However, a vivid interest seems to have grown on the subject of global Islamic terrorism. The author has indeed successfully pointed out that Islam has been unfairly targeted in the west and that it is by no means synonymous with violence and killing. This viewpoint, to the author’s credit, is forcefully and convincingly presented. We would recommend the book for all those interested in understanding the dynamics of Muslims’ interaction with the rest of the world, especially the west.

Sohail Mahmood


‘Obayd Zakani, whose full name is ‘Obaydallāh [‘Ubayd Allāh] Zākānī Qazvini, was born in the eighth/fourteenth century, and lived part of his life in Shiraz, Tabriz, Baghdad, and Kerman. He was a contemporary of the great Persian poet, Hāfiz (d. 793/1391) and died in Shiraz sometime around 772/1370-1. He is one of the most famous and beloved satirical poets of the Persian speaking world. In many ways one may compare him to Bocaccio (d. 1375) who lived approximately the same time in Europe. ‘Obayd, like Bocaccio, was brave enough to make public the hypocrisy and insincerity which dominated certain social strata under the guise of religiosity, albeit, in satirical form.

Satirists by their nature are sharp tongued and witty. By reading them not only between the lines, but also the lines themselves, one can get an image of the society wherein the author lives. A society where the author himself is sometimes admonished and is under attack, for being fowl mouthed, going against the conventions of the society, and not following the order of the day. This we can find in many pieces of ‘Obayd’s work, where he expresses his utmost dislike for judges, where school becomes a holiday house, and teachers the head of failures. Where bribe becomes the savior of the weak and downtrodden, and tax collectors become the most dreaded elements of the society. These personages and ideas suddenly appear to be transcendental and transcontinental, and this is why ‘Obayd should be read. Be it China, Persia,
Byzantium, or Western Europe, the words which appear to be verbal attacks against the authorities become understandable to the ordinary people everywhere, and I believe ‘Obayd does this for the medieval Persian society beautifully. It is for this very reason that a critical edition which should be followed by a translation into English of his work is much desirable.

Some of ‘Obayd’s works were compiled in Iran in 1942 by the late Abbas Iqbal Aštiyani (Ashtiyanī) (the Qašīdas, Ghazals, Rubā’īyāt, and ‘Ašegh-name ['Āsiq Nāmeh]), and in 1967 another volume containing other works (Mūš o gorbe [Mūsh-ō Gorbeh], Akhlagh al-šhraf [Akhlāq al-Asbraf], Risale-ye delgošā [Risālab-‘i Dilkushā], Risale-ye sad pand [Risālab-‘i Šad Pand], Risale-ye ta’rifat [Risālab-‘i Ta’rifāt], and R š-name [Rēsh Nāmeh]), which omitted the unsavory vocabulary used in many parts of the text and was not a critical edition. The book under review aims to fill this gap and bring together all of the remaining prose and poetic of ‘Obayd Zakani in one volume. Having emphasized the popularity of the poet, it is all the more amazing that such an endeavor did not take place earlier and thanks to the late M.J. Mahjoub and the E. Yarshater we now possess a critical edition. The edition is based on twelve manuscripts which are available in Asia and Europe and which were consulted. The oldest manuscript dated to 807 AH (Codex T) is in Tajikistan which is the most difficult manuscript to consult; Codex B1 belong to the British Museum and is dated 817 AH and is incomplete and the writer was sloppy in his copying; Codex P is in Paris and is one of the best manuscripts; Codex D is in Egypt (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah); Codex M from Tehran belonging to Mahdavi Bayani does not contain many important pieces of ‘Obayd’s work; Codex H (Hamidiyye Library); Codex Š from the National Library of Vienna; Codex B2 from the British Museum which is complete but from the thirteenth century AH; Codex B3 from the British Museum whose writer seems to have had no knowledge of Persian or Arabic; Codex B4 from the British Museum; Codex A from the ninth century AH and kept at the Majlis Library in Tehran; and lastly a printed edition (Ĉ), by Abbas Iqbal Aštiyani.

The book is divided into ten sections. The first part contains the Qašīdas, Ghazals, Rubā’īyāt, Mathnavīs, and minor pieces. The first part of this section is the Qašīdas composed by ‘Obayd for his patrons who he lived under in various cities. The next section contains the Ghazals which are of mediocre standing in the history of Persian poetry. This is followed by Rubā’īyāt and Mathnavīs, and concludes with the critical apparatus. The second part of the book, however, is of much more interest since it contains ‘Obayds more famous or infamous odes. This section containing La’tā‘īf, Akhlagh al-šhraf, Risāle-ye delgošā, Risāleye sad pand, Risāleye dah-fasl, and Rēsh-nāme. The third section contains the Fālnāmeh, Kanz al-latā‘īf, Muš o
gorbe, and Arabic and Persian stories. It is these two sections which show ‘Obayd’s genius in his satirical composition and as a critic of his society. Some of the dialogues of course are put as polemics between unmentionable body parts which take a life of their own.

If there are any criticisms to be made against this edition, it has to do with the table of contents. There is none! It was rather disheartening not to find where the different pieces were and one really has to go through the whole text to find the sections and make a table of content. The other point has to do with the critical apparatus. In comparison with Khaleghi-Motalgh’s Shāhnāme of Ferdowsi [Firdawsi] (d. 1020) which is published by the same Bibliotheca Persica, one notices that it is very difficult to see which manuscripts contain which word, or omitted which word. Khaleghi-Motalgh’s edition provides the variants at the bottom of the page, while Mahjoub’s edition provides the variant at the end of each section. Of course we have to remember that Mahjoub did not live to see the work through, as it is apparent in the lack of an introduction and the insertion of the two articles of Mahjoub published in the journal Iran Nameh [Iran Nameh] and an old introduction written by Iqbal Aštiyani. It is, however, a blessing that what Mahjoub had done came to light and was rescued from oblivion, and we should thank Yarshater for this. Finally ‘Obayd is canonized as one of the most important satirists not only in the Persian speaking world, but also that of the Muslim world and available to the Western libraries who take an interest in these matters. It is hoped that some of his work be translated again into English for the non-Persian speaking readers, so that ‘Obayd’s satirical virtuosity becomes known.

Touraj Daryaee

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*Enemies of the Ayatollabs* is a difficult book to read. The author presents the case against the present Iranian regime and the case for the Iranian opposition in terms of black and white, reminding one of George Bush’s famous “you are