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-Motlagh’s Shābānāmeh of Ferdowsi [Firdawsī] (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-Motlagh’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 [Irān 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


Enemies of the Ayatollas 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
with us or you are against us” statement. On the one hand, the author brands “the mullahs’ regime” as “the main engine of modern-day fundamentalist-based terrorism (p. 11). On the other hand is Sazeman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran, the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), “with an avowedly anti-fundamentalist interpretation of Islam” (p. 45).

Mohammad Mohaddessin calls this ‘conflict’ between the Iranian rulers and the Iranian opposition “the clash of two Islams” (p. 45), to which he devotes the part II of the book. On one side of the conflict are, in the words of the author, “the Shia mullahs offering a fundamentalist model of government” to the Muslims all over the world. On the other side of the conflict is PMOI which “advocates a secular, democratic and pluralist form of government that is at odds with the present theocracy.” Mohaddessin says that the “two Islams” have been at war with each other in Iran since 1979 when the religious leaders rose to power (p. 45).

Mohaddessin introduces and uses the term “two Islams” casually and carelessly as if they were two factions of a political party at loggerheads with each other. The religious rulers in Iran and the PMOI are two political factions in Iranian politics and calling the conflict between them the fight between “two Islams” is incorrect. In fact, the very term “Islams” appears to be preposterous. Just as there are no Christianities, or Judaisms, there are no Islams. It is unfortunate that Mohaddessin employs this word to describe what are political differences, on the one hand, and differences in the interpretation of religious concepts, on the other, among the Iranian Muslims.

What becomes clear very early on in the book is the audience and the purpose of the book. Mohaddessin’s audience is American and European, especially those Americans and Europeans who have control over political power. The purpose of the book seems to lobby those residing in the political centres of Europe and the United States to ‘get tough’ with the Iranian regime.

The author thinks that dialogue — “constructive dialogue” in the words of the British Foreign Secretary — with the Iranian regime is not useful and will not lead to a change in political situation inside Iran. He thinks that a policy of appeasement on the part of the Western world strengthens the mullahs who, the author claims, sponsor terrorism. Mohaddessin says that the Iranian government is the “chief patron of international terrorism in the world today” (p. 79).

Instead of presenting a well-reasoned analysis, backed by evidence, of the current situation in Iran, the author engages in polemics on behalf of PMOI and the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a coalition of Iranian groups opposed to the rule of the present regime in Iran. Mohaddessin himself is the chairman of NCRI’s Foreign Affairs Committee.
The book chronicles the history of the PMOI, which the author calls “the oldest and largest anti-fundamentalist Muslim group in the Middle East” (p. 45). In bits and pieces dispersed throughout the book, Mohaddessin talks of PMOI’s founding in 1965 and its transformation from its intellectual roots to a “resistance force”, and PMOI’s political ideology. The author, however, does not make it clear what it is that makes PMOI the largest anti-fundamentalist group in the Middle East. He also fails to engage in a serious discussion of PMOI’s politics. It is important to point out that PMOI was declared a terrorist organization by the US State Department.

As is clear from the title of the book itself, the author of the Enemies of the Ayatollahs has chosen to present Iranian opposition’s case by focusing primarily on what it is against, instead of what it is for. Often while reading about PMOI, one feels that one is reading a promotional brochure of a political faction.

In part III, titled “Battleground Iraq,” Mohaddessin charges the Iranian government with interfering in Iraq’s internal affairs. According to Mohaddessin, the deal between the US and British governments on one side and the Iranian government on the other was that if Iran refrained from any meddling in Iraq during the attack and occupation of Iraq, the US-UK forces would bomb the military bases of PMOI in Iraq. The author accuses the Iranian government of breaking its promise of not interfering in Iraq. Mohaddessin claims that in late 2002, the Iranian government had “decided to send sufficient weapons into Iraq and prepare safe houses and weapons ware houses to hide weaponry” (p. 153).

Mohaddessin claims “thousands of mullahs’ agents are present as military and paramilitary forces as well as religious preachers in different Iraqi towns, including Baghdad, Al-Amara, Baquba, Al-Kut, Najaf, Karbala, and parts of Basra and continue their work in the framework of expanding influence. In smaller towns and regions, Teheran-affiliated forces and groups run the administrative affairs through which they intend to institutionalize and at the same time expand their influence and control” (p. 158).

After reading paragraphs like this, one is left wondering why does the author not provide evidence to substantiate his charges. What is equally interesting is that the author does not even cite the sources, contrary to what he does in other chapters of the book, for what he presents as factual information. Were the author and the editors remiss in citing sources for the information regarding charges that Iran is meddling in Iraqi affairs? Or was the author trying to protect the identity of his Iranian sources inside Iran so that they do not come to harm? (If that was the case, the author could have said so.) Or were the ‘facts’ just made up? Or did the information come from
sources of questionable credibility, like the US intelligence agencies? The issue is of utmost importance to have been discussed in such an offhand manner. Similarly, the author discusses the nuclear programme of Iran in a manner which reminds the reader of how Iraq’s fictional weapons of mass destruction were presented to the world before the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States and the United Kingdom. The text in the book regarding what the author calls “Mullahs’ Manhattan Project” is to be carefully read and evaluated.

Considering the seriousness of the issues it deals with, the book is a disappointment. Those for whose consumption the book was written should read it with utmost care lest they are misled to make the kind of decisions about Iran that they made about Iraq.

Shahid Kamal

★★★★