The Arabic Literary Theorists Vis-avis al-Sariqah al-Shiʿriyyah (Plagiarism) in the Medieval Period: Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637AH) as a Locus Classicus

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ABSTRACT

This disquisition revolves around the hypothesis of a literate cognoscente Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d. 637AH) on the concept of al-sariqah al-shiʿriyyah (plagiarism), which was one of the burning literary issues among the literati during the third century of Hijrah, in his chef-d’ouvre themed al-Mathal al-Sāʾir fī Adab al-Kātib wa al-Shāʾir. Though a coterie of connoisseurs in the field of literary praxis before ibn al-Athīr, for example, ibn Ṭabāṭabā (d.322 AH) in his ‘Iyār al-shiʿr; al-Askarī (d. 395AH) in his Kitāb al-Ṣināʿatayn: al-Kitābah wa al-Shiʿr and ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 456 AH) in his al-'Umdah had delved into the signification and classification of al-sariqah al-shiʿriyyah, albeit in a less tenuous manner. Underscoring ibn al-Athīr as a trailblazer in his exceptionally unique and unprecedented venture into the classification of al-sariqah al-shiʿriyyah, Abd al-Latīf Sayyid al-Harīrī avers "We have seen that Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr has treated the topic in an appropriate manner. He made the classification after he had reminisced, regurgitated and digested the patrimonies of his predecessors. Due to this, we rely mostly on his classification and terminologies; we used them as a torch in our way...". The only logically intuitive inference from this proclamation by al-Harīrī is the reinforcement of the rarity and infrequency of this literary endeavor by ibn al-Athīr. In the light of the foregoing this modest paper is set to give an in depth analytical exposition of this unusual classification by ibn al-Athīr in a well-defined and distinctly translucent manner.

KEYWORDS

hypothesis, literati, plagiarism, connoisseurs, classification, trailblazer, patrimonies, exposition

PROLEGOMENON

Al-sariqah (plagiarism) is an act of appropriating a literary work and unduly ascribing it to oneself. Al-sariqah is a common phenomenon in the literary firmament from time immemorial since there was no stated law guiding authorship and publication. Researches are corroborative of the rarity of works that are completely free from the virus of plagiarism; no matter the intellectual prodigiousness or encyclopedic wizardry of the writer. Even works of world acclaimed titans and renowned virtuosos such as Heretodus, Aristophane, Sophoolees, Terence, and Menander were all alleged to have been suiled by the blight of literary transgression. (Haddarah 1958:4) If plagiarism is strongly linked with history of literary activities right from the Hellenistic ages, then, Arabic literature can not be an exception. Scholars of Criticism and Rhetoric had candel their nights through deep examination and critical investigation of Arabic poetry from the Jāhiliyyah through the Renaissance periods to unravel both the overt and latent acts of plagiarism in the field of poetry. Al-Qāqī al-Jurjānī (d. 366AH) describes al-sariqah al-shiʿi ʿriyyah as “old malady and ancient flaw” (al-Jurjānī2010:24) while al-Āmidī portrays it as "a (criminal) path from which the early and modern scholars are not exonerated " (al-Āmidī 2009:23) . Ibn al-Rashīq al-Qayrawānī views it as "a wide path which none among the poets has never trodden" (Haddārah 1958:5)

Al-Sariqah al-Shiʿriyyah Down the Memory Lane

(a) During the Jāhiliyyah Period

In the Jāhiliyyah period, huge amount of plagiarized texts was detected and recorded by the poets and critics. Ibn al-Sallām al-Jummāḥ (d. 230 AH) in his Tabaqāt al-shuʿʿarāʾ points out various poetical verses where new practitioners of poem imitated their predecessors. He accentuates similarities between verses of Imruʿ al-Qays and ‘Antarah. The former said:

وفوِقًا بِهِ صَحِيٍّ عَلَٰٓ مِّنْهُمْ يَقُولُونَ لا تَهْكِلُ أَسُى وتَجْمَّلُ
My friends while on their camels stood by me saying: "Don't die of lugubriousness but (just) persevere" (Qamṭah 2003:58)

‘Antara plagiarized this verse of Imrul Qays, verbatim, when he said:

وَقَوْفًا بِهَا صَحِيحٌ عَلَى مَعْطَيْهِمْ يَقُولُونَ لَا تُهْكِلُ أَسْيَ وَتَنْجِدُ

My friends while on their camels stood by me saying: "Don't die of lugubriousness but (just) persevere" (al-Hāshim 1407:194)

Narrators of poems had explained that large number of Imru’ al-Qays verses was purloined by his contemporary poets and his successors such as Zuhayr ibn Abū Sulmā and others (Hadarrah 1958:7). Not even Imru’ al-Qays himself, the legendary champion of Arabic poetry, is free from plagiarism. The critic, ibn al-Rashīq al-Qayrawānī gave an account of Imru’ al-Qays’ culpability in the appropriation of other poets’ verses. He says: "Imru’ al-Qays used to rely on him (Dāud al-Iyādī) and narrated his ordeals ".

al-Askarī pointed out that the ubiquitous verse of al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī:

فإذك شمس والملوك كواكب إلا طلعت لم يبد منهن ذيفان

"And indeed, you are the sun while other kings are stars; when it (sun) rises no star will appear"(al-Andalusī 1990:178)

was purloined from a poet among Kinda tribe who said:

هو الشمس وافت يوم ذهن فاضلبت على كل ضوء والملوك كواكب

"He is the sun that served (our purpose) on the day of Dujn, and surpassed all lights while other kings are stars"(al-Hadarrah 1958:73)

of plagiarism was not after all free from this misdemeanor. He said:

لا أسوق الشعراء ما نطقوا بل لا يوافق شعرهم شعري

"I do not plagiarize what other poets have said, indeed, their poem is not compatible with my poem]". (al-Hadarrah 1958:73)

In spite of this swaggering self-aggrandizement, critics detected plagiarism in his literary works. His verse:

وَنَشْرِبُها فَتُرِكْنَا مِلْوُكًا وَأَسْدُوا مَا يَنْهُنَا الْفَاءِ

"We always take it (alcohol) and it makes us like kings and lions, nothing refrains us from meeting (the enemy).

was said to have been duplicated from ’Antarah’s qasidah:

فإذا سكرت فإنني مسَّهُم مالي وعرضي وافر لم يكلم وأذا صبحت فما أقصر عن ندى وكما علمت شمايلي ونكرمي

"When intoxicated, I squander my property; and my dignity is intact and not tarnished. When I regain my consciousness, I do not tarry in generosity, as you have known (that) as my nature and nobility" (al-Hāshim 1407:211)

There are other poets in Islamic era whose works are contaminated with literary theft. K'a'ab ibn Zuhayr, Hutay'ah, al-Nābighah al-Ja'adī were among those that fell into this cesspool. (Ibn al-Athīr 1995:12)

During the Umayyad dynasty, plagiarism affected the creative ability of many poets, plagiarizing words and contents was commonplace due to wideness of the scope of poetry. Poets started hurling vituperative and satirical poems on one another as a result of tribalism, sectarianism and political upheaval that were the hallmark of the dynasty. Literary narrators had cited many textual evidences on imitation. Farazdaq, a renowned polemic poet was said to have purloined poetical lines of Abbās bn Abd al-Muṭallib verbatim. Abbās said:

وَمَا النَّاسُ بَالْنَاسِ الذِّينَ عَهْدَتُهُمْ ولا اداً بالدار الَّذِي كَتَبَّتْ

(b) During the Islamic Period

During the Islamic era, literary theft was more rampant among the poets than that of the previous era. Some of the poets were Mukhadramūn, (a term used for poets who witnessed the Jāhiliyyah and Islamic periods) who narrated the pre-Islamic poems from their memory because they were unlettered. Through this means, they appropriated other poets’ verses into theirs inadvertently or otherwise. Hassān ibn al-Thābit who exculpated himself from the dust
"The People are not those you know, and the house is not the one you know.

Al-Farazdaq said:

وما الناس بالناس الذين عهدتهم ولا الدار بالدار التي كنت تعرف

"The people are not those you know, and the house is not the one you know (Ibn al-Athīr1995:18)

The only contribution of al-Farazdaq here is the supplanting of ta'lam with a synonymous word “ta'rīf”

Other poets like Abd Allah ibn Zubayr, Jamīl ibn Mu'anmar, al-Kuthayyir were not free from plagiarism.

(c) During the Abbasid Period

Abbasid dynasty also recorded a more preponderant degree of plagiarism in literary works, when compared to the tempo in the preceding eras. Many books were authored by the critics to expose those poets that engaged in literary theft. Poets started raising the dust of suspicion on one another over plagiarism; an antagonist of a poet, for example, would just point an accusing finger to his enemy alleging the heinous crime of plagiarism. (Hadarrah1995:19) Plagiarism has strong nexus with criticism because it aids in the exposure and identification of the forte as well as the kryptonite of a particular poet. It also unearths his level of creativity in ideas and capacity in selecting appropriate words to convey the ideas.

Biographical Sketch of Ibn al-Athīr

His full name is Abū al-Fathī Naṣr Allah ibn Muḥammad al-Jazaʿrī Dīyāʾ al-dīn ibn al-Athīr. He was an epistolographer, literary theorist and critic (Meisami and Starkey 1998:314-5). He was born on Thursday, the twentieth day of Sha’bān 558AH in Jazīrah ibn Umar, a city in Musil. (Ibn Khallikān:343) Any city he visited, he did associate himself with scholars and engaged them in deep scholarly discussion. Naṣrullaḥ bn al-Athīr was an expert in Arabic language and poetry. He highlighted his potential in his book titled al-Washy al-Marqūm. He said: "I memorized a lot of classical and modern poems which I cannot enumerate; after which I restricted myself to the poems of Tayyi Ḥārīb ibn Aws, Abū Ubādah, al-Buhtūfī and Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī. I memorized their Diwans, I used to read them repeatedly for two years consecutively till I gained mastery of their phraseology and became addicted to it. O, you who enters into this ocean, you cannot be satisfied except you do what I did and tread my path". (Ibn Khallikān:25)

His Works

Many literary works were attributed to ibn al-Athīr. Among them are:

(i) al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kāṭib wa al-shāʾir
(ii) al-Washy almarqūm fī hall al-manẓūm
(iii) al-Jāmīʾ al-kābir fī šināʿ at al-manẓūm min al-kalām wa –al-manthūr
(iv) Rasāʾīl ibn al-Athīr - (v) al-Burhān fī ʿulūm al-bayān( vi)Riśālah al-azhar
(vii)Mʿunis al-wahdah
(viii) Kanz al-balāghah
(ix) al-Iṣtirdār ʿfī al-akkdh ʿalā al-muʾākhḥidh ( ibn al-Athīr 2007:56)

He visited Baghdad many times as an emissary. He died after a protracted illness in the month of Rabiʿal-Awwal 637 AH.

Ibn al-Athīr’s Paradigmatic Touchstone on Plagiarism
Ibn al-Athīr classified plagiarism into five main types:

(1)  
**al-Naskh:** imitation of meaning and words or imitation of meaning and part of words from an antecedent poet. This is sub-divided into two categories:

(a) Direct plagiarism or word for word plagiarism (*al-hāfir bil hāfir*): to copy from a poet's work, word and content. Among the verses of poems used by ibn al-Athīr as an illustration of this are two lines of poem that are similar. One was composed by Imru’ al-Qays and the other by Tarafah. (Ibn al-Athīr 1995:352)

*biblí* said:

وَقِفِيْهَا بِهِ صَحِيحٌ عَلَيْ مَطْيِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ لَا تَهْكِلُ أَسِى فَتَحْمِل

'Antara borrowed the theme and the words, saying:

وَقِفِيْهَا بِهِ صَحِيحٌ عَلَيْ مَطْيِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ لَا تَهْكِلُ أَسِى وَتَجْد

The difference between these lines is the last foot of the second hemistich. This type of borrowing is considered repugnant by the author. He fortified his judgment with lengthy explanation. "If we have seen a poet in the earlier period compose a speech, and later we heard it from another poet who came after him, it would be known to us that he had borrowed it from him (antecedent) … if the borrowing occurred as this, it is faulty. And if the later poet claimed that he did not borrow it from the earlier poet, it (the idea and words) occurred to him spontaneously as it had occurred to the earlier poet, the truth of this claim is known to Allah, but the later poet is faulty as the matter would be judged from what is seen outwardly even if his claim is genuine". (Ibn al-Athīr 2007:350)

It is known through these quotations that ibn al-Athīr is in support of accidental coincidence of ideas and meanings (*tawārud al-afkār*), but should not be expressed with the same words

((b) To copy meaning from a particular verse and retain most of its original wording. He cited as example a eulogy composed for Ma'bad. (Ibn al-Athīr 2007:352)

أجَادَ طَوِيْسٌ وَالسَّرِيْجِيَ بَعْدَهُ وَمَا قَصَبَتُ السِّبَقِ إِلَّا لَمَعِيد

"Tuways and Surayjyyu, after him, have performed well, but Ma'abad triumphed over them all"

Abū Tammān said:

"Indeed, it increases my passion, knowing that I am hateful to any unsuccessful man."

Al-Mutanabi copied this meaning and extracted from it a different meaning but similar to it. He said. (Ibn al-Athīr 2007: 353)

إِذَا أَتَتَكَ مَذْمُوَتِي مِن نَاقِصٍ فَهِيُّ الْشَهَادَةُ بِأَنِّي فَاضِل

"If you heard my censure from an imperfect (person), that is an evidence that I am a man of honor."

(b): To copy only idea in a particular work without words used. This kind of plagiarism is very difficult to detect and also uncommon. Example given is poem of 'Urwah bn Ward:

وَمَن يَكَ مِثْلِي ذَا عِيَالٍ وَمَقْتُرٍ وَمِنَ الْمَالِ يَطْرُحُ نَفْسِهَا كَلَّمَطَرَح

"Anyone who has large household and is needy like me will surrender himself totally. In other to give excuse or achieve his want. Who gives himself excuse is like a victorious."

Abū Tammān picked the idea, he said: (Ibn al-Athīr2007: 342)
"An adolescent lost his life between beating and stabbing. This is a substitute for victory, (even though) the victory has eluded him.

(e): To borrow idea and copy little of its words. Ibn al-Athir said: "This is the most repugnant kind of plagiarism. Among the verses of poem used as example is a verse of al-Buhturi where he said:

كَلّ عَيْدٍ مَنْ جَوْدِهِ فِي عِيدٍ    كُلّ يَوْمٍ مِّنَ الْآيَاتِ مَتَّى

"Every feast day has an end: but every day my palm is (endlessly) in festivity from his munificence"

Al-Buhturi borrowed the idea and copied little of words used from Ali bn Jabalah’s poem, who said: (Ibn al-Athir2007: 342)

كُلّ عِيدٍ يُمْتَمِّزُ فِي عِيدٍ        كُلّ يَوْمٍ مِّنَ الْآيَاتِ مَتَّى

"Feast is, among all other days, a day that people await: but everyday people are in the feast from your (generosity).

(d): To copy the idea and present it in an opposite meaning. Abu said:

أَحْبَيْتُكَ فَأُحْبَيْتُ فِيهِ مِّلَامَةٌ    أَحْبَيْتُكَ فَأُحْبَيْتُ فِيهِ مِّلَامَةٌ

"In your love, I find censure as pleasure, having sensual desire in your remembrance. Let censors reproach me.

Al-Mutanabbî picked the meaning and presented it in opposite. He said: (Ibn al-Athir2007: 343)

أَحْبَيْتُكَ فَأُحْبَيْتُ فِيهِ مِّلَامَةٌ    أَحْبَيْتُكَ فَأُحْبَيْتُ فِيهِ مِّلَامَةٌ

"Will I love him with blame on him? Verily, the blame on him is from his enemies".

Ibn al-Athir commented favorably on this category saying: "This is among the stealthy plagiarism. To be tagged "ibtidā’" (creativity) is preferable to plagiarism. (Ibn al-Athir2007: 345)

(e): To copy part of the meaning. Among this is line of Abu Tammâm which says:

كَلَفُ بَرِبِ الْمَجِيدِ بِعَلَمِهِ    لَمْ يِبْدُ أَرْفَعَ إِذَا لَمْ يِتَّمَّ

"He is very much in love with the exalted. Knowing that any grace not completed was (as good as) not started.

al-Buhturi said:

وَمَثَلُكَ إِنْ أُبْدَى الْفَعَّالُ أَعَادَهُ    وَإِنْ صَنَعَ المَعْرُوفَ زَادَ وَتَمَّا

"If someone like you demonstrates action, he will repeat it (ad infinitum) it. And if he does a favor, he will increase and complete it"(Ibn al-Athir2007: 345).

Ibn al-Athir comments thus: Abû Tammâm in his poem eulogized someone that always continues his charity, and he knows that he will not start deed that will lack continuity. al-Buhturi only eulogized the person continuing his generosity.

(f): To copy meaning and merge it with another meaning. al-Buhturi said:

خَلِّ عَنَا فَإِنَّمَا أَنتَ فِيُّا    وَأَوْ عَمْرٍو أَوْ كَالْحَدِيثِ الْمَعْدَ

"Stay away from us, you are in our midst (redundant) like letter wā’ of (the word) 'Amru' or like tautology ".

Abû Nuwâs said:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ يَدْعُي سُلَيْمَةَ سَفَاهًا    فَلَسَتْ مِنْهَا وَلَا قَلَامَةَ طَفْرٌ

"Tell anyone who unduly claims that Sulayma is stupid, you are not in her position and not equal to her nail cuttings. You are an appendage like (letter) wā which was unduly attached to (the word) 'Amru in its spelling". (Ibn al-Athir2007:346)

Ibn al-Athir comment goes thus: "except that Al-Buhturi added another meaning (كالحديث المعاد) to what he copied from Abu Nuwâs. Many critics and scholars assert this category is acceptable and commendable.

(g): To copy the meaning and put it in better ornamentation, adore it a better expression. A representative of this is the verse of Abû Nuwâs, where he said:

يَدُلُّ عَلَى مَا فِي الْضَّحِيمِ مِنَ الْقَلِيدَ    تَقْلِبُ عَيْنَيْهِ إِلَى شَخْصٍ مِّنْ بَعْدِي
"It indicates what is in the heart of a man (in affection), turning of his eyes towards the person he loves".

al-Mutanabbi copied the meaning and embellished it in a better expression than that of Abū al-Nuwās when he said:

وإذا خامر الهوى قلب صب فعليه لكل عين دليل

"If affection has permeated the heart of a lover, there will be an indication to this for every eye". (Ibn al-Athīr 2007: 346)

Ibn al-Athīr accepts this kind and exonerates it from plagiarism.

(h): To copy the meaning or idea and paraphrase it. Ibn al-Athīr regarded this category as an accepted plagiarism because it indicates simplicity in the poet's style and his competence in rhetoric. An example of this is the poem of Bashshār ibn Burd:

من راقب الناس لم يظفر بحاجته وفاز بالطيبات الفائقة اللهج

"Whosoever keeps his hope in people will not succeed in his desire, while the deadly undaunted will achieve his goal.

Sullam ibn al-Khasir who was the originator's disciple copied the idea in the verse when he said:

من راقب الناس مات غما وفاز باللذة الجسور

"Whosoever keeps his hope in people will die in sorrow, and the stouthearted will gain the bliss" (Ibn al-Athīr 2007: 346)

(i): To copy meaning or idea and change it from general to specific or vice versa. Ibn Athīr regards this category as a pardonable plagiarism. He cited Al-Akhṭal's verse as an example:

لا تنه عن خلق وتقني مثله عاز عليك إذا فعلت عظيم

"Do not forbid an act only to start indulging in it, doing so is a great reproach on you

Abū Tammām picked it:

هو الصنع إن يعجل فتقطع وإن يرث فلتريث في بعض المواطن أنغ

"Will I reproach someone who is parsimonious only to become his coeval after? How reprehensible is such an act? (Ibn al-Athīr 2007: 347)

( j): increase in explanation and equivalence in meaning. This is to copy meaning or idea, and represent it with illustration to make it clear. Abu Tammām said:

فرى من يراه سيئك على أسرع السحب في المسير الجهام

"It is a benefit, if you speed it up, it is still good. And if you are laggard; surely that one too, in some circumstances, is more beneficial

Abū Tayyib picked the idea and polished it thus:

ومن الخير بطء سبيلك عليه أسرع السحب في المسير الجهام

"It is good when your gift reaches me at a snail speed; (after all) it is waterless cloud that moves in high speed ". (Ibn al-Athīr 2007: 347)

(k): Ibn al-Athīr defines it as "ittiḥād al-ṭarīq wa ikhtilāf al-maṣṣad (convergent method and divergent meaning). When two poets composed their qaṣīdah (ode) using the same style and arrived at different destinations where superiority of one over another will manifest. The author cited lengthy poem of Abū al-Tammām on elegizing a young child and al-Mutanabbi's poem on elegizing a young child as examples of this kind.

(3) al-Maskh: This is the act of changing of borrowed idea from good expression to bad expression and vice versa. (Ibn al-Athīr 2007:348)

فتى لا يرى أن الفريصة مقتل ولكن يرى أن العيوب مقتل

"(He is) a person who does not believe that violent fear kills, but he believes that flaws kill"

يرى أن ما يراه منك يضرب بالمثل مما يراه منك لعائبة

"He believes that what (sign) you give to one who strikes is more lethal in effect than what you give to one who reproves"
(4) Changing of bad expression to good expression, he compared a verse of al-Mutanabbi which says:

لا لو كان ما تعطيهم من قبل أن تعطيهم لم يعرفوا التأمي

If what you donate to them is known to them (prior to the time), they wouldn’t have held out their hope (for gift)

With a verse of Ibn al-Nabata which says:

لم يبق جودك لي شيئا أمل

| "Your openhandedness does not leave me with anything to hope for you made me live in this world without expecting (any need)"

(5) Changing good expression to bad expression is considered a repulsive plagiarism.

Analytical Study of Ibn al-Athīr’s Approach to Plagiarism


The author opened the door of discussion on this issue in his book al-Mathal al-Sâ’îr with a promise that imitating wording and ideas originally in poetry to prose cannot be equated with imitation of one in prose to another in poetry. The latter is an act of plagiarism while the former is pardonable in literary entrepreneurship. The author discussed extensively on it in his book titled "al-Washy al-Marqum". Samni Amidu, a professor of Middle Eastern studies and world renowned literary critic, gave detailed literary chronology of it in his work themed The Arabic Theory of Prosification and Versification.

To state that ibn al-Athīr is a man of vast ingenuity is to state the obvious; and one of the clearest indices of this averment is his independent mindedness on miscellaneous issues that verge on Arabic Rhetoric and Literary Criticism in all his writings by saying wa alladhi indi (i.e.in my opinion). We might sometimes see him reverberating the opinion of a predecessor if their views coincide on a particular issue For example, he concurs with ibn Tabataba “that the modern poets cannot dispense with borrowing ideas or meaning from the old poets, but they should conceal it.” (Ibn al-Athīr2007: 350).

On the other hand, to prove that he is not tied to anybody’s apron string, the author did not conceal his vehement opposition to the common opinion of notable scholars such as ibn Ṭabarānî and Abd al-‘Azîz al-Jurjānî that the antecedent poets had encompassed all ideas and had exhausted meanings in all directions(Ibn al-Athīr2007:352). Ibn al-Athīr believed that this notion cannot be generalized in literary arena. He proclaimed that the door of generating new ideas is widely open till the Day of Resurrection. He said: "And the truth is that the door of creating new ideas is open till the Day of Judgment", who can deny the brain of provision of abundance of thought. (Ibn al-Athīr2007:343). Driving home his point and convincing all doubting Thomases, he drew a line of parallel between his position and the common argument among the Jurists on whether the door of ijtihād is closed or not" He agreed that some ideas are common among poets because they are known to people naturally except that poets are on the same level on some ideas." But such ideas and meanings should be concealed and presented in a new expression or with better ornamentation, otherwise it is considered plagiarism". (Ibn al-Athīr2007: 343)

His approach to plagiarism is based on classification of plagiarism into several categories. He classified it into five major sections and sub-divided it into sixteen. He said; "these are types of plagiarism. They are sixteen and nothing is left behind. If the examiner is just with what I have presented, he will know that I have mentioned what others have not. I am seeking successfulness from Allah to let me be thankful for His blessing and not (being among the) vainglorious (Ibn al-Athīr2007: 344)

Ibn al-Athīr in his thorough examination of the subject matter subscribed to the notion of tawârud al-alfîr (coincidence of thoughts) but those ideas and meanings should not be conveyed by modern poet with the same expression used by the antecedent. He considered it in this form as an act of plagiarism. He said: "if an ancient poet delivered a poem and we heard it from another poet who came after him, this situation is a witness that the latter imitated it from the former. Assuming brains are coincidental in bringing out common ideas, how can tongues be coincidental in molding themes in the same expression? (Ibn al-Athīr2007:346)

He explained further: "if imitation is like this (word for word) it is faulty. If the successor claimed that he did not hear it from the predecessor, the idea occurred to him accidentally as it had occurred to the previous, the authenticity of such claim is unknown to anyone but Allah. The successor is blame worthy as seen outwardly even if what he claimed is true
(Ibn al-Athīr 2007: 346). This hard line stance is at variance with those of other critics who maintain moderateness in their submissions on plagiarism. Al-Āmidī, while affirming that judgment of plagiarism should not be passed on every text that contains ideas earlier expressed by a poet proclaimed: "...except I found in his poem several ideas which I have seen in other (poem). I will pass my judgment that it (the poem) contains imitated idea on which I cannot pronounce judgment as they are not distinguishable from each other. I will just say: someone said this idea and he has been preceded by someone else. By this, I will gain the virtue of truthfulness, and I will be free from frivolity"(Ibn al-Athīr 2005: 347). This view by al-Āmidī is in alignment with that of Abū Hilāl al-Aṣkārī (d. 395 AH) who had earlier said: "Sometimes it occurs to a modern (poet) ideas that had earlier occurred to an ancient (poet) which he might not know. This is an issue about which I knew, I am not in doubt about it. I wrote about women description, I thought that no one had preceded me on this idea until I detected it from the works of some Baghdad poets. I became amazed, and I determined not to pass absolute judgment of plagiarism on the modern poet who presented same idea as the earlier poet" (al-'Askārī: 1952:146). Moving in the same orbit of moderateness presented same idea as the earlier poet" (al-'Askārī: 1952:146). Moving in the same orbit of moderateness are renowned scholars such as al-Khaṣṣā' Qazwīnī (al-Qazwīnī 2005:350), Abū al-Fatkār al-Basyūnī, (al-Basyūnī2004:278). Abū al-Rahmān Ḥasan al-Maydānī (al-Maydānī 1996:54). and Aḥmad al-Badawī (al-Badawī :373-4).

CONCLUSION

A wide spectrum of burning issues arrested the attention of literary icons at the twilight of the third century of Hijrah; and on the front burner among these was that of al-sariqat al-shi’riyyah. This paper has exposed and highlighted the gargantuan contribution of ibn al-Athīr in this area. All studies by his predecessors in the field of plagiarism are, to say the least, peripheral and superficial. Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature has captured it all when it says "as a person, ibn al-Athīr comes as …………, but his work shows him as an independent mind who brings new life for a while to the already ossifying discipline of literary theory"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Salmon Hakeem, on bagging his PhD in Arabic Literary Criticism from Lagos State University, joined the Academic staff of his alma mater where he remains till date. During his undergraduate course, he won scholarship for one year specialist course in Arabic proficiency at the prestigious International Islamic University of Africa, Khartoum where he graduated with distinction. His area of research operation has, essentially but not exclusively, been in Arabic poetic culture, General Textual Analysis and Philosophical Postulation on Arabic Literary Discourse. He is a member of National Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS)

NOTES AND REFERENCES


324


Qamḥah Mufīd
