TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

ARABIC LITERATURE: POETICS AND STYLISTICS. II: TO THE PROBLEM OF CORRELATION OF THE TRADITIONAL AND THE ORIGINAL IN MEDIEVAL POETICS (ABOUT “IMITATION” IN CLASSICAL LITERATURES OF THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST)

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Modern readers, who mostly base their idea of literature on their knowledge of the works by 19th—20th centuries’ writers may be astounded by the variety of the types of “imitation” and the role which they played in the medieval literature of the Near and Middle East. Even specialists on medieval literature have long been puzzled as in this occasion they came across a peculiar phenomenon in the history of world literature which required special explanation. In this article we will try to characterize this phenomenon in the historical-poetic aspect.

First of all we should say a few words about the most common terms to define “imitations”. Medieval theorists of literature distinguished jawāb (literary “response”), tataubbū (literary “following”), naẓīra (literary “resemblance”), istiqbāl (literary “entry for an honorary meeting”), tawqil (imitation), payrawi (literary “following in somebody’s tracks”), maqābil (literary “going towards”) etc., over ten terms altogether. However, the first three were used most widely. As contents of these terms in trustworthy works in Arabic, Persian, Turkic languages and Urdu can not be defined exactly, we can not be sure about the boundaries of the phenomena they describe. However, we are now concerned with the essence of this phenomenon rather than its definitions and its characteristic features which can be found in most types of “imitation”.

If a work is an imitation of a lyrical work, it should repeat the metre, the rhyme, the radif (if there is any), most often the topic and an artistic technique (ghazal, rubā‘ī, qasīda). If the subject of an “imitation” is a narrative, the poetic meter, the main elements of the plot, the number of chapters etc. (mathnawi) should correspond to the original. According to E. E. Berteљs, the conditions for imitating an epic work are even more complicated than for poetry.

“When beginning to write such work, — the researcher says, — a poet should fill the gaps between the node points outlined in advance in a completely different way, he should introduce a new motivation for the characters’ actions, change their character and psychology” [1].

Not only separate epic works but also collections of works can be “imitated”. The most common example is the so-called “Quinter” (Khamsa) by Nizāmī (ca. 1141—1209) which had a centuries-long tradition of imitations. In the Near and Middle East imitations were often written on a language different from that of the “original” (for example, an “imitation” of a work in Persian was written in Turkic). Let us give some examples to illustrate this.

A famous panegyrist of the Muslim Spain Ibn Darrāj al-Qaṣṭālī (958—1030) wrote by request of the ruler al-Mansūr a qaṣīda which imitated a well-known work by an outstanding poet of the ‘Abbāsid period Abū Nūwās (ca. 755—ca. 813). The Andalusia poet repeats the rhyme, the meter and the main themes of his predecessor’s work. However, when interpreting the themes raised by Abū Nūwās, Ibn Darrāj usually develops them in more detail. As a result he coped with his task successfully and created a work which brought him wide popularity “in the East and in the West” [2].

A Persian poet from Isfahān Kamāl al-Dīn Ismā‘īl (ca. 1172/3—1237) created a unique work in which in 94 lines (bayts) he repeats the word mā (“a hair”) 102 times. The poets most important task, according to Z. N. Vorozhekina, was to use “all semantic ‘valencies’ of the given lexeme” by “creating dozens of poetic expressions based on the same word and skillfully playing it up in different word combinations, idioms and puns” [3]. The qaṣīda “Hair”, which is considered by specialists to be a poetic masterpiece, provoked a flow of “imitations”. However, none of his followers (including an outstanding poet Salmān Sāwajī) managed to create a poetic work which would meet all the requirements to a naẓīra [4].

An Indian Persian-speaking poet Fānā Kashmirī (d. 1670) wrote his poem Haft akhtār (“Seven Stars”) as an imitation of Haft peykar (“Seven Beauties”) by Nizāmī. The plotline of the original is altered; it lacks the characters of the hunter-king Bahārīr Gūr and the beauties-narrators. At the same time Fānā Kashmirī introduces into the poem seven independent stories etc. A certain independence of