



حبر أبيض
WHITE INK



Prof. Mohamed Afifi

The stereotypical images of Arabs in Persian culture Shahnameh as an example

Literature is one of the most important sources of understanding the nature of societies, and one of the most important colors of literature is poetry and popular epics. We can see this clearly with the "Iliad" and its reflection on the ancient Greek society, in addition to the pre-Islamic poetry. During that period, it has been described as the "Diwan of the Arabs". As for Persia, it is one of the most important sources to understand the nature of Iranian society, not only before Islam but also after it. So, what's the story of the Shahnameh?

"Shahnameh" is a Persian word meaning the biography of kings. It includes the events of the Persian Kings, facts, battles, hunting trips, and other details of daily life. The Shahnameh covers the historical period from the early history of various Persian countries, to the end of the Sasanian state and its fall at the hands of the Islamic conquest of Persia in the middle of the seventh century AD.

The Shahnameh has been written at the request of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni around the year 1010 AD. The Shahnameh consists of nearly sixty thousand verses, written in Persian, although at the time Arabic was the dominant language in Persia. It is even said that it has been written in Persian in order to respread the Persian language in Iran, in an attempt to diminish the Arab influence on literature and governance in Persia. The one who has written the Shahnameh is the famous Persian poet Ferdousi. Who is he?

He is Abul-Qâsem Ferdousi, one of the most famous poets of Persia after the Islamic conquest of Persia. Ferdousi is attributed to the province of Khorasan. He is said to have been born in 940A, while he has died around 1020 A.D. According to some, whoever reads the Shahnameh may get the feeling that it has been written to lament the fall of the Persian Empire with the Islamic conquest. It is as if he wants it to flourish again. Some critics, who studied the Shahnameh, describe the Ferdousi as being sympathetic with the Zoroastrians, who follow the ancient pagan religion of Persia. Besides, they believe that Ferdousi has been one of the most important supporters of the "populism" movement, what is populism?

"Populism" is one of the most important and dangerous intellectual and political movements against Islamic rule in the Islamic East. Some attribute the origin of the word to the word "people," in the sense of being bias towards a certain people, and, hence, the rejection of Arabs' Islamic rule, and the desire to revive the ancient pagan language and religions. Ferdousi is one of the most important intellectual theorists of this movement.

In this way, Ferdousi has gained his racist views against the Arabs, as expressed in the Shahnameh. Some refer to Ferdousi's portrayal of the Arab king "Al-Dahhak" as representing the Arab invaders who ended the rule of the Sassanid Empire, and then the Persian civilization, from his point of view. Therefore, Ferdousi has intended to resurrect Persian populism. Interestingly, this racist perception has been re-employed during World War II. In the fight against Nazism in Iran, the image of al-Dahhak, the Arab king, has been hanged next to Hitler's image! Hitler is certainly one of the greatest serial killers in history, but the link between the image of the Arab king and Hitler is the ultimate racism against the Arab character.

Faradousi rejects the Islamic conquest of Persia and denies its important religious and civilizational effects on Iran. He describes the Islamic conquest as an invasion. He says: "The faith - Zoroastrianism - has been executed, Khosrow has been slaughtered. They have seized power from Khosrows, not by courage, but by deception. And with it also, they have seized power. And by force, they have taken the wives of men, spoils and orchards. Can you imagine the horrors that these bastards - Arabs - have carried to the world. Their horror is unprecedented. These invading Arabs have ended our legacy and all I see are examples of poverty."

The Shahnameh is perhaps one of the most important Persian literary works. It is considered, by some, to be the source of the revival of the Persian language and nationalism again, but it also expresses a clear racism and anti-Semitism against the Arabs, and a clear rejection of the Arab civilization and the religious influence over Iranian history.