

PROBLEMS OF AUTHORSHIP IN CLASSICAL ARABIC LITERATURE

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Researches into the classical Arabic literature are inevitably connected with comprehension and identification of great number of authors. Till now Arabistic does not dispose of an exhaustive or nearly full index of authors notwithstanding efforts enterprised: the situation hardly having analogues in studies of the history of any other literature. Difficulty of embracing of all those, who wrote in Arabic consists in the fact that cataloguing of the manuscripts is still off the end, and that it is not always possible to ascertain the name of an author after a manuscript. But even the success in cataloguing of Arabic manuscripts all through the world will bring only a possibility to take down a list of title-page authors of the books which reached us. Besides that, more detailed study of texts reveal names of unknown authors.

In endeavours to understand and explain the greatness of numbers of Arab authors it does not suffice to remind the length of literary history on the vast territory, where Islam and the Arabic language were spread, the intensity of its development in certain periods, the prevalence of author's works over anonymous. The most essential circumstance consists obviously in the fact that the conditions of functioning of literature, ideology and sciences in the medieval Muslim society favoured the multiplicity of their agents, who endeavoured ambitiously to reserve their names for the progeny. It is to be taken into account at least the following: an aiming at possession of the knowledge was one of the most important value orientations in the system of Arab-Islamic culture¹; the sphere of literary activities enjoyed maximum of en-

¹ F. Rosenthal. *Knowledge triumphant. The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*. Leiden 1970. In Russian: Moscow: Nauka, 1978.

couragement and special preferences, compensating to some degree the restrained and weak development of fine arts; joining to the literary and scholarly activities was in practice a significant form of social stratification; there did not exist any legitimate formal restriction (of race or cast for example) on acquiring of knowledge, this rested on its turn upon the notion of equality of believers, the unity of Islamic community deprived of distinctions between laymen and clergy.

There was not elaborated in Arabic literature a generalizing term for designation of author as a person, who creates verbal works. An authorship or a literary propriety in most general form was expressed by usual linguistic means for designation of belonging – *status constructus*, or preposition *li-*, or rarely the word *ṣāhib* (of). Besides there exists a fairly developed nomenclature for designation of the literary work and workers, derived from the roots denoting “to say”, “to write”, “to gather”, “to compile”, “to comment”, “to possess” and others. But relations binding the names with texts, complete or fragmental, are not the same in reality, of no equal value.

Most characteristic for the Arabic literature in its early stage are works of twofold – may be permitted to say – authorship. Before being fixed in script the verbal works were current in oral sphere during some longer or shorter period and were transmitted in lifetime of generations again and again. It is important that an act of making and promulgating of certain work is separated in time and space from its fixation, irrespective of its belonging to folklore or to an author, and of its being preserved as unchangeable text or differently retold. Genuine creators, authors in true sense of the word, did not write their works. In majority they were illiterate but frequently having firm consciousness of being the author. Thanks to the writing down they entered into the Arabic literature as authors of some verses, speeches, tales, sayings, aphorisms, jokes, witty replies: they were cited and perceived as authors. Unfortunately one cannot always be sure of the truth of such authorship – names were forgotten and substituted unintentionally or deliberately for others, even for legendary ones.

Through a phase of oral transmission had gone many works of early Islamic period too. An appreciable space of time separates the pronouncing of *āyas* and *sūras* of al-Qur'ān from transformation of them into written *mushaf*, or *al-Kitāb*.

The writing philologist (or logographer - after R. Blachère) was not an initiator of verbal work. His efforts consisted of gathering, selection and arrangement of what was by somebody uttered, expressed in word, composed. He was just transferring a verbal work from oral sphere into written one, recording that, which was fixed in a system of sounding signs into a system of written signs. In the context of the cultural history the services rendered by a logographer are of high esteem and he may be recognized as second author: with him begins the written work, even when the text one hundred per cent belonged to other person. It was of his competence and mastering of two systems of signs that depended the stock and quality of texts, not to mention of his preserving the names of ancient authors. He fixed at times data on circumstances of composition, explained difficult words and phrases. Twofold authorship is inherent in the other large layer of early Arabic literature, the translated one. We may consider the translator as co-author of an Arabic version of the work. Translations introduced into Arabic literature a fair amount of foreign authors and names of those, whose dicta or opinions were cited in their works. At all probability foreign authors of this kind penetrated as well into Arabic books by medium of oral translations and retellings, which were afterwards written down.

The "logographical" method is not confined to the beginnings of Arabic literature, but remained productive in later periods. For instance, poets rarely made their verses putting them down immediately; *dīwāns* of poets were mostly cared for by educated philologists and admirers of poetry. Oral poetry was feeding the written Arabic literature during all historical periods. Beside poetry were written down speeches of politicians and religious authorities, table-talks of aristocracy, utterances of ascetics and *ṣūfīs*, eye-witness accounts, memoirs of participants of historical events. Such materials were often subjected to literary treatment and emendation.

The writing author emerges in Arabic literature probably in 2nd/8th century and naturally becomes the central figure in it. With growing in scope of the forming literature, and reducing of translation and fixing of oral materials, there begins to play an essential role in author's work, progressing in time, the reproduction, remaking and exposition of the texts extant and of the facts, notions, images, forms, which are included in them. Every new work becomes further a small item which is added to a great whole, continuing to absorb later supplements.

Under these conditions obtained wide recognition the method of compilation: an author painstakingly draws from former books what he considers necessary or suitable, and inserts it into his work. Not infrequently his own contribution comes to simple rearranging of ready literary materials, different grouping or systematization of them.

Popularity was gained by the method of making new books by commenting on existing works. Originals of what was translated into Arabic partly consisted of commentaries. And when the oral lore was written down some explanations to them were added here and there. With commentaries was supplied a wide range of works – poetical, theological, scientific. And the same work might be commented on many times and repeatedly.

Favourable attitude to imitative and compilative methods in literary work opened facile and easy ways to the authorship to abundant productivity of diligent erudite.

Traditionalism was dominating in the medieval Arabic literature, science and social thought. But the problem of literary propriety and genuine authorship was of vital importance, however it may seem paradoxical. Frequently we meet accusations in plagiarism, but they concern mainly the poetry, which was most sensitive to what is personal, original, individual in an author. Theoretical discussion of the matter restricted to the field of poetry too; in 3rd/9th – 5th/11th centuries was displayed a particular activity in creating treatises on poetics. There was discussed a difference between imitation and theft (*sariqa*), attempts were made to ascertain the verge beyond which using of traditional motive

turned into simple borrowing, discernible or concealed, into misappropriating of somebody else's "invention" (*ihtirā*).

In the field of Arabistic the first to pay attention to the theory of *sariqa* was G. Grunebaum², who had given an account of it after the work of Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. 1010). Arabic treatises on poetics were investigated afterwards more thoroughly and appraised more precisely in works of Iḥsān ʿAbbās³ and A. B. Kudelin⁴.

Meanwhile not only the philologists who wrote special treatises were interested in the problems of authorship. On pages of numerous and various medieval Arabic books, especially those of prefaces and introductions, are to be found reasonings about author's individual contribution, achievements or misgivings of the predecessors, originality or imitation, competition as an impetus to the author's efforts, scientific or literary plan of composition, true or false right to be recognized as an author⁵. Of course, such materials did not pass the attention of scholars, were used and investigated by them in catalogues of manuscripts and in works on the history of literature. But the results achieved are scattered and need summarising and classification.

There is a set of problems concerning Arabic authors, partly very specific, partly common with other medieval literatures. It appears that to discuss them on a theoretical level and to elucidate is necessary for specialists as well as for representatives of continuous fields. They may also serve as stimuli to comparative studies in medieval literatures.

² G. E. von Grunebaum, "The concept of plagiarism in Arabic theory". *JNES*, III (1944), 234-253. In Russian: Moscow: Nauka, 1981.

³ Iḥsān ʿAbbās. *Ta'riḥ an-naqd al-adabī ʿinda l-ʿarab*. Beirut 1971.

⁴ A. B. Kudelin, *Srednevekovaya arabskaya poetika*. Moscow: Nauka, 1983, esp. pp. 100-123.

⁵ Some examples in: A. B. Khalidov, *Arabskie rukopisi i arabskaya rukopisnaya traditsiya*. Moscow: Nauka, 1985, chapter 3. On the conception of *sabq* in the lexicographical tradition: Idem. *Slovari Iḥṣāq al-Fārābī i Maḥmūda al-Kāṣṣarī*. Moscow: Nauka, 1987.