Arabic Oral Literature and its Types

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction
Oral literature is a part of “folklore”. The word folklore includes words “folk” and “lore”, and refers to “common knowledge”. It also deals with aesthetic aspects present in works of common culture. As a virtue, this term asserts the functional kinship between the written and spoken worlds in which artistic applications of the human language are divided.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review
In the Arabic language, the term “Tirath al-Sha’abi” refers to common knowledge which involves a vast knowledge that encompasses folk literature, i.e. “al-Adab al-Sha’abi”. Another term in this field is “al-Adab al-Darij” which refers to “popular literature”. This term is accurately selected since it deals with the oral literature audience. It also points out the language used in these works, which includes local language, i.e. “al-loqah al-Darijah”. In this study, oral, common, or popular literature are regarded as equivalents. The only difference is that each of these terms focus on a particular aspect in this literature; oral literature deals with the oral transmission of information, while common literature is focused on the author and origin, and popular literature pays attention to the audience. The term “folklore” was first used in 1846 by the British researcher, William Thomas. Since then, the term was globally accepted. This term deals with the side of the culture that is defined against formal culture; yet, its scope and domain is very extensive. In the field of literature, the term oral literature is much more efficient. The term “oral literature” was used since the beginning of the 20th century. However, it bears a more particular concept compared to folklore. In the field of Arabic literature, oral literature did not flourish during the Umayyad era. In that era, the most prominent form of poetry was ode (qasida); Arab poets of the time would incorporate their poetic concepts, ranging from epics, hymns, and eulogies to descriptions of separation and departure, in the form of odes. The most significant advocate of the Arabic language and literature, the Umayyad caliphate, considerably asserted the conservation of the Arabic dignity, insisting on how this language should not be integrated with other inferior languages. Nevertheless, the beginning of the Abbasid era brought about the emergence of folk literature, while the collapse of this caliphate led to the expansion and flourishing of this type of literature. As the Abbasid caliphate came to an end, its formal and powerful genre of literature, i.e. odes,

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lost its main advocate, paving the way for the prominence of other genres, particularly oral literature. Subsequently, the Arabic oral literature can be classified into two parts: since 132 to 656, and 656 to the current era (Nak. Alkhaleli, 2010: 49, 57). Since the 7th century, the Arabic literature was significantly oriented towards applying various types of folk poetry other than odes such as al-Dubait, Mawaliyah, and Zajal (al-Rafei, 2001). There are numerous examples of this type of poetry in books such as Wafi al-Wafiyat.

3. Method
The present descriptive-analytical study seeks to provide an appropriate answers to the research question: what are the causes behind the emergence and growth of the Arabic oral literature, as well as examining the literary genres in this type of literature? The causes include: urbanization and familiarity with the literature of other nations, the collapse of the Abbasid caliphate, the reign of Musha'sha'iyyah, different historical and geographical contexts, familiarity with the West, religion and ideology, music and singing, books and publications, cultural institutions, and manpower.

Oral literature genres include classic forms such as poetry, Muwashshah, al-Dubait, Zajal, Qoumah, Makan, and Mawwal. New forms of poetry include long poems such as Murabba’a, Andalusian Muwashshah, Amoudi, Rajodi, and new poetry. Short forms of poetry include short poems of the second branch of new poetry. This type of poems are mostly Do-bayti, and can be classified into two groups, including congruent and incongruent rhymes: the former includes Abuziah, Maimer, Haat, and Attab. The latter group with incongruent rhymes include Nael, Daremi, Houwsah, and Choubiyah.

4. Results and Discussion
In this paper, factors including caliphate, the reign of Musha'sha'iyyah, different historical and geographical contexts of Arab countries, and nationalism were investigated. Furthermore, various genres of Arabic oral literature, classic forms of Arabic oral literature such as Mawaliyah and Zajal, new forms such as Murabba’a, folk Muwashshah, short poetry, different types such as Hada’a and Rukbaniyah, and others were examined. Also for the first time, a novel classification of Arabic oral literature is presented in this study. Finally, it was concluded that the Arabic oral literature involves three important historical periods that constitute three stages during which this type of literature was emerged.

5. Conclusion
Given the examinations carried out in this study, it can be concluded that the emergence and growth of Arabic oral literature involved three stages; in the first stage, the Arabic literature was introduced to other cultures and civilizations such as Iran and Andalusia. In this era, the emergence of various literary types can be observed for the first time such as al-dubait, Mawaliyah, and Zajal. The second stage took place during the 7th century when the central caliphate was collapsed. In that period, oral genres quickly became pervasive, reaching different Islamic lands through commercial caravans and narrators. The third stage began since the 9th century during the reign of Musha'sha'iyyah in Khuzestan and reached its peak in the 11th century. This is the period where Persian and Arabic literature were combined. In the Musha'sha'iyyah era, poets became familiar with Persian literature through various means such as understanding the Persian language, religious and political
commonalities, and geographical adjacency which resulted in a number of innovations in
Arabic folk literature; these innovations included reciting Mawaliyah in new structures,
presence of Attab poetry, and Abuzyiah recitation.

Keywords: Arabic Oral Literature, Different Arabic Oral Types, Folklore

References (In Persian)


References (In Arabic)


