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THE ROLE OF *ḲASIDA* IN THE FORMATION OF MEDIEVAL ARAB-MUSLIM CULTURE

Abstract

The history of Arabic literature which plays a significant role in the formation of Islamic culture in the Middle Ages begins before Islam by the end of the V century. It does not appear to be connected with the Hellenistic culture. The first examples of Arabic literature that survived cover the period from the end of the V century until the middle of the VII century, in particular the period before Islam. The pre-Islamic Arabic poetry takes the most important and special place in the history of Arabic literature. Poetic forms, themes, motifs, genres, and poem measures established in that period determined the development of poetry of the next periods not only in Arabic poetry but in the literature of other Islamic countries. They were spread in almost every Muslim country, greatly influenced Islamic poetry, and existed until the end of the XIX century. The pre-Islamic verse had its forms: *ḳasida* (قصيدة) and *ḳit'a/muḳatta'a* (مقطوعة // قطعة). *Ḳasida* (which means having some kind of goal) is a long and more complete form than *ḳit'a/muḳatta'a*, where the amount of couplets is more than fifteen. *Ḳasida*, which survived and is available for us today, does not consist of more than 120 beits.

We can freely admit that the development of all the above-mentioned innovations was encouraged by *ḳasida*, the poem form which was so flexible, perfect, and refined that enabled all the poets to express their individualism, create something new which would be relevant to current time and condition. It was able to go back to the past but thematically refer to the current political situation. Hence, the poet was familiar with the structure of *ḳasida*, used it perfectly, and stated the topic, which was beneficial for him in order to get the attention of the audience from the very beginning. Then, in a matter of a second, he moved to the main topic and brought to society what was aimed initially. Another version was to start from the main topic and synthesize other topics skillfully or skip from one topic to another. Undeniably, it was not easy and required great intelligence from the poet. Awareness and realization of literary traditions acquired from other people were of paramount importance. All the facts mentioned above contributed to the formation of the whole Arab-Muslim culture, which flourished in the Medieval Caliphate.

Keywords: *Ḳasida*, poetry, poetic forms, Islamic culture.

During the Middle Ages, the poetry of different types of Arabic tribes had an impact on the creation of Islamic culture, especially the ones of nomadic and warrior Bedouins that were widespread within the pre-Islamic period. Their verbalization (during the pre-Islamic period, poetry was orally transmitted since at that time tradition of written poetry didn't exist and transmitters were known as *rāwī*, who had to go from one tribe to another and declare works of different tribe poets. It is said that some of the transmitters had more than 1000 verses in their minds. As for the tradition of writing them, it started in the second half of the VII century) does not appear to be connected with the Hellenistic culture, and the latter enabled the formation of an independent culture that played an important role in the creation of Islamic and Arab-Muslim culture.

The pre-Islamic verse had its forms: *ḳasida* (قصيدة) and *ḳit'a/muḳatta'a* (مقطوعة // قطعة). *Ḳasida* (which means having some kind of goal) is a long and more completed form than *ḳit'a/muḳatta'a*, where the amount of beits is more than fifteen. *Ḳasida*, which survived and is available for us today, does not consist of more than 120 couplets. Its form was created at the end of the V century and the beginning of the VI and managed to reach the XX one. The first creator of the form is considered to be al-Muhalhil, the

uncle of the most distinguished representative of pre-Islamic poetry, Imru' al-Ḳays. However, it should be noted that his *ḳasida* does not have the complex composition characteristic for this form. Having gone through several stages of formation during pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, it acquired its original form. It is proved by the fact that its theoretical description was made by the philologist of the ninth century Ibn Ḳutaybah who included it in his book “The book of poetry and poets” (Krachkovsky 1956, 251). It is a big-sized work with complex composition and concerns multiple topics. It consisted of several parts, which were poorly connected or had no connection at all. It manages to unite almost all poetic forms: *nasib*, *wasf*, *madḥ* (panegyrics), *fakhr*, *khamriyya*, *hidjā'*, *ṭardiyya*, *ḥikma*. The connection between the topics is conditional. Poet is obliged to go through all legitimate parts, topics, motives of *ḳasida* (concerning pre-Islamic *ḳasida*). These are *nasib-wasf-madḥ* or *fakhr*, or both together, or *hidjā'*, or *fakhr* and *hidjā'* together. There are cases when they include *khamriyya*, *ṭardiyya*, *ḥikma* (wise sayings, aphorisms, proverbs). *Marḥūya/rithā* is not found here. This conditional connection between topics (they can be called genres) enabled their development, and throughout Islam's creation and development, this resulted in a big step forward for its spreading widely and modulating.

During the Middle Ages, *madḥ* (eulogy, panegyrics) becomes one of the main genres of Arabic poems, which was easily transformed into a political tool. It acquired sententious meaning as well. The poets who were creating the poems of this genre appeared to be religious-political leaders protecting the interests of their community in terms of the Caliphate. The following figures can be distinguished: al-Akḥṭal, al-Djarir, and al-Farazdaq. As for the position of *madḥ* in terms of *ḳasida*, it varies based on development stages. For instance, in pre-Islamic poetry, *madḥ* was one of the main parts of *ḳasida*, which consisted of three components. However, since VIII century on, *ḳasida* appears to have two parts, only *nasib*, and *wasf*; *ḳasida* consisting of three parts was rare but, if found, it had too short *nasib* and *wasf* while *madḥ* was quite long. Since the X century, this type of *ḳasida* was considered to be a good one. This fact was conditioned by the political situation existing in the Caliphate. In comparison with other genres, *madḥ* was distinguished by its traditionalism. Undoubtedly, it was changing, developing but the process was relatively slow, so slow, which conditioned its monotonous character. It is impossible to find anything different or extraordinary in eulogy poems. Characters of these poems are templates and have no difference from characters of other types of poems. It is only possible to discover a general portrait of a human. The majority of eulogy poems are impersonal, and it is impossible to guess which period is represented by the author. There is no representation of peculiarities or a specific style of the author. It was natural to follow the work of predecessor poets. Their forms and fictional characters were used unchanged and repeated many times even if they didn't suit the modern period and environment. For instance, in the X century, eulogy poems of the Andalusian poet Ibn Darraj represented the description of a desert, its flora, and fauna that was absolutely unknown for the Andalusian environment. In this case, the poet had just followed the old Arabic poets for whom desert was a natural and integral part of their environment. Stereotypical Oriental pictures were transmitted from one generation to another. They were repeated and repeated frequently. But the fact that they were not suitable for the modern period, new geographical environment, situation, modern conditions of the society, and many others were not taken into account. Social conditions they were used to were not conveyed. It could happen since Ibn Darraj (Tevdoradze 2012, 72-73), for instance, created his poems in Arabic that were aimed at the whole Arabian language world, the majority of which lived on the Arabian Peninsula and actually, they were not familiar with Andalusia and its specifications, geographical environment, its landscape and so on. To make it clear and acceptable for the majority of Arabian people, consciously or unconsciously, the poet had to transmit an acceptable environment to Andalusia. That is why these poems lacked documentary character, apart from some exceptions. In Medieval *madḥ*, an individual is neither seen nor personal qualities of the characters and the author. There is also the lack of displaying some specific and distinguishing features that they are characterized only. Many modern European researchers believe that this was conditioned by the fact that eulogical poems were created by the poets for political or economic purposes and not following their honest personal beliefs.

As we have noted above, the pre-Islamic *ḳasida* used to begin with a poetic preface, the so-called *nasib* that was a sad memory of love. It is presented in the very first pre-Islamic works (since the first half of the VI century). It is always focused on the past. It expresses love memories and the pain which is evoked due to it. As it is written by D. Gardavadze, the introduction of *nasib* in *ḳasida* is attributed to Hizam or well-known al-Muhalhil or even to Imru' al-Ḳays (Gardavadze 2018, 12).

During the Middle Ages, the character of *nasib* was changed as well. In the cities of Hijaz, it remained to be one of the thematic topics where theocratic ideology was not still dominant, but one of the

most distinguished representatives of this genre, Umar ibn Abi Rabi'ah, has to justify himself for his poetry. Time by time, the song on love, which is wholly out of the religious framework, becomes the expression of ideological protest.

Pre-Islamic poetry, *nasib* in particular, had a great impact on the Arabic poetry of later periods. During the Umayyad-Muslim period, Bedouin ('*udhri*) and urban amorous lyrics (*ghazal*), functioning as an independent genre, differ from pre-Islamic *nasib* in many aspects, such as form, style, plot, or musicality, but several similar features are also possible to be noticed revealing hereditary line of succession. The difference is that pre-Islamic is mainly focused on the past while urban on the present. Being completely different from urban, '*udhri* amorous poetry is characterized by platonic, spiritual love. They are devoted to the only one, and love as entertainment is unknown for it. Maḍjnūn dedicates poems to Laylā only, Ḍjamil to Buseina. Consequently, permanent loving couples are created: Laylā-Maḍjnūn, Ḍjamil-Buseina... Suffering from love and passion, born based on these sufferings, is placed above all corporal enjoyment; they are accompanied by tears only. Aspiration is understood as merit, striving for that only one and still unreachable. They describe permanent sadness evoked by love. All the above-mentioned is in absolute contradiction with the Bedouin poetry representing the beloved, who is free, with sincere and deep love. The *kasida* is quite long here as well. It is assumed that the '*udhri* sense of love enabled the development of Sufism and Sufi poetry.

Interpreting became widespread during the Middle Ages, which is the reason why Muslim culture used one language in the VIII-X centuries (Arabian). Greek philosophy works were translated, and the development of Muslim philosophy poetry appears to be the result of this fact. But it is incorrect to say that a similar topic didn't exist in Arabic poetry before because, during the pre-Islamic period, one of the *kasida* topics was *ḥikma*, Greek sayings, and proverbs. Pre-Islamic *ḥikma* performed a tremendous role in the creation and development of Arabic philosophy lyrics. Different Arabian and non-Arabian, European or Russian scholars such as I. Krachkovsky, I. Filshtinsky, T. Nöldeke, W. Ahlwardt, L. Cheikho, and so on reveal parallels between *ḥikma* of pre-Islamic poets and philosophical poets of the 'Abbāsīd period, for instance, works of Abū al-'Atāhiyya, who is considered to be one of the first representatives of philosophical lyrics. They assume that *ḥikma* particularly encouraged the lyrics of Mutanabbi, Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arri, and others. I. Krachkovsky writes the following concerning Abū al-'Atāhiyya and reflexive-philosophical direction: "...Abū al-'Atāhiyya was the first important figure representing this direction (direction of philosophical reflexivity), and he devoted half of his life to it. But he was not such an unexpected phenomenon as he is thought to be (for instance, by Kremer). Similar ideas are found in the works of 'Adī ibn Zayd, and a great deal in Labīd's whose muse is closest to Abū al-'Atāhiyya..." (Krachkovsky 1956, 37). In this case, like I. Krachkovsky and I. Filshtinsky, we find many examples in the works of Abū al-'Atāhiyya, especially in his *zuhdiyyāt*. Even in these poems, the flexibility of *kasida* and its exceptional role in the development of this direction can be seen clearly.

Due to their living conditions, Arab Bedouins moved a lot to different places, met people of various religions, and possessed not only economic but cultural influence, which was reflected in the works of Arabian Bedouin poets. The creation of numerous topics and motives was the result of these interactions and influences. The best example of this fact is the topic of wine which was modulated as an independent genre in the Middle Ages – *khamriyya*. It was devoted to wine and feasts. Its birth within the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry is connected with al-Ḥīra, the place close to Christian hearths, while wine and relevant activities were almost traditional. In the process of its development on the Arabian ground, Arabian poets of this school (school of Hirah) played a significant role. They were al-A'shā Maymūn ibn Ḳays and 'Adī ibn Zayd. In pre-Islamic period poems, it is seen in a whole, united form. Wine motives are included in other topics of *kasida* fragmentally and are subordinated to the main topic functionally. 'Adī ibn Zayd can be considered as an exception. In his greatest anthology, "The Book of Songs", Abū al-Faradī al-Iṣfahānī writes about him alongside distinguished Medieval poets like al-Walid and Abū Nuwās that indicates the fact that he is the creator of not the only independent verse of "Wine Poetry" but one of the first developers of this topic included in *kasida* (al-Isfahani 1980, 280). Abū Nuwās gained fame with the help of *khamriyya*. He adored the wine with his whole heart and soul. His love for this drink was as strong as the effect of the drink itself. He admired everything connected with wine, and without it, Abū Nuwās lost the beauty of life. If there was no wine, he was not able to see the essence of life. He could hold his whole body, heart, soul, and it was the cure for all misfortune and sorrow. He perfected this genre in the form of *kasida*; gave it the form of an independent poem, which was good for attracting the attention of that time society since the poet writing on the topics of wine and its relevant topics was in the midst of attention and became quickly recognized because he talked about feasts,

entertainment, drinking the wine which was enjoyable for the society of that time, and the listener was in a good mood. So, poems of this genre have got literary and historical values. They convey the soul of the poet and give us the possibility to imagine what was happening in the Medieval Arabic Caliphate.

While talking about Abū Nuwās, it is impossible to ignore Bashār ibn Burd, the poet of the same period, the representative of the period when there was a great contradiction between old traditional literature followers and supporters of renewal. He was trying to please both groups and used old styles and methods of poetry in his works but, at the same time, he also introduced some features of the modern epoch since he felt that literature was a product of a particular social environment and considered it his duty to be the representative of those people and that epoch. Hence, the work of Bashār ibn Burd was the start of classical literature and enabled other poets to develop. So, it should be admitted that his art is a kind of a link between old tradition and new literature processes. He achieved this with the flexibility of the *kasida* form, contributing to the overall cultural development.

Thematic synthesis among parts of *kasida* that can be identified in the pre-Islamic *kasida* is noteworthy. It was thoroughly used by Medieval poets. In this case, the synthesis of *madh* (panegyrics) and *fakhr* should be noted (Tevdoradze 2013, 314-315). This type of *kasida* was met in the *Mo'allaqah* of al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza al-Yashkurī, which was devoted to the king of al-Ḥīra. As for the Middle Ages, this type of *kasida* synthesis was mainly noticed among the works of panegyric poets al-Akḥṭal, al-Djarir, and al-Farazdaq but the difference is that here is presented the synthesis of *madh* (panegyrics) and *hidjā'* because the period and the political situation demanded it. That is why their *kasidas* are characterized by short *nasib* and a long *madh*, or the poems are started directly by *madh*. Sometimes the poem is started by *fakhr* and then moves on to *madh* and *hidjā'*. It is the innovation for medieval poetry. With the help of these poems, they became the innovators for such poetic directions as Political Poetry.

Kasida was flexible and enabled the medieval poet to choose from two different directions, which would be beneficial for him during the current period and useful for establishing himself. One direction assumed going back to the past creating a traditional poem, and the other one was about introducing something individual and innovative, using the old version of the traditional poem. The representatives of the Middle Ages, Abū Tāmmām and al-Buḥturi should be noted as creators (Filshinsky 1985, 388-392), who used traditional verse and old topics and developed them so that they managed to form new ones. Abū Tāmmām requires more attention since he is considered to be the creator of rational direction. He managed to lead the poetry to the highest level of development. Due to this fact, he is ahead of all other poets, and the forms of the poems are closely connected to the plot and the emotions. As for al-Buḥturi, he sympathizes with traditions since he was a Bedouin. He acquired a new lifestyle and civilization outwardly only. He wrote poems on almost all topics which were mainly imitations of old literature. He was born to be a poet with an inherent poetic spirit and refined feelings.

The appearance of renovated genres during the Middle Ages was not the whole part of poetic evolution because independent genres representing the authors existed even before. They conveyed themselves through the verse style, poetic technics, refined wordplay, metaphors, and all these revealed authors' intelligence and knowledge of current literary processes and previous ones, including pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. At the end of the IX century, the book became a tool for spreading knowledge since Arabs started writing the poems down, and the collections and anthologies were created. Love for books became so common that literate activities were widened in the Caliphate. Paper production took its start, and it was more convenient than parchments. Library buildings were built as well, and literate activities were performed intensively.

As we have already mentioned, together with *kasida*, there was the other form of the poem *kit'a/muḥatta'a* (مقطوعة // قطعة), which consisted of less than 15 couplets, and for mourning was mainly used *marthiya/rithā'*, while for condemnation – *hidjā'*. This form was not essentially transformed during the medieval period.

We can freely admit that the development of all the above-mentioned innovations was encouraged by *kasida*, the poem form which was so flexible, perfect, and refined that enabled all the poets to express their individualism, create something new which would be relevant to current time and condition. It was able to go back to the past but thematically refer to the current political situation. Hence, the poet was familiar with the structure of *kasida*, used it perfectly, and stated the topic, which was beneficial for him in order to get the attention of the audience from the very beginning. Then, in a matter of a second, he moved to the main topic and brought to the society what was aimed initially. Another version was to start from the main topic and synthesize other topics skillfully or skip from one topic to another. Undeniably, it was not easy and required great intelligence from the poet. Awareness and

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