

THE CONCEPT OF LOVE IN THE CROSSROADS OF EASTERN AND WESTERN TRADITIONS: A SILK ROAD PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *The Great Silk Road was not only a trade route but also a profound cultural corridor facilitating cross-cultural exchanges that shaped world civilizations. This article examines the evolution and interpretation of the concept of love as a cultural universal within the Eastern and Western poetic traditions. Through comparative analysis of classical Eastern (Uzrit, Omarite, Sufi) and Western (courtly love, troubadour, dolce stilnovo) poetic forms, this study reveals how the Silk Road enabled a complex dialogue that enriched and transformed the understanding of love. The integration of mystical, philosophical, and literary elements demonstrates the Silk Road's crucial role in shaping a shared cultural heritage, emphasizing love as a multifaceted phenomenon reflecting both universal and culturally specific values.*

Keywords: *Silk Road, cross-cultural exchange, concept of love, Eastern poetry, Western courtly love, Sufism, troubadours, cultural integration, medieval literature*

The Great Silk Road can be studied from the point of view of various scientific disciplines: history, geography, cultural studies, etc. However, a purely disciplinary approach does not reveal the full depth of this phenomenon, which has played an outstanding role in the history of civilization. The Great Silk Road can be considered not only in a particular historical context, but also as a unique phenomenon of cross-cultural interaction that has integrated such large-scale cultural patterns, which allows us to talk about its role in shaping the culture of humanity as a whole.

One of the most interesting spheres of this interaction is the sphere of interpretation of such a phenomenon as love. Among the ideological universals of culture, the universal love occupies one of the central places, acting as a base for cultural traditions of various types, however, in different traditions (both lyric-poetic and cultural traditions in general) it is interpreted differently [see. 6, p. 588-590], and the vicissitudes of the development of these interpretations at certain moments were influenced by factors brought to life by the Great Silk Road.



1. Lyrics of the East: the development of ideas about love in the culture of the medieval city.


The Great Silk Road brought to life the unique cities of the ancient and medieval East, that is, it gave birth to outstanding cultural centers, whose significance in the history of mankind goes far beyond national cultures, acquiring an international character. So, in particular, in the context of these cities, a fundamental transformation of ideas about love in the Eastern poetic tradition was carried out.

The symbolic system of classical Eastern poetics, which is based on a systematic, philosophically based idea of love as a phenomenon of human existence and cosmic existence as a whole, has gone through several stages in its development.

As the earliest, we can single out the traditional Uzrit lyric poetry, which took shape on the basis of archaic epics, in which love is conceived in the context of archaic ideas about the connection of human sexuality with recitations of the cosmogonic marriage of sacred progenitors and the fertility of natural forces. So, for example, in Imruulkais: «Seeing, hearing Suad, «Appear again!» - the earth will ask: / Where her tents stand, the earth bears fruit more abundantly» [1, p. 23]. In traditional Uzrit poetry, the construction of a lyrical line is not formalized by a stable code, however, the analysis of galaz uzri allows us to say that the feeling glorified by Uzrit authors is conceived as chaste and pure: Jamil, who sang his love for Buseyna; Kais Ibn Zarih, who immortalized the name of Lubna; Qays Ibn al-Mullawah, nicknamed Majnun for his boundless love for Leila - distraught with love. This feeling, however, is tragic due to the inevitable separation: «I saw that the time for separation has come to us: / The camels are already loaded ...» (Antara [3, p. 47]) «Tell Hurairah «Farewell!» – the time has come for us to part: / The caravan sets off...» (al-Asha [3, p. 64]). The classic plot of the ghazal behold is the cry of a lover over the former camp of a beloved caravan, which was taken away long ago and passed off as another: «They hid Lubna in patterned tents, / A lot of sentinels guard her, - / But the wind will mix the lovers' breath ... / ... and in a sad trembling / The constellations will mourn the sleepless bed» [1, p. 81].

The second most important stage in the formation of the symbolic system of classical Eastern poetics was the design of the Omarite lyrical tradition, which was directly related to the culture of medieval cities. Early urban oriental culture gives rise to the tradition of Omarite lyric poetry, whose poetic plots, in contrast to the Uzrit tradition, are focused not so much on the analysis of emotional movements as on the fixation of sensual events. So, for example, in Omar Ibn Abi Rabia: «Yes, I knew her! She was fragrant with musk, / Only a Yemeni cloak covered beauty without blemish. Secretly she crept, her heart trembled with joy, / The body in the folds of the cloak shone with the blush of the east ...» [2, p. 190].





If in the context of the Uzrit tradition, love acted as a fateful totality, then in the Omarite tradition, it was like a motley scattering of joyful episodes («The beloved said:» So, the desires were fulfilled. / Easily, without care, without sorrow - like a game «by Omar Ibn Abi Rabia» [2, p. 184]). The situation of meetings and partings, tragically comprehended in the ghazal behold, in the Omarite lyrics acquires a purely hedonistic semantics, it is no coincidence that the main genre form of the Omarite lyrics is such a kind of ghazal as the ghazal ibahi (from Arabic abaha 'to allow').

The most important stage in the development of ideas about love in Eastern culture is the period of the 8th-9th centuries: at this time, in the culture of medieval cities, the process of imposing Muslim culture on pre-Islamic traditions was going on, acquiring new meanings in a new context, as a result of which, by the end of the 9th century. there was a kind of synthesis of the Uzrit (Bedouin) and Omarit (urban) directions of oriental lyrics, giving rise to the phenomenon of a specific love poetry based on a clearly formulated concept of love. In the tenth century The Baghdad school finally formalized this cultural vector into a poetic tradition that glorifies a special, higher love. The unattainability of the beloved, which in the Uzrit lyrics acted as an objective circumstance of nomadic life, was rethought as a normative value: unrequited, but sensually vivid love for a «cruel» married lady is the canonical plot of the poetic tradition of the eastern cities of the mature Middle Ages.

Thus, the interpretation of love in classical oriental poetry was a product of the interaction between the traditional Uzrit poetic system, on the one hand, and Omarite poetics, on the other.


2. The Great Silk Road and courtly poetry

as a product of interaction between the cultural traditions of East and West

The Great Silk Road largely ensured the unity of the ancient and medieval world, integrating Asia, Africa and Europe into a single civilizational space and ensuring the spread of the most important achievements of civilization (paper, gunpowder, silk, glass, etc.). However, the Great Silk Road was not only a trade communication, but also a channel for the exchange of new ideas, enriching the spiritual life of countries and peoples. Scientists, philosophers and poets who traveled with caravans ensured not only the acquaintance of Europe with Islam and Asia with Christianity, but also the integration of traditions on an East-West scale.

One of the areas of this integration was the interpretation of love in the courtly tradition of Europe, which initially took shape in the south of medieval France. The interpretation of love proposed by the troubadours is distinguished by a high level of complexity and tries, with the help of complex semiotic constructions, to carry out a kind of legalization of the phenomenon of corporality, giving it a special symbolic interpretation.





The concept of love characteristic of the troubadours was formed on the basis of the influence that the courtly tradition experienced from the culture of the East. Andalusian culture, the culture of Arabized Spain, acted as a mediating link here.


The meaningful impact of the Eastern tradition on the formation of a courtly worldview can be considered in two layers.

The most important factor in the formation of the courtly concept of love was the fact that the spiritual life of Provence proceeded in the field of interaction of extremely diverse cultural influences. Due to geographical and historical reasons, the south of France was a kind of crossroads of trade relations between France, Italy, Greece and other European countries with the East. The interpretation of love in the courtly tradition was particularly influenced by the Arab-Spanish culture. According to I.M. Filshtinsky, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the «role played by the Arabs of Spain in the cultural exchange between East and West, which had such a fruitful impact on the development of world culture» [9, p. 251].

Occurring in the VIII - IX centuries. in Arabic literature, the process of interaction between Muslim culture and the pre-Islamic cultural tradition of the peoples of the Caliphate resulted, as already noted, in the formation by the end of the 9th century. concept of high love. In Arabized (in the process of Moorish rule) Spain in the 11th century. The theoretician of this direction was Ibn Hazm, the author of the famous treatise on love «The Dove's Necklace» [see. 5]. In the XII century. in Arab-Spanish literature, such a genre of strophic poetry as Zajal 'song' became widespread, which was created not in classical Arabic, but in colloquial language typical of Moorish Spain, containing a large admixture of Romance vocabulary and equally understandable to both Arabs and Europeans. The most important monument of Zajala is the divan of a Cordoba poet from the early 12th century. Ibn Kuzman, widely known in Provence, adjacent to Spain. Moreover, the strophic structure of the songs of the first troubadour known to us, William of Aquitaine, largely coincides with the structure of the Zajals of Ibn Kuzman.

A deeper layer of influence on the courtly notions of the southern French chivalry from the Eastern cultural tradition can also be singled out: through the Arab-Spanish culture, the foundations of the courtly system of values (and, above all, the interpretation of the phenomenon of love within its framework) experienced a meaningful impact as some areas of Muslim culture (first of all, Sufi mysticism and the Sufi allegorical poetry that developed on its basis, characterized by a high level of semioticism), as well as elements of the ancient (namely, ancient Greek) cultural heritage assimilated by Eastern culture (primarily, Platonic ideas that existed in Arab culture, not deformed ideas of Christian asceticism).






The core of the Sufi concept is the doctrine of revelation, interpreted as the merging of the soul with the Absolute (tawhid), at the moment of which the mystic comprehends both his own essence and the truth of God (there is a widespread metaphor about a drop that poured into the ocean and became it). When a murid experiences khakikat, that is, a direct feeling of unity with God, a good thought overwhelms his heart, demanding permission. This connection of the heart with the tongue (dhikr) suggests two forms of its manifestation: one of them is silence («How strange the Sufi is silent! – How strange that you have no ears» by Jalal ad-Din Rumi [quoted from: 8, p. 39]), the other is the verbalization of mystical experience in a poetic text through allegories and allusions to an ineffable mystery. Early Sufism used ready-made texts of lyrical songs for this purpose (a significant role in this was played by the fact that one of the key figures in the formation of Sufism, Rabi'a al-Addawiya, with her classic thesis «the ardor of love for God burns the heart» [cit. by: 4, p. 317], was a professional singer). In addition, in the early stages of development, Sufism was persecuted as a heresy for the idea of the possibility of direct merging with the Absolute, due to which the use of secular lyrics to address the mystic to God also had camouflage functions [see. 4, p.61].

We can talk about a wide range of symbolic structures that make up the iconic arsenal of Sufi texts: a Sufi is designated as ashik (lover) or rind (wine drinker), God is conveyed by the term durst or hum-mar (respectively, «beloved» and «intoxicating»), a spiritual mentor - as butler, etc. The special dictionary of Mahmud Rabbi Shabistari (XIV century) gives an interpretation of such terms of Sufi texts as eyes, lips, curls, fluff, mole, belt, and many others. others [see 4, p. 110-111] So, if the face of the beloved symbolizes the authenticity of the existence of the Absolute, then the curls hiding it - the transient phenomenality of the temporary existence of the objective world. Consequently, the rings of curls, in which the heart of a lover is entangled, are a symbolic designation of the temptations of the outside world, which the soul aspiring to God must reject; and the lover, removing curls from the face of a friend, symbolizes tawhid and the contemplation of divine light. As Omar Ibn al-Farid writes, «My love, I'm only drunk on you, / The whole world blurred, hid in a fog, / I myself disappeared, and only you alone / are visible to my eyes looking inward» [2, p. 521]. Thus, the motifs widely spread in Sufi texts, which are assessed as erotic by the outside reader, actually act as complex symbolic systems for the verbalization of mystical experience. In turn, Sufi poetics significantly influenced the secular lyrical traditions, within which the concepts of sublime love took shape, which, describing interpersonal relationships, preserved the religious and philosophical symbolism of Sufi texts.

This symbolism of Sufi poetry had a significant impact on the European cultural tradition, and above all on the southern French knightly tradition, which found its





expression in the poetry of the troubadours, who created the cult of sacred love for Donna as the path to truth and perfection.

Later, the symbolism of the troubadours formed the basis of such a trend in European lyrics as *le dolce stilnovo* («new sweet style»), which, in turn, influenced the symbolic systems of Petrarch and Dante. The semantic conjugation of love and comprehension of the truth was preserved in European culture until the 20th century, in the last decade of which P. Sloterdijk wrote about the need for a kind of «decognitization of love», which in the European consciousness is closely associated with the semantic figures of «love of knowledge» and «knowledge through love» [7].

Thus, in the interpretation of the phenomenon of love in European culture, a deep meaningful impact of the spiritual heritage of both pre-Islamic and Muslim Eastern culture is revealed.

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