

THE PSALMS OF ISLAM (*al-Ṣaḥīfat al-Sajjādiyya*) of Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn, translated into English by William C. Chittick, The Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 9 Mount Pleasant Road, N.W. 10 3EG, London, U.K., First Edition, 1988, pp. xvi+301, Price not given.

This is a collection of the Psalms attributed to Imām 'Alī Ibn Ḥusayn (AH 38–95/CE 658–713), also known as Zayn al-'Ābidīn because of his piety and constant occupation with prayers and complete detachment from the worldly pursuits and interests. The fourth Imām of the Ithnā 'Asharī (Twelver) Shī'ah, he was the sole surviving adult male of the Prophet's (peace be on him) family (*ahl al-bayt*) from the tragedy of Karbala, in which his father Imām Ḥusayn and the rest of the adult males of his family were massacred. The impact of the shock made him retire from the public life and he spent the rest of his days in complete seclusion busying himself with worship, recitation of the Holy Qur'ān, and supplication.

Supplications or prayers form a large part of the Shī'ite spiritual and religious literature. Various Shī'ah scholars, during different periods of time, have composed prayers for daily recital, as well as, for particular occasions. These prayers are believed to have come down either from the Prophet (peace be on him) or the Imāms. The prayers of the Imāms are held in equally high esteem since, according to the Shī'ī belief, they constitute a chain of light issued forth from the "Sun of Prophecy", peace be on him (*A Shī'ite Anthology*, edited and translated by William C. Chittick, Introduction by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Muhammadi Trust, London, 1980, p. 6). Whatever has come down from them is believed, therefore, to have emanated from the divinely inspired wisdom and knowledge. Perhaps the reason for the abundance of supplications in the Shī'ite literature is that the most of the Imāms of the Shī'ah, particularly the latter one's, spent almost their entire lives or major parts of them as victims of unending persecution, which predisposed them to concentrate their attention on worship and recitation of supplications or prayers addressed to the Almighty.

The *Ṣaḥīfat al-Sajjādiyyah* is a collection of, perhaps, some of the most beautiful and soul-stirring supplications and is held in esteem next only to the *Qur'ān* and the *Nahj al-Balāghah* in the Shī'ī spiritual literature. These prayers form part of the daily religious life of not only the Shī'ah's but also of many Sunnis, since quite a few of these prayers are found in many of the prayer manuals popular among the Sunnis. Some of these prayers have been translated by Constance Padwick in her *Muslim Devotions* (London: 1961).

The Shī'ah believe that Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn himself collected the supplications and taught them to his children, especially to Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Zayd. Subsequently, these prayers were widely circulated among his followers. The Shī'ah authorities on the *Ḥadīth* believe that the text of the supplications has been transmitted through an un-broken chain of narrators and its authenticity has never been questioned by the scholars. Fifty-four supplications form the main body of the text while fourteen supplications (including seven prayers for each day of the week) and fifteen *munājāt* were added later. These latter supplications are said to have been added to the original text

by Shams al-Din Muhammad Ibn al-Makki (d. 786/1384), better known as al-Shahid al-Awwal, the author of the famous work on Shi'ah jurisprudence, *al-Lum'at al-Dimshiqiyah*.

The original *Ṣahīfah* does not comprise all the supplications which have come down to us from Imām Zayn al-'Abidin, as at least eight other collections, containing additional supplications, were compiled later by other Shi'ah scholars. The second *Ṣahīfah* (lithographed in Iran as well as in Bombay: 1311/1893) is equal in size to the original and was compiled in 1053/1643 by Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Hurr al-'Amili (d. 1104/1692), the author of the famous Shi'ah collection of *Ḥadīth, Wasā'il al-Shi'ah*. The third was collected by Mirzā 'Abd Allāh Ibn Mirzā 'Isā Tabarizī, known as Afḥāndī, a disciple of Majlisī. The fourth was compiled by Mirzā Husayn Ibn Muhammad Taqī Nūrī (d. 1320/1902) and was published in Iran. The fifth, and the largest of the published versions was compiled by Muḥsin al-Amin, the author of *A'yān al-Shi'ah*, a biographical dictionary of the Shi'ah religious authorities. It contains fifty-two extra supplications in addition to those of the previous compilations. Constance Padwick has made use of this fifth collection of *Ṣahīfah* in her *Muslim Devotions*. The sixth was compiled by Muhammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarāni al-Hā'iri. These six collections have been mentioned by Aghā Bozorg Tehrāni in his *al-Dhar'ah ilā Taṣānif al-Shi'ah*, under *Ṣahīfat al-Sajjādiyyah* (vol. 15, pp. 18–21, nos. 95–100). Collections have also been compiled by some contemporary scholars such as Hājj Shaykh Muḥammad Bāqir Ibn Muḥammad Ḥasan Birjāndī Qā'ini, Shaykh Hādī Ibn 'Abbās Āl-i-Kāshif al-Ghitā Najafi, and Hājj Mirzā 'Alī Husaynī Mar'ashi Shahristāni Hā'iri (cf. Aghā Najafi's Introduction to the *Ṣahīfah*).

At least, forty commentaries and glosses have been written on the *Ṣahīfah*, specially since the Safavid period. Among the famous commentaries of the Safavid period are those written by Shaykh Bahā'ī, Mir Dāmād, and the younger Majlisī. The most well-known of the later commentaries is *Riyāḍ al-Sālikīn* by al-Sayyid 'Alī Khān al-Husaynī al-Ḥasanī al-Shirāzi (d. 1120/1709).

As regards the contents and subject matter of the *Ṣahīfah*, the book is a bouquet of the Islamic Garden of Spirituality laden with flowers of variegated colours and rich odours whose fragrance and hues have all emanated from the divine arch-tree of the Furqān and its chief gardener, the Prophet (peace be on him). The nectar sprinkled on these flowers is the same that springs from "the sparkling fountains" in the orchard of faith. Although a collection of supplications, which are mainly designed to offer sincere prayers with humility and modesty in order to elicit Divine mercy and favour, the *Ṣahīfah* also sheds light on some other domains of the belief, and stresses some of the innermost dimensions of Islam. It provides the best available summary of the Muslim perceptions of God, the Angels, the Prophets, the Scriptures, the Last Day, and *qaḍā* and *qadar* (fate and divine decree), which constitute the core of the Islamic world-view. The *Ṣahīfah* often refers to the domain of Islamic practice, or the *Shar'ah* in a broad sense, and emphasizes the absolute necessity of following God's guidelines as set down in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. It also emphasizes the necessity of establishing justice in the society.

The translation of Imām Zayn al-'Abidin's treatise *Risālat al-Huqūq* (Treatise on Rights), the only work attributed to him apart from the *Ṣahīfah* and some letters and sayings, constitutes the Appendix.

As regards the quality of this translation, the translator has apparently made every effort to make his translation at once literally accurate, readable and lucid to the English-knowing world. In fact, in view of the esoteric and metaphysical nature of the contents of the book, it can be easily guessed that its translation from Arabic into any European language is an exceedingly difficult task. But Dr. Chittick deserves appreciation for acquitting himself creditably of this task.

The quality of the translation can be appreciated by comparing it with the earlier translations, for example, that of Sayyid Aḥmad 'Alī Mōhāni, (first edition published in Lucknow in 1929–31, the latest, edited by Lāleh Bakhtiār and Dr. Ziyā Sa'adi, published by the Islamic Propagation Organization, Tehran in 1984). The superior quality of the present translation is the result of the experience and skill of the translator in rendering difficult Arabic texts into English. He was the first to edit and

translate the major Sūfi treatise of Jāmi, *Naqd al-Nūṣūs* and some of the major works of Qunyawī. He has also edited and translated *A Shi'ite anthology*, referred to earlier, which is a selection of the Shi'ah *Ḥadīth* by 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Husayn Tabātabā'i.

The translator has consulted commentary on *Ṣahīfah* by Sayyid 'Alī Khān Shirāzi, its excellent Persian translation and commentary by 'Alī Naqī Fayḍ al-Islām and the less useful Persian translation by Mirzā 'Abū'l-Qāsim Shā'rāni. He has provided useful notes which, though not exhaustive, are meant to identify the proper names, clarify obscurities and draw attention towards a few of the Qur'ānic references in order to suggest how thoroughly the text is based on the Revealed Book. In some cases, he has mentioned relevant *Ḥadīth* and discussed the various interpretations offered by the commentators.

It may also be mentioned here that the Arabic text of the *Ṣahīfah*, the supplications for the days of the week and the *mundāt* have been copied from the Sha'rāni edition, calligraphed by Sayyid Tahzīb al-Hasan Naqvi, who incidentally belongs to a well-known family of calligraphers from Amruha (India). His father, Sayyid 'Ayn al-Hasan Naqvi Jarī, was a famous calligrapher of his time.

We conclude this review by quoting a beautiful passage from the "Introduction" of the book by the translator which will show a glimpse of his inner feelings about the Islamic civilization in general and the mystics in particular:

Islamic civilization as a whole is much like a traditional Muslim city. The outer walls make it appear dull and sombre, and it is not easy to gain access to the world behind the walls. But if one becomes an intimate with the city's inhabitants, one is shown into delightful courtyards and gardens, full of fragrant flowers, fruits trees, and sparkling foundations. . . . Some of the gardens are opened up through the study of Sufism, art and architecture, poetry, and music. . . . The most traditional and authentic gardens of the city, and the most difficult of access, are the hearts of the greatest representatives of the civilization. It is here that the supplications handed down from the pillars of early Islam can open up a whole new vision of Islam's animating spirit, since they provide direct access to the types of human attitudes that are the prerequisite for a full flowering of the Islamic ideal. (pp. xlii–xliii).

In short, the translator and the publishers of the book deserve thanks for offering such a beautiful souvenir of spiritual excellence.