BOOK REVIEW

The Mahamadaj Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is doing a commendable service in introducing some famous works on Islam to the English-speaking world. The Trust is devoted to dissemination of authentic knowledge about Islam, particularly Shi'ism, as the latter has hitherto been neglected, or, for one reason or the other, has been inaccessible to the Western world.

The book under review is the fourth of the series of which three books have been published earlier. The first one is in the Sh'ite Islam by 'Ali and Sayyid Muhammad Husayn (Tehran) vol. 1, ed. by Dr. H. Nani, the second is The Qur'an in Islam by the same author a Persian version of which has already appeared in Tehran, but its English translation is still awaited. The third book of the series is A Sh'ite Anthology, selected and translated by the 'Allamah and edited and translated into English by W.C. Chittick. (See Review on this book in the Islamic Studies of March, 1982.)

The present book is an English translation of Kifh al-akhzab by Shaykh al-Mufid Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Na'wan (336-417 A.H.), a leading Sh'ite scholar, jurist, theologian and linguist. The book contains an authentic account of the lives of the Sh'ite twelve Imams and is the earliest extant history of the Imams. It briefly discusses the background and authority for nomination to Imambayat about each Imam, his biographical account, miracles performed by him, his virtues and sayings, circumstances leading to his death and of the disappearance of the last Imam. The book has been divided into two parts; Part I is devoted to the life and achievements of the first Imam, while Part II deals with the life, virtues and sayings of the other eleven Imams.

The author of book, Shaykh Mufid, was the teacher of some great Shi'ite scholars, including al-Sharif al-Radd (d. 406 A.H.), the famous compiler of Kifah al-Hajj, the monumental work on the laws, speech and sayings of Imam 'Ali, Radd's brother, al-Sharif al-Muradi (d. 436 A.H.), one of the greatest Shi'ite theologians and Shaykh Tusi (d. 480), the most t fear of Shi'ite theologians, jurist, traditionists and leader of the Shi'ite scholars who compiled his famous collection of Sh'ite haddith, Ta'rikh al-Hadith, as a commentary on Mufid's Kifah, one of the latest books on Sh'ite 'Ali. Its First Part includes a number of speeches of Imam 'Ali, some of which are not found in Radd's collection, Kifah al-Hajj, a living evidence of the authenticity of Kifah al-Hajj, as some hazard persons have most
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unjustly alleged that the speeches, letters and sayings contained in Nahj al-balaghah are
the creation of Mu'tad himself who has wrongly attributed them to Imam 'Ali.

Dr. I. K. A. Howard, who has accomplished the arduous and most difficult task of
translating this great work into English is a lecturer in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the
University of Edinburgh. He has travelled widely in the Middle East and has spent some
time in Aden and Leb non. He happens to be a specialist in Sh'ite Islam and has to his credit
a number of articles on various topics of Shi'ism.

The learned translator has not only translated the material of the book, but has also
taken great pains in finding the source of the contents of the book. At times he has even
compared the accounts of Shaykh al-Mufid with that given by the other historians and
biographers. In Part I of the book dealing with the life of Imam 'Ali, the translator has
compared the account given by the Shaykh specially with that given in Maqalat al-Ta'lihibayn,
Tahiri's Tarikh, Bostan Firdaws, and Shaff al-Maghfir and even corrected some of
the errors of the Shaykh or the text of the book in the light of the information given by the
other reliable sources. He has also given the source of the various speeches of Amir al-
Mun'im 'Ali or their extracts and his sayings from Nahj al-balaghah and pointed out the
differences in the wordings given in the two works.

In Part II, Chapter I, dealing with the life of Imam Husain b. 'Ali, the learned
translator has compared the account of the Imam as given in the book under review
with that given in Maqalat al-Ta'lihibayn only. But it is not clear, why he has not compared
the account given by the Shaykh with that given in Tahiri's Tarikh and Ibn al-A'lam's Tarikh,
as he has done in case of the following chapter (i.e. Chapter II dealing with the life of
Imam Husain).

In Part II, Chap. II dealing with the life of Imam Hasan, the translator has compared
the account of the Imam as given by the Shaykh with that given chiefly in Tahiri's
Tarikh, and sometimes with that given in Tahiri's Maqalat al-Ta'lihibayn and Ibn al-A'lam's
Tarikh.

In the following six Chapters (dealing with the lives of the third to eighth Imams) the
translator has compared the text of the sayings of the Imams given in the book under review
with that given in al-Kifah and has only rarely compared the accounts of the Imams given by
the author with Maqalat al-Ta'lihibayn, but has made no comparison of their accounts as
given by the Shaykh with that given by other books on history and biography.

Likewise, in the four following Chapters (dealing with the lives of the ninth to
twelfth Imams), the translator has referred to the traditions of the Imams appearing in al-
Right, and sometimes pointed out, differences between the two versions but has not made any comparison of their accounts as given by the author with that given in other books on history and biography.

Generally, while translating a technical or uncommon word, the translator has also given the original Arabic word in brackets. It is usually very difficult to translate a text of an oriental language into a European language, particularly when the text is replete with religious or spiritual terms or unusual words the equivalence of which are not easily available in the European languages. The present text is of such a type, and, therefore, its translation from Arabic into English has obviously been an arduous task, as it requires great patience, meticulous scholarship and extraordinary command of both the languages. The learned translator has acquitted himself of this onerous task successfully, and, therefore, he deserves our sincere appreciation and profound admiration.

However, there are some words whose translation does not seem proper. For example, the word radd al-Allah has been translated as "Anointer of God" (p. 1:4) while it should be translated as "Messenger of Allah" in order to avoid the Christian religious term of "Apostle" which is used in the Christian terminology as "any of the twelve messengers whom Christ sent forth to preach the Gospel." So also we should avoid the word "God" and use the Islamic term of "Allah" due to a world of difference in the actual connotation of the two words. (Similarly, there are words like "Church of Islam," "clergy of Islam" and their derivatives, etc. or adjectives like "catholic," etc. which are being so often used even by the Muslim scholars in their writings which must be avoided while writing on Islam or Muslims, as they are typically Christian terms with special connotations.) Likewise, the word usri is has been translated as "Lord" (p. 1:11), which should better be translated as "master, or chief," as the translator himself has translated the word "usriya" as "mixture" (p. 1:8).

In short, the translation, as a whole, is a great success, and deserves every commendation and congratulation.

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