

1. A Precious Collection

The Nahju 'I-Balaghah is a precious collection of the sermons, letters, invocations, advices and the sayings of Amiru 'I-Mu'minin, Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (upon whom be peace). It was compiled by a great Shi'ite scholar 'Allamah Sayyid Sharif Radhi about a thousand years ago. The passage of time has not been able to antique it, rather the appearance of new ideas and wise thoughts has increased its value.

As 'Ali was a man of speech, he delivered many lectures, and on different occasions many wise-sayings were heard from him; also many letters were written by him, especially during the period of his caliphate. The Muslims were very keen to preserve his sayings as can be seen from what al-Mas'udi, who lived a century before Sayyid Radhi, wrote in his famous history book *Muruju 'dh-dhahab*:

Alone the sermons of 'Ali (peace be upon him), which have been preserved by various people, number more than four hundred and eighty. 'Ali delivered these sermons extemporaneously without any notes or written outlines. People memorized the words and benefitted from these words in their practical lives. [1](#)

In the Nahju 'I-Balaghah only two hundred and thirty-nine sermons of 'Ali have been recorded, but the testimony of a great historian like al-Mas'udi shows that the lectures delivered by the Imam were more than four hundred and eighty. From al-Mas'udi's quotation we can also understand that many people were eager to memorize the sermons of the Imam.

[1.](#) al-Mas'udi, Abu 'I-Hasan 'Ali, *Muruju 'dh-Dhahab*, vol. IV, Paris (with French translation) n.d., p. 441. It is not clear for me whether al-Mas'udi means only the sermons- which were recorded in writing, or only the ones which were memorized by the people, or both.

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