artists could not be traced. In view of this set back, it therefore meant that the inability to identify the artists also meant the inability to establish the date of production of the works. The study discovered that virtually all the Friday mosques visited were built along the major roads of each Local Government Area. The major reason given was the availability of space, but it is the opinion of the researcher that the reason is probably because it is expected to draw the attention of those who ply the roads. Similarly, the study discovered that not all the Friday mosques have Arabic calligraphy for embellishment purpose due to religious group interest, the Tijjaniyya and Qadiriyya religious interest groups are famous in this regard.

It was also the finding of this research that there has been no major change or development in Arabic calligraphy, except the development of new styles in painting using digital media and incorporating calligraphy instead of the manual type of pattern design. Also, it appears that the art of Arabic calligraphy gained more prominence in the twentieth century A.D especially with the coming of computer. With a click of the mouse or finger tip, a list of various scripts are generated electronically and utilized.

From the reviews on Arabic calligraphy, it was established that there are different styles of Arabic calligraphy and the stylistic tendencies developed over time into formal scripts. *Ibn Muglah*, the foremost master Arabic calligrapher is reputed for inventing the cursive style of Arabic lettering, the *Naskh* script which eventually replaced the angular *Kufic* as the standard of Arabic calligraphy. The earliest *Qur'an* is also said to have been written with the *Kufic* script. The study also established that *ibn Muglah's* contemporaries, particularly *Al-Bawwab* also adopted same style, but later modified it. *Al-baba* (1964) writes that “each script has distinctive shape and characteristic. The scripts were used for different purposes. Some scripts were used to write the Holy *Qur'an*, while others were used for court documents”. It is imperative to write that the initial scripts used in writing the *Qur'an* was the *Kufic*. *Kristyan* (2012) adds that “the first copies of the *Qur'an* were written in *Kufic* styles. Others include *Thuluth* and *Naskh*.”

*Nasruddin* (2004) reveals that “*Kufic* was developed in the Middle East, probably in Baghdad. Other probable scripts developed far to the West, in Muslim world ruled Spain or Morocco. In other words, the scripts are developed in southern Spain and northern Africa. The script is used in writing the Holy *Qur'an*”. The Arabic name given to this type of script is called *al-Maghreb*, but it is popularly known as *Maghribi*, and it was basically used in writing the type of *Qur'an* found in this region. By and large, the type of Arabic calligraphic style used in Kano by the calligraphers had infirmity with the tradition of calligraphic writing. For instance, the adoption of *Kufic* (plain and foliated), *Naskh*, *Thuluth* and *Farsi* styles used by the earliest masters was also followed. However, the calligraphers in Kano have equally followed and built upon these tendencies, but with slight modification (adding personal style) on few occasions when commissioned to embellish the mosque.

Oloidi (1981) in Gutip (1998), states that “documentation in art is a primary pre-requisite for harmonious co-existence especially for developing societies. Through documenting artists and their works, socio-cultural, socio-historical, and socio-political objectives and achievements could properly be articulated, and in the process, help to maintain proper historical perspective”. In view of the importance of documentation particularly in visual art, the researcher documented the Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano, Nigeria for posterity. Some of the documented calligraphic ornamentations were done in mural, engraving, frames and panel forms. On the aspect of style, the research findings showed that the artists employed one or more design patterns, and the design patterns range from single to multiple embellishments of the *Qur’anic* verses, pious names, depending also on the choice of the artists. The specific calligraphic styles that are dominant in terms of usage by the calligraphers are Kufic, *Farsi* and *Nasakh*. The reason for this is not far-fetched: the Arabic styles are easily read and the calligraphers prefer using them because, according to some of the calligraphers interviewed during field work, the three styles are flexible to manipulate.

## **Recommendations**

This study on the aesthetics of Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano, Nigeria has brought to limelight the visual excitement of this art form within the context of aesthetics in certain mosques. Owing to the limitation of the study, it will be imperative for other scholars to research on the religious context of Arabic calligraphic embellishment. By so doing, the theological and aesthetical aspects of Arabic Calligraphy will be better understood and appreciated. In addition to this, art students should endeavour to learn and specialize in Arabic calligraphy. By the time they learn, perfect this noble profession and become Arabic calligraphers, they can make money from teaching the art of Arabic calligraphy and commissions for the embellishment, the

end result of which could lead them to self-reliance as employment generation has remained a focal point in the Nigerian Government Policy. It is also recommended that a comprehensive database of all the non-Arabic speaking Muslim calligraphers be made. This is because the researcher discovered, during field work, that there are quite a number of Arabic calligraphers scattered around the area studied.

The study observed that, the bulk of authors on Islamic art are Europeans, it is therefore recommended that indigenous writers, with vast *Qur'anic* and Islamic knowledge should venture into this endeavour so as to neutralize the European dominance and strike a balance in this regard. To achieve this, Islamic Foundations and other Organizations and individuals should provide grants to those interested in Arabic calligraphy as incentive. The study further recommends that studies on Arabic calligraphic embellishment be carried out on mosques other than that of Friday mosque. This will help to establish whether the Arabic calligraphic designs on them are significantly different from those of Friday mosques within Kano metropolis as they also have beautifully embellished Arabic designs on the walls. Lastly, since the present administration of Engineer Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso is giving so much priority to religious affairs, it is recommended that the History and Culture Bureau (HCB), Kano should also document such artistic and aesthetic elements of Arabic calligraphy owing to the constant renovation of Friday mosques being carried out in the process of which the existing artworks are usually smeared<sup>53</sup>, with no record of such.

## Notes

1. Barau (2006:13) gives an account of the high population in Kano as a result of availability of some basic or primary needs humans cannot do without.
2. Within the context of this study, “functional” means “practical/useful” apart from artistic value or attractiveness.
3. In this study, the term “artistic” has been confined to the beautiful expressions of ideas in visual form.
4. According to Cyril, (2005:467) *Umayyad* is the first dynasty of Islam which began with the reign of Muawiyah in 661 and ended with that of Morwan II in 750 A.D.
5. Eric (2008:1) reveals that Suleimaniye mosque is the largest mosque in Istanbul Turkey. It is one of the best examples of Ottoman architectures built by order of Sulaiman I, after whom it is named the mosque symbolizes the strength and power of the Turkish Mediterranean state known as Ottoman Empire.
6. Muhammad (2009:3) in one of his lectures for the 400 level students of archeology, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria cites some mosques in parts of West Africa which are aesthetically appealing to view.
7. Doi, A.I (1984:109-192) states this while emphasizing the types of motifs used in embellishing the interior of mosques for decorative purpose.
8. Cyril (2005:308) reveals that *Mihrab* is a niche in the wall of a mosque to indicate the *qiblah*, the direction of Mecca, towards which all Muslims turn in prayer. It also provides a reflecting surface so that the voice of the Imam is clearly heard by those behind him.
9. The direction the Muslims face when performing the salat toward the Ka’abah in Makkah.
10. The large cubic stone structure, covered with black cloth, which stands in the center of the grand mosque in Makkah.
11. Cyril (2005:309) states that Minbah (also written and pronounced Mimbah) is a pulpit in a mosque used by the Imam for preaching the Friday sermon (*khutbah*). It is actually a movable staircase.
12. The name Zaria is used to denote the capital city of the kingdoms formally called Zazzau or Zegzeg. It is a historic kingdom and traditional emirate. Zaria is known for its ancient dye-pits and wall decoration which can be found in the Emir’s Palace. Others can be found in private buildings (traditional and modern), the ancient Friday mosque inclusive.

13. Arabic language that literally means son of Tulun
14. Sadiq, Abubakar Nayaya (1997) argues that the name Hausa does not denote a particular people but refer to all these people who speak Hausa language as their mother tongue and who live in the area known as Hausa land. In Kano, these also include the settled Fulani who after their conquest of the old Habe and Maguzawa settled down there.
15. For more detail explanation on this, see Madden, E.H. (1975) ‘‘Some Characteristics of Islamic Art’’ in The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Summer Vol.33, No.4
16. Barau (2006) discloses that according to Kano chronicles, around 900 AD, an influx of people (foreigners) took place mainly from the outside Kano and later as far away as Baghdad. Other foreigners are Chinese, Malays, Indonesians, Djerma, Tuaregs, Shuwa Arabs, Ghanaians, Europeans and Yemenis to mention just a few.
17. Banjoko (2000:3) explains that craft is as old as art, but the lower status accorded crafts is as a result of its nature, the less skill it requires. Craft varies from one culture to another but it is not as modern as art. The practice of craft is relevant to the culture of the people and because it serves the domestic and utility needs of the people, it has its localization. Perhaps, a time will come when craft will be internationally standardized.
18. Kofoworola and Lateef (1987: VI) classify different art forms practiced by the Hausa with emphasis on the traditional setting.
19. During an academic discussion on global arts and artists, Gausu Nuhu Wali (2008) a former colleague at Kano State Polytechnic reports that modernity and or modernization did not take place overnight. It is a process that has been going on for two centuries or so, and is still going on presently. Perhaps, it will continue tomorrow or next.
20. Vildan (2007:82) sees inscription within the context of his article titled ‘The Art of Writing’ as writing that is made by carving, engraving or making relief on marble, stone, wood, tile or metal slabs (pieces) on inner or outer walls of buildings.
21. On Sunday the 3rd of January, 2010, in Kano, the researcher observed his Magrib prayer in a mosque built by a prominent personality Miko Abdallah (now deceased). The mosque was renovated by a philanthropist; therefore both the interior and exterior parts of the mosque were repainted. To the utmost surprise of the researcher, the Arabic calligraphic inscriptions that once embellished the interior walls were no longer there. What were left hanging on the interior walls were only two frames: one bearing ‘‘Allah is Great’’ and the other ‘‘*Suratul Fatiha*’’. A good example of this assertion can be seen in Kaltume Dawani’s undergraduate project (2002) titled ‘‘The Concept of Design on Islamic Architecture in Kano Metropolis pp. 30-31’’ plates XIII-XVI.

22. Muhammad (2010) gives a vivid account of such state of dilapidation when he reveals that it can be seen on the relief inscriptions of Arabic calligraphy found in Bashir Tofa's mosque, built in his personal house at Gandun Albasa, Kano. Similarly, the once vivid colourful painting of this inscription had equally faded due to harsh weather.
23. Oloidi (1981:9) describes documentation in art as a primary prerequisite for harmonious co-existence especially for developing societies. Through documenting artists and their artworks, socio-cultural, socio-historical and socio-political objectives could probably be articulated and in the process help to maintain proper historical perspective. Only by documenting her art forms can Nigerian cultures be preserved and a truly national identity is forged out of her heterogeneous cultures.
24. Within the context of this study, self-reliance could mean self-supporting and independent, that is to say one's efforts to meet one's needs and wants.
25. No sooner the researcher finished presenting his first Doctoral seminar proposal on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2011, when one of the audiences reacted emotionally and cautioned that the researcher has no business with his second and third objectives. Unfortunately, he gave no alternative objectives to be adopted in other to aid the research work.
26. Abdallah (2004) while shedding more light on the issue of globalization and technological development avers that due to the availability of the internet, one can find thousands of relevant sources of information in a short space of time. The internet is a recent and valuable medium for academic research in many fields.
- 27 The second dynasty of the Islamic Empire which succeeded the Umayyad.
- 28 The dynasty that founded Cairo as a capital and which ruled an empire extending from Palestine to Tunisia. The Fatimid's rulers called themselves Caliphs, thus laying claim to supreme political and spiritual authority in Islam in rivalry to the Abbasids of Bagdad.
- 29 Also known as Osmanlis, they were a clan of the Ghuzz (Ogluz) branch of Turks, descended from a chief of the seventh/thirteenth century A.D called Ertoghrul, whose, whose son Uthman (alternate spelling are Othman, Osman and Usman). See Cyril (2005) the concise encyclopedia of Islam P.349
31. Madabo, named after one of the wards where the early Islamic learning in Kano took place. That was probably why Madabo is always referred to as center of learning.
32. Sarki Yaji (1349-1385) whose real name is Ali was so called "Yaji" due to his hot temper as a child. "Yaji" in Hausa language means pepper.
- 33 Muzammil Saddiqi was the President of the Islamic Society of North Africa (ISNA). He had the opportunity to go inside the *Ka'abah* in October 1998 and

describes what he saw of the interior ornamentation. For further details, see <http://www.ka'abahinfo.net>

- 34 The great Ottoman architect during the sixteenth century A.D, Sinan describes how and why the Suleimaniye mosque was decorated with verses and other texts.
- 35 A military corps made up of slaves originally from beyond the Islamic domains and non-Muslims who were converted as youths. They were raised to be soldiers with loyalty to a single chief.
- 36 A derivative of the name Muntaz Mahal, the favourite wife of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. Muntaz Mahal, whose name means ‘chosen one of the palace’, had been more than the emperor’s wife. Indeed, Shah Jahan had a number of wives, but Muntaz Mahal was his favourite. She was the best friend and his most trusted political adviser.
- 37 City within the context of this study refers to the eight Local Government Areas that make up the areas understudied, the areas understudied are also called metropolis
- 38 An ornamented variant which is highly admired to this day is characterized by large geometric shapes created by small, delicate ornaments which fill the gaps between the letters and words. It was used for long names and the titles of the sultans.
- 39 Imam (singular), Imams (plural) an Imam is the leader in prayer, for a particular occasion or as a regular function. He leads by standing in front of rows of worshippers, if only two persons are praying, the Imam stands to the left, and slightly in front, of the other. Every mosque has one or more Imams who lead prayers, in whose absence any suitable male may be Imam. Imam is also a title, perhaps, in addition to other titles, of the head of a community or group.
- 40 This tallies with the statement made by the Chief Imam of Sharada Friday mosque, Sheikh Baharah Abdulrahman during field work that the writing reminds one to remember the infinity of *Allah* and makes one to be remorseful. Similar view was expressed by Mallam Gausu Nuhu Wali that the writing gives peace of mind and serves as a kind of preaching and makes him contemplate and come close to *Allah*. He also confessed that the writing gives beauty and dignity to the building.
- 41 Colour like purple is obtained from the bark of ‘Bagaruwa’ (Acacia Tree). It is obtained and soaked in water for about two months. It is then boiled and sieved. While red colour is obtained from ‘Dinya’ (Black plum or its fruit) and fresh leaves is also boiled and sieved. Besides the colour, it has a sting of fragrance.
- 42 This is one of the commonest word /Arabic letter that is frequently used for embellishment in mosques as well as living homes. It is obvious that the

rendition of the word may vary due to the artist's style or the person who commissions the work.

43 Cyril (2005:43) reveals that the Name of *Allah* is not confined to Islam alone. It is also the Name by which Arabic-speaking Christians of the Oriental churches call upon God. When written, the Name is usually followed by the formula 'Azza WA Jall ('Great and Majestic') or by *Jalla Jalaaluhu* ('Great is His Majesty'). The *Al-Qur'an* speaks of God in innumerable verses of great beauty and penetration.

44 The sword is an important symbol to the Arabs, it appears in their emblem and it is held with high esteem.

45 This has further justified the study as the previous Arabic calligraphic ornamentation is not documented. In this regard one cannot be in a position to know how it looks like or appreciate the stylistic rendition or colour used for the artwork.

46 During the course of interview with the artist, he revealed that Sheikh Isiyaka Rabi'u was his major patron and he was presently building a house (one story building). So far, he has spent over five hundred thousand naira for the decking alone. Mu'azzam frowns at any civil/public servant's job, because of the amount he gets from commissioned works. Surprisingly, Mu'azzam doesn't have any apprentice as people from within his immediate environment prefer to trade. He only employed the services of some youths to help him execute any commissioned work and paid them off when the job was done. Some of his artworks can be located in places like Kano Emirate Council, Bayero University, some filling stations, factories and restaurants in Kano. Others include Senegal, Bauchi and Abuja.

47 In an interview with the researcher during fieldwork, the Chief Imam of Jami'u Maulana Sheikh Aliyu Harazimi Friday mosque, Uztaz Muhammad Auwal Badamasi explains that he was the one who commissions the artist, Muhammad Mu'azzam to carry out the Arabic ornamentation of the mosque. Uztaz Muhammad Auwal Badamasi also states that he paid Mu'azzam the sum of seventy thousand naira (#70,000.00) for the labour. Luckily enough, Uztaz Badamasi has acquired western education and attained up to University (Bayero Kano) level and graduated in 1985.

48 Saliu (2015:3) states that unity can be defined as the state or quality of being one. Visuals Arts describes unity as the arrangement of the elements in a work of art in accordance with the single overall design or purpose. The following quotation broadly describes the unity from two perspectives: 'All for one, one for all' (Alexandre Dumas. *The Three Musketeers*) and 'by uniting we stand, by dividing we fall' (John Dickinson, *The Pat ruts' Appeal*).

49 Ibid (2013)

50 Kaltume is the Curator, National Gallery of Art, Kano Liaison office. She also happens to be one of the female Arabic Calligraphers within the studied area.

Kaltume had her conventional art training at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and obtained her Bachelor of Arts Degree, specializing in painting. She also had her M.F.A (Painting in 1989). For an elaborate discussion on Kaltume Bulama Gana, refer to Muhammad Aliyu's thesis titled 'A Study of Kaltume Bulama Gana's Artworks and Her Contributions to Contemporary Nigerian Art (1994-2004).

51 Tofa is one of the forty four Local Government Areas which constitutes Kano State. So named after this area, Alhaji Umar Tofa is one of the popular and highly placed business men in Kano; he also holds a traditional title: 'Dan Adalan Kano in Kano Emirate Council.

52 A one-time military administrator in Lagos state

53. When the researcher went back to Tokarawa Friday mosque on Friday 7 November 2014 to take photograph of the main mosque as suggested by the supervisory committee after the defense. It was realized that the Arabic calligraphy (Plate XXVII), had been smeared (see appendix VII, page 167) with white paint due to the renovation of the mosque by Kano State Government about three months earlier. It was also defaced with probably a political poster.

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## APPENDIX I

### RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGNED FOR MALLAMS WITHIN THE METROPOLIS

Assalamu alaikum Mallam, the researcher is a postgraduate student of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, undertaking a study of the aesthetics of Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano, Nigeria. Kindly offer necessary assistance by providing useful information on the topic. Information provided will be considered confidential and used only for the purpose of this study.

1. When did the Arabic calligraphic ornamentation start in Kano?
2. Who were the originators of this ornamentation?
3. Which area did this ornamentation start in Kano?
4. What materials were used for the mosque wall's ornamentation?
5. Have there been any changes in these materials?
6. Who are the artists that do this ornamentation?
7. Do you think this ornamentation adds to the beauty of a mosque?
8. Does the ornamentation mean anything to you?
9. What other functions do you think it plays in the mosque, if any?
10. Please, give specific examples, of such functions
11. If it does not, what do you think is responsible for that?

## APPENDIX II

### RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGNED FOR CALLIGRAPHERS WITHIN THE METROPOLIS

Assalamu alaikum, the researcher is a postgraduate student of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, undertaking a study of the aesthetics of Arabic calligraphic embellishment of mosques in Kano, Nigeria. Kindly offer necessary assistance by providing useful information on the topic. Information provided will be considered confidential and used only for the purpose of this study.

1. Who brought this type of ornamentation to Kano, and from where?
2. When did it come to Kano?
3. How did you come about doing this form of art?
4. Can anybody do it?
5. For how long have you been practising this art?
6. What determines the design that you do in the mosque?
7. Are the colours used in the design significant?
8. If yes in the above, what are the significance?
9. What part of the mosque do you often ornament?
10. Are the designs in the inner/outer parts of the mosque walls the same or different?
11. If there are differences, what are they?
12. Do the designs mean anything?
13. If yes, please give some examples of such meanings.
14. How many types of Arabic calligraphic styles do you know?
15. Which of them do you often use?
16. Why do you often use it?

### APPENDIX III

#### INTERVIEWS HELD WITH MALLAMS/ IMAMS WITHIN KANO METROPOLIS



The researcher is seen jotting down answers given while conducting interview with Mallam Muhammad Rabi'u, on Tuesday, 25 October, 2012 in Nassarawa Local Government Area, Kano.



Uztaz Kabiru Badamasi Dantaura, the Chief Imam of Murtala Muhammad National Friday mosque, responding to questions in his guest parlour, within the mosque compound in Kumbotso Local Government Area, Kano on Sunday 1st September, 2013.



The Chief Imam of Jami'u Maulana Sheikh Aliyu Harazimi Friday mosque Mallam Muhammad Auwwal Badamasi answering questions in the mosque's premises in Ungogo Local Government Area, on Sunday 1 September, 2013.



Mallam Sha'aibu Ali the senior Mallam of Shabbabul Friday mosque Hadejia Road, Nassarawa Local Government Area in an interview session with the researcher in the mosques Premises, on Saturday 21 September, 2013.

## APPENDIX IV

### INTERVIEWS HELD WITH ARTISTS IN KANO METROPOLIS



Gausu Nuhu Wali, one of the artist within Municipal Local Government Area in an interview session with The resaercher at School of Technology, Kano State Polytechnic on Wednesday, 2 January, 2013.



Auwalu Adamu, one of the artist within Dala Local Government Area in an interview session with The resaercher on Wednesday, 2 January, 2012.



The researcher is seen going through some photographs of artworks executed by the artist while conducting interview with Mu'azam in his shop located at Kofar Mata (Zango) in Municipal Local Government Area, Kano on Tuesday, 3 September, 2013.



Aminu Isma'il Arabic calligrapher with the researcher during an interview session in Brigade quarters on Sunday, 4 January, 2015.



Kaltume Bulama Gana, a female Arabic calligrapher with the researcher in her office along Ahmadu Bello Way, Nassarawa Local Government Area, Kano during an interview session on Wednesday, 4 September, 2013.

## APPENDIX V

### FEMALE ARTIST EXECUTING A COMMISSIONED ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY IN A CERTAIN MOSQUE



Kaltume Bulama Gana, a female Arabic calligrapher embellishing one of the commissioned mosque.



Kaltume Bulama Gana, a female Arabic calligrapher posed before a finished work Umar Farouk Friday Mosque Nassarawa Kano.

## APPENDIX VI

### INTERVIEW HELD WITH AN ART ENTHUSIAST IN KANO METROPOLIS



Mallam Dalhat Yusuf Chiranci, Arabic Calligraphic Enthusiast answering Questions posed by the researcher on Wednesday 2 January 2013.



The researcher poses with Mallam Baba, on Tuesday, 25 October, 2012 in Shatsari, Dala Local Government Area, Kano.

## APPENDIX VII

### OTHER ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY FOUND IN CERTAIN FRIDAY MOSQUES WITHIN KANO METROPOLIS.



Sheikh Ahmed Tijjaniyya Friday mosque, Municipal Local  
Government Area Kano



Mil Tara Friday mosque, Ungogo Local Government Area,  
Kano



Kanzu Friday mosque, Dala Local Government Area



Ali Ibn Abi Talib Friday Juma'at Mosque, Tarauni  
Local Government Area. Also see Plate V(a) page 78  
for similar Arabic calligraphy.



Noman's land Friday mosque, Fagge Local Government, Kano.



Abubakar Mas'ud Friday mosque, Tarauni Local Government Area Kano

**APPENDIX VIII**  
**SMEARED/DEFACED ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY**



Tokarawa Friday mosque, Nassarawa Local Government Area (the smeared and defaced Arabic calligraphy found in Plate XXVII(a) page 129.