Modern readers, who mostly base their idea of literature on their knowledge of the works of 19th—20th centuries' writers may be assuaged 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 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 shall 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 literary distinguished javšālī (literary "response"); tatabhabā (literary "following"); nazrā (literary "resen-blōnīl, nīrāsā (literary "entry for an honorary meeting"). tāqītī ("imitation"), poṣrāvī (literary "following in somebody's tracks"); mahdhāblī (literary "going towards"); over ten terms altogether. However, the first three were used most widely. As contents of these terms in troubadour works in Arabic, Persian, Turkic languages and Urdu can not be determined 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 re-present the metre, the rhyme, the rāfīḍ (if there is any), most often the topic and an artistic technique (gīzāt, rūbaʾ, qūzāt). If the subject of an "imitation" is a narrative, the poetic meter, the main elements of the plot, the number of chapters and correspond to the original. According to E. Berte's, 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 poins outlined in the original as distinctly different way, he should introduce a new motivation for the characters' actions, change their character and psychology" [4].

Not only separate epic works but also collections of works can be "imitated." The most common example is the so-called "Quintet" (qāshāwī) 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 Dārāj al-Qasīfī (958—1030) wrote by order of the ruler al-Mansārī a qūzātī which imitated a well-known work by an outstanding poet of the Abbasid period Abū Nuwās (ca. 755—ca. 813). The Andalusian poet repeats the rhyme, the meter and the main themes of his predecessor's work. However, when interpreting the themes the reader by Abū Nuwās, Ibn Dārāj usually develops them in more detail. As a result he copied 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 Ḩādī (ca. 1172/3—1257) created a unique work in which in 94 lines (stanzas) he repeats the word nāšī ("a hair") 102 times. The poems most important task, according to Z. N. Vorosheleva, was to use "all semantic 'valences' 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 qūzātī "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 Šāhī) managed to create a poetic work which would meet all the requirements to a nāšī [4].

An Indian Persian-speaking poet Fārīd Khānghonī (d. 1670) wrote his poem Ḥādī nāšī ("Seven Stars") as an imitation of Ḥādī nāšī ("Seven Beauties") by Nizāmī. The plotline of the original is altered: it lacks the characters of the hunter-king Bālūrān Gūr and the beauties-narrators. 14 lines (stanzas) should correspond to the original. According to E. Berte's, the conditions for imitating an epic work are even more complicated than for poetry.

There is an opinion that "imitation" was an effective instrument of literary rivalry between court poets who tried to prove that only they could "imitate" the original. "All Shi'r Nawā'ī's task, according to E. Berte's, was, in particular, to create such works which would be "able to meet the competition and try the rival to flight". Nizāmī was an ideal task to accomplish this task as it gave equal status to the competing authors: "When a connoisseur reader looked at a work based on an already well-known theme... saw that the same problem, the solution of which he already knew was solved in a new, possible more elegant and original way" [14]. We know of cases when poets tested each other's or a beginner's skills with the help of nāšī, or organized somewhat a literary contest when all participants had to write a "response" to the same poet. Thus, a poet, according to A. Marzouk, was "measured "his talent through other poets' talents" [15].

Such view on "imitations" is to a large extent justified by medieval literary practice. However, it does not fully reveal the nature of the rivalry mentioned above. In this connection let us turn to the fact that, according to E. Berte's, to some extent reveals the 15th century poe-
tery technique. A royal author Sulṭān Ḥusayn, having writ-
ten a gīzātī, "writes two more gīzātīs with the same rhyme and rāfīḍ. In other words, he wrote a sort of a "re-
spose" (naṣīrī) to his own poems" [16]. Such example of a poet's competition with himself must have been a rare one, but a more common phenomenon is undoubtedly, link between the "imitation" and the "response." Like modern researcher to express such point of view must have been H. A. Gibbs at the end of the last century [9]. The point is that the "imitator" is viewed not just as a thoughtless copyist of his predecessor, but as his rival. And one of the conditions is that the subject for "imitation" should by no means be an ordinary, mediocre work, but outstanding, exemplary gīzātīs, gūzātīs, mughnāwīs, collections of poems, etc. An "imitation" was considered a success if it in the author managed surpass his predecessor in realization of certain elements of form or contents. This task was an extremely difficult one and not all "imitators" could cope with it. Thus, a medieval philolo-
gist wrote about one of the masterpieces of Arabic-Spanish lyrics — qūzātī Nāṣīrī nāšī (lit. "Ibn Zādīn (1003—1071)"
"And this qūzātī is incomparable, many have tried to imi-
tate it, but were not able to surpass it" [10]. Al-Jamī wrote about another qūzātī that it had happened so that nobody coped with "response" to his famous qūzātī as it was re-
quired..." [11]. In another source we read: "...Connois-
sors of poetry have created numerous "responses" to this gīzātī, but none of them surpassed it" [12]. However, the literary history of the Near and Middle East also knows many cases when the imitation "exceeded the origi-
nal" [13]. Anyway, it is important to realize that only a self-confident author who had authority in literary circles dared to write "imitation" in order to show that "imitations" of Nizāmī's poems were written by such out-
standing authors as Amīr Khānghonī Dāhāwī, All Shi'r Nawā'ī, Fārīd Khānghonī.

Most modern researchers tend to "view imitations" as a kind of rivalry, competition. What was the aim of such ri-

The leader of all this caravan [of poets].
The ruler of the country and the talent... Nizāmī, who bears the stamp of eloquence...Composed a perfect poem Majdān al-anwār... He was followed by Khānghonī...And his successor lighted the world...And he wrote the book "The Rise of Stars"...After that we heard the voice of al-Ham...Now in Rome's acres live eloquent poets, And there are great masters among them...And each of them created one poem...And wrote it in nazrī technique...[18].

From this fragment it follows that the Turkish poet wanted to "beat his rivals with their own weapon, and to do this he could not go within the borders of themes outlined by them" [19]. It seems doubtful that "All Shi'r Nawā'ī, to whom the poet quoted a poem by E. Berte's, refers, wanted an "imitating" Khānghonī, to "beat" his great predecessor. How-
ever, he entered into a dialogue with him, into a dispute and competition, acknowledging and emphasizing the gene-
tics ties of his work with Nizami's work.

The view on rivalry (even in wide interpretation of the word) as the basis of "imitation" does not explain all pe-
culiarties of this form of creative work for a modern re-
searcher. Let us get back to the idea that Ibn Zaydun's qiziwa Nirizua is incomparable, "it was imitated by many but they did not seem able to exceed it". If we preserve the medieval essence of this phrase but fill it with names and characters from world literature of the 19th—
20th centuries, it sounds like nonsense. "As imitation of "Bel Ami" by Guy de Maupassant writer O. wrote "Bel Ami" but could not surpass his predecessor. The term "creative imitation" which is widely used today instead of just "imitation" which emphasizes the necessity to intro-
duce changes into the "original" while writing a "response" to it, does not make it sound any better. A modern reader and researcher must be surprised with an incorrect, accord-
ing to modern views, equalization in rights of the author of the "original" and the author of the "imitation", in other words: the author and his copier. However, such equaliza-
tion was common for medieval writers, readers and scholar-
s. In this case we undoubtedly deal with peculiar concept about author's originality in medieval literatures of the Near and Middle East.

Berte's focused on this aspect of "imitation" in more detail than other researchers. Many of his ideas deserve careful attention even today, several decades later. The re-
searcher finds it wrong to call the authors of najiwa "imi-
tutors" as it is a sign of anti-historical approach and misun-
derstanding of the characteristic features of feudal litera-
ture, and the tendency to "measure all past phenomena by one's own bushel". In that society the choice of themes was "extremely limited" by the "narrowness of interests, the restraints of life and the slow pace of life". Because of this even the authors who could renew the circle of themes it would have been absurd to assume that Naw'i could not introduce a new theme in literature if he wanted to) did not aim to go beyond the limits of traditional themes. The nar-
rowness of the circle of themes together with intensive lit-
erary life led to "extreme sensitivity to the culture of the world" and development of views close to the concept of "art for the sake of art", as "often the aim of a literary work was mere demonstration of skill framed with a well-known plot". However, it would be wrong to assume that such view on literature sufficiently minimizes its social value, as "a talented writer even in these difficult conditions, limiting his imagination, will be able to affect the thoughts and emotions of a reader and to open before him new aspects of human soul"[20].

Berte's ideas allow us to make some conclusions. Me-
dieval literature of the East and the West are different by distinct traditionalism determining the peculiarities of their artistic system. "Imitations" like najiwa were popular not only in the Near and Middle East. In vagrant collections of works there are numerous works in which similar themes and images are developed. Each such work was not a result of changing or altering it, but of "imitating", it is not "spoil-
ing a text", it is an artistic "contest" insists M. L. Gasparov [21]. Different types of "imitations" in me-
dieval literature were united by their common aim — crea-
tive perception of the "original", rivalry and competition with it.

The notion of contest was one of the central concepts in the system of medieval literature. It was based on non-historical concept (historical concept) of the tradi-
tional creative thought. The works of old Russian literature "lived for many centuries", "in literature there existed 'all
multaneously', or better, beyond any time limits, everything written now or in the past" says D. S. Likhachev [22]. The non-historical method was realized in "removal of" chronological distance while comparing: a five-hundred-year or even a thousand-year interval did not confine researchers comparing the results of a "contest", the authors' belonging not only to different epochs, but also to different literatures and cultures was not taken into ac-
count.

An important element of contest, which needs special explanation, was artistic optimism of the "copyists". What did they hope for: it is obvious that no medieval author would have "competed" with a predecessor knowing that his task is doomed to fail?

An indispensable condition of contest in the Middle Ages was the author's strong belief in the uniqueness and invariability in time (no matter how long) of the aim they pursued. The idea of the "absolute", of the unreachable genre or stylistic canon created a base for concrete com-
parisons. An original author who created the first work on some theme was viewed by everyone as a person who made a necessary step towards a common goal. An original au-
thor in medieval view only "passed ahead" of his rivals in the competition, "overtook" them on their way to the ob-
ejectively given, common and imperative for all authors aim. Such understanding of the "original", an "example" at-
tached to it two peculiar features. First of all, in the eyes of medieval scholars it could not be perfect, as any interpreta-
tion of the eternal could not be full and final. Secondly, the "original" could not in any way be considered as anybody's possession as it was of common value, being the first, but still only one of the necessary for everybody steps towards the perception of the absolute.

These peculiarities determined the attitude to an "ex-
emplary" work in literature. No "original" was qualified by medieval scholars or authors as the best achievement on the way to the absolute. The followers felt it was their duty to perfect and improve the "discovery" to advance towards the absolute.

Thus, the attitude to the "examples" was ambivalent. As a step towards the absolute they required being repro-
duced by the followers. As a fruit of human thought they
could not be an adequate realization of the absolute and were bound to be imperfect. Thus, following the examples not only allowed but implied altering the inherited "ex-
amples" to pursue one goal: advance to the absolute. Variation of "images" in the "imitations" of the followers thus ac-
tained special meaning and the individual and the collective were dialectically connected with each other in the chain of endless mutual transformations on the way of endless per-
fection.
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