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# **TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION**

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## **ARABIC LITERATURE: POETICS AND STYLISTICS. IV: MEDIEVAL ARABIC PANEGYRIC: TRADITION AND CREATIVE PERSONALITY**

Classical Arabic poetry refers to the traditionalistic type of art and, as a specific form of artistic creation, possesses its own peculiar features. Starting from the beginning of the 20th c., scientists have done a lot to explain what exactly makes it peculiar. However, most of their works have a sufficient drawback. The specifics of creative principles of medieval Arabic authors was assessed in them according to the norms of the European literature poetics of the 19th—20th c., which led to misunderstanding of medieval poetics and undervaluation of aesthetic importance of classical Arabic poetry.

In the interpretation of scholars of the first half of the 20th c., medieval canons were a burden for Arabic poets and limited their art: only the most outstanding authors could resist them. However, even their art looks like a “*la danse aux chaînes*” (the leitmotif of R. Blachère's book about a great Arabic poet al-Mutanabbī [1]). What concerns poets of average talent, they did not have a chance to create artistically valuable works and either imitated “old” authors, or created versifications which were technically perfect but of no aesthetic value.

According to this interpretation, all of the best examples of classical Arabic poetry were results of overcoming canons — works which were created against the principle of canons which lay at the core of creative activity of medieval Arabic authors. The weak point of the abovementioned interpretation is that it considers a whole creative system to be a defective one.

To define the specifics of a certain unfamiliar phenomenon it must be compared with a known phenomenon. This is what the researchers of the first half of the 20th c. did. However, their ideas about the peculiarities of classical Arabic poetry and its poetics were one-sided. They managed to show (and they were very convincing in that) that factors which make up aesthetic value of literary works of 19th—20th c. Europe do not work or are limited in classical Arabic literature. However, these scholars failed to make an opposed comparison necessary for a typologically correct description of a phenomenon. They did not ask themselves a question whether there were specific factors which were

different to the contemporary ones and which were capable of creating an artistic value in a literature based on canons.

It is necessary to make another preliminary remark. The incomprehension of classical Arabic poetry by scholars of the second half of the 19th—first half of the 20th c. is least of all incomprehension of an “exotic” culture by the Europeans, as sometimes specialists in Arabic studies of the older generation declare. It lies in incomprehension by the 19th—20th c. people of medieval culture on the whole (and Arabic-Muslim poetry as part of this culture). One can make certain of that if we look at what the Europeans said about their own medieval culture. More than a hundred years ago a coryphaeus of Provençal studies Friedrich Diez wrote a phrase which for a long time determined the attitude of researchers towards works of traditionalistic type: all old Provençal literature “can be taken for works by one poet” [2]. Such ideas were expressed by many first-rate researchers of the art of troubadours of the end of the 19th—beginning of the 20th c., as well as by specialists on other literatures of antiquity and the Middle Ages. As early as in the beginning of the 1920s—1930s it was fashionable among researchers to express regrets about little individual expressiveness and “naturalness” of many works created in the period of domination of traditionalistic creative consciousness.

The actuality of the question of one-sided approach to Arabic classical literature has become especially evident in the last four or five decades under the influence of the process of reconsideration of many historical, cultural and literary problems of the Middle Ages. As we do not have the possibility to discuss this subject in detail, we will only look at books on the medieval literature, and in them — at numerous works on medieval literatures' poetics and will distinguish in them two ideas which, in our opinion, are especially important for the understanding of the nature of medieval Arabic poetry.

According to the first one, canons in literature are results of a certain type of social consciousness, the existence of which was determined by many objective factors, and, as such, can not act as a limiting factor in the development of literature. They appear and act in the conditions of domina-