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Meeting 7: The Science of Knowing the References Part 2

Meeting 7: The Science of Knowing the References Part 2 (E'Im Ma'refatel-Masader) A Glance at the Main Shia Books of Hadith

[The Four Books \(Al-Kotobul-Arba'a\)](#)

The first and the most reliable Shia books of Hadith are four books: Al-Kaafi, Man La Yahzorohul-Faqih, Tahzibul-Ahkam and Al-Estebzar. In short they are referred to as Al-Kotobul-Arba'a: (the Four Books).

[Al-Kaafi \(the suffice\)](#)

Al-Kaafi is the first and the most ancient Shia Hadith collection. It was compiled during the period of minor occultation. Al-Kaafi is written by Muhammad Ibn Ya'qoub known as Sheikh Kolayni¹. He died in 328 or according to Najashi in 329 A.H; i.e. the last year of minor occultation.

The numbers of its Ahadith according to the present published copy- is 15176 Hadith which is more than the Ahadith of all the Six Authentic Sunni books of Hadith.

[Annotations and Commentaries](#)

More than fifty commentaries and annotations are written on Al-Kaafi. The followings are some of the most famous ones:

1. Meraatul-Oqool (the mirror of intellects) written by the late Al-Allama Al-Majlesi (died in 1111 A.H).
2. Sharhe Osool Al-Kaafi: written by the late Mulla Sadra (died in 1050 A.H).
3. Sharhe Osool and Roudha Al-Kaafi by the late Mulla Saleh Mazandarani; the teacher of Al-Allama Al-Majlesi

4. al-Wafi (sufficient) by the late Faydh Kashani (died in 1091 A.H).

Different views on Al-Kaafi

Al-Kaafi; the next book after the Quran

The Shia Traditionalists (Al-Akhbariyyoun) and even many jurists hold an extra ordinary position for Al-Kaafi. They regard all its Ahadith authentic and assert that all its words are the words of the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt (a.s.). The followers of this opinion supported their view by the following reasons:

Firstly, Kolaini was living in Baghdad during the time of the minor occultation and hence, he should have been in communication with the special ambassadors of Imam Mahdi (a.j.). Surely the Ambassadors must have approved his book.

Secondly, Al Kaafi was presented to Imam Mahdi (a.j.) and he was pleased with it and said about it, "al Kaafi is sufficient for our followers." [2](#)

Al-Kaafi is not a significant book

Unlike the first group a margin group of the Shia' scholars who have perhaps been influenced by Sunni thoughts do not hold much value for Al-Kaafi. They regard most of its Ahadith non-authentic. Sheikh Muhammad Baqir Behboudi, one of the contemporary writers limited the authentic Ahadith of Al-Kaafi to only 4428 Hadith and considered the rest which is more than 11000 Hadith non-authentic! The followers of this opinion refer to some Ahadith in Al-Kaafi which seem to suggest that the number of the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt are 13 or indicate that the Quran is distorted.

The Realistic View

Most of the contemporary Shia' scholars disagree with the above two extreme views. In response to the first view they argue that Sheikh Kolayni was one of the great scholars of the city of Rey, in Iran. He only travelled to Baghdad in the last few years of his life where he died. [3](#) Further, historically there is no evidence to prove his communication with the four ambassadors of Imam Mahdi (a.j.). Moreover, what is narrated from Imam Mahdi (a.j.) that he had said: 'Al-Kaafi would suffice our followers' has no known narrator and hence, has no scholarly value.

On the other hand, the Ahadith which seem to suggest the number of the Imams are thirteen Imams, their manuscripts are perverted. And most of the Ahadith that seem to suggest the Quran is distorted are either meant for the distortion of the meaning of the Quran or they mean the real interpretation of the Ayaat are distorted.

In short, we do not suggest that Al-Kaafi is entirely authentic nor do we agree that it is the same as any other book of Hadith. There are unauthentic and incorrect Ahadith in it yet, in comparison to other books of Hadith it is the most authentic Shia' book of Hadith.

Man La Yah-dhorohol-Faqih

Man La Yah Dhorohol-Faqih is the second book of the four books of the Shia' Hadith. It is compiled by Muhammad Ibn Ali known as Sheikh Sadooq. The late Sheikh Sadooq was born at the time of Husain Ibn Ruh the third special ambassador of Imam Mahdi (a.j.) out of the prayer of Imam Mahdi (a.j.) for his birth and the birth of his brother. Sheikh Sadooq died in 381AH in Rey.

The book Man La Yah dhorohol-Faqih consists of 5963 Hadith that 2050 of them are Mursal. It is the compilation of jurisprudential Hadith that its author regarded them as reliable and has given his verdicts accordingly. It is published only in four volumes. The late Sheikh Sadooq has compiled many other valuable books of Hadith such as Elalul Shara'eh, Oyoon Akhbar Al-Reda, Alkhisal, Thawabul A'mal and Al-Tawhid etc.

Al Tahtheeb and Al Istibsaar

The third and the fourth books of the Four Books are, 'Tahtheebul Ahkaam Fe Sharhil Moqniah' and 'Al-Istibsaar Fe Makhtolifa Minal Akhbar'. These two books are compiled by Muhammad Ibnil Hassan, known as Sheikh Tousi or Sheikhul Taefah. Died in 406 A.H. Like 'Man La Yah Dhor', 'Al-Tahtheeb' is a collection of jurisprudential Hadith, the number of its Ahadeeth according to the counting of Bahrani, are 12590 Hadith, in 93 chapters. This book has been published in 10 volumes.

One of the differences between 'Al-Tahtheeb' and 'Man La Yah Dhor' is in that Sheikh Sadooq compiled only Ahadith that he could give verdicts towards, whereas, Sheikh Tousi has compiled all the jurisprudential Hadith, regardless of whether he agrees with them or not. Sheikh Tousi compiled 'Al-Istibsaar' in reconciliation between the paradoxical Ahadith. 'Al-Istibsaar' consists of 5531 Hadith, in 915 chapters.

Nahjul Balagha

Nahjul Balagha is the collection of the miraculous words of Imam Ali (a.s.). It is compiled by one of the most noble Shia' scholars of the fourth century, known as Sayyed Al-Radhi (died in 406 A.H.). Nahjul Balagha, consists of three main parts: 241 sermons, 79 letters and 480 words of wisdom, in addition to 9 Hadith that Sayyed Al-Radhi named them the 'amazing words of wisdom of Imam Ali (a.s.)'. The eloquence of Nahjul Balagha is so miraculous and its meanings are so profound that it is said "it is lower than the words of the creator, and above the words of the creations." [4](#)

Al-Jahez, died 255 A.H., was a leading Arabic linguist. His book 'Al-Bayaan Wal Tabyeen' is one of the four pillars of Arabic literature. In his book, he quoted the saying of Imam Ali (as) "the value of every person is what he knows well" [5](#). He then praises the Hadith in few paragraphs and then asserts "had there been no sentence in my book other than this Hadith it would have been enough for the value of my book". [6](#)

The influence of the words of Imam Ali (as) was so profound to his audience that when he delivered his sermon in description of the characteristics of the pious, Hammam who was listening to the sermon, was so captured by the words of Imam Ali (as), that he fainted and died![7](#)

Different views on Nahjul Balagha

Some Sunni scholars have denied that Nahjul Balagha is the words of Imam Ali (as). They sometimes wrongly relate it to Sayyed Radhi and others[8](#) even make a bigger mistake in relating Nahjul Balagha to Sayyed Mortada; the brother of Sayyed Radhi. Had these people so much as only read the introduction of Sayyed Radhi on Nahjul Balagha would have realised that the book is collected by Sayyed Radhi and not his brother.

Indeed, how ignorant is the claim of those who relate Nahjul Balagha to Sayyed Radhi or Sayyed Mortada not Imam Ali (as) despite many historians and narrators had already quoted the sermons of Imam Ali (as) before even Sayyed Radhi was born. For instance, Al-Jahez has narrated sermon 31 of Nahjul Balagha, in 'Al-bayaan wal tabyeen'. [9](#) Similarly, Sayyed Radhi stated in the beginning of sermon 231 that "Imam Ali (as) delivered this sermon prior to his departure to Basra and Al-Waqidi in Al-Jomal has also narrated the sermon."

Al-Waqedi is a renowned historian died in 207 A.H. (200 years before Radhi). He has narrated the sermon in page 75 of his book. It seems one of the main motivations of those who rejected the book to be the words of Imam Ali (a.s.) is the third sermon of Nahjul Balagha in which the Imam (a.s.) has castigated Abu Bakr and Omar. Interestingly, there are many ancient references for that sermon. For instance, Sheikh Sadouq in his Esnad narrated the sermon from Ibn Abi Omair from Aban Ibn Othman from Aban Ibn Taghleab from Ekrema from Ibn Abbas. [10](#)

Overall, there is no doubt that Nahjul Balagha in general cannot be the words of an ordinary human, even a linguist. The extraordinary eloquence of Nahjul Balagha coupled with its profound meaning and variety of its subjects are the most convincing evidences that this great book can only be related to Imam Ali (a.s.)

Asnaad of Nahjul Balagha

Does Nahjul Balagha need any reference or is there any reference to connect Nahjul Balagha to Imam Ali (a.s.)? One of the technical problems concerning Nahjul Balagha, is that despite its extraordinary significance, its Ahadith are technically Mursal. Unfortunately, Sayyed Radhi has never mentioned the chain of transmitters of Nahjul Balagha.

Had he mentioned the transmitters of Nahjul Balagha he would have uprooted the most important technical problem of Nahjul Balagha. This task would have been easier at his time as it was closer to the time of the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). It seems the words of Imam Ali (as) have been so well known and its eloquence has been so miraculous that Sayyed Radhi did not feel any need of mentioning the

transmitters.

The Shia' scholars particularly in the last several decades have attempted to collect references to Nahjul Balagha. The followings are some of such efforts:

1. Madariko Nahjul Balagha; written by the late Al Alamah Sheikh Aal Kashiful Ghita', died 1361 A.H. This was the first official attempt in discovering the references of Nahjul Balagha. Unfortunately, however, the learned author has not quoted the references of most of the sermons, letters and words of wisdom. Moreover, very often the references that he introduced are the books that are compiled after the time of Sayyed Radhi, such as 'Nasikhul Tawaarikh'. Obviously, such books cannot be used as references for Nahjul Balagha.
2. Masadir Nahjul Balagha Wa Asaneedo; written by Sayyed Abdul Zahra Al Hossaini. This book was published in four volumes and indeed is the best book for the references of Nahjul Balagha. The author has successfully been able to quote references for most of the sermons, letters and the words of wisdom of Nahjul Balagha. However, similar to the previous work the references that he has introduced include post Sayyed Radhi time.
3. Bahsi Kootaah Peramooneh Madarik Nahjul Balagha; written by my respected teacher, Ayatollah Redha Ostadi. The advantage of this book is that he has limited the references only to the time prior to Sayyed Radhi. Nonetheless, it is for this reason that most of the sermons, letters and words of wisdom remained without a reference.

In conclusion, the research concerning the references of Nahjul Balagha is yet to be completed. We may even further argue that by mere quotations of previous historians, linguists and narrators who were living earlier than the time of Sayyed Radhi we cannot prove the authenticity of the narrations. Thus, Nahjul Balagha technically remains a Mursal book, that to prove the authenticity of its narrations needs internal and external evidences.

To simplify matters, we should note that Nahjul Balagha hardly contains any jurisprudential narrations and thus does not require much of the technicality involved in jurisprudential narrations.

Other Shia Hadith Collections

Al-Waafi (the Sufficient)

Al-Waafi is the work of Mulla Muhammad Mohsen Kashani known as Faydh Kashani (died in 1091 A.H). Faydh is the author of more than 200 books. Al-Waafi is the collection of all 'the Four Books' in a more systematic and organised fashion.

Beharul-Anwaar (the Oceans of the Lights)

Beharul-Anwaar is the most comprehensive Hadith book in Shia. It is collected and compiled by the late Muhammad Baqir Majlesi known as Allamah Majlesi (died in 1111 A.H.). Behar is a great Hadith collection in various topics from theology, history, astronomy, natural sciences, philosophy, interpretation of the Quran, jurisprudence, ethics, etc.

The main motivation of Majlesi in compilation of this encyclopaedia—as he stated in his introduction— was to safeguard the Shia books of Hadith at a time when they were exposed to annihilation and destruction by the ruthless rulers. Naturally, amongst those books were weak and unauthentic Ahadith that Majlesi would not vouch for. Nonetheless, as the purpose of his work was to collect the books he did not pay much heed to purification of the Ahadith. Thus, although Beharul-Anwaar is a very useful reference, the usage of it requires scholarly skills. Beharul-Anwaar is published in 110 volumes.

Wasa'elu-Shia

The actual name of this collection is 'Tafsil Wasa'elu-Shia Ela Tahsil Masa'el-Shari'a' (explanation of the means of Shia to achieve the Islamic issues). Wasa'el is compiled by Muhammad Ibn Hasan known as Sheikh Al-Horr Al-'Ameli died in 1104 A.H.

Wasa'el is a Hadith collection in jurisprudence. In addition to the Four Books, the author has referred to more than 90 other books of Hadith most of which are reliable books. Wasa'el consists of 35850 Hadith. This book is the most important Hadith book in Shia jurisprudence. No jurist can deduct any issue without referring to it, and mostly he does not need to refer to any other Hadith book if Wasa'el is at his possession.

Mizanul-Hikma (The Scale of Wisdom)

Mizanul-Hikma is one of the contemporary Hadith collection written by Sheikh Muhammad Rey-Shahri and is published in nine volumes. Mizanul-Hikma is compiled in an alphabetical order and consists of 23030 Hadith. Mizanul-Hikma is a Hadith collection in ethical, theological, social, political and economic Islamic issues. The author has largely used Beharul-Anwar and Kanzul-Ommal. Thus, it is a combination of the Shia and the Sunni Ahadith in social and ethical issues.

Narrative Tafsir

Some of the famous Shia interpretations of the Quran according to the Ahadith are:

Tafsir Forat Al-Kufi

Forat Ibn Ibrahim was one of the eminent Shia scholars and his Tafsir is one of the most ancient interpretations of the Quran. Our information about the author is very limited. We only know that he was

a contemporary of Sheikh Kolayni and hence was living during the minor occultation (260–329 A.H).

Al-Borhan Fi Tafsir Al-Quran (Clear Evidence in interpretation of the Quran)

Al-Borhan is the best collection of Hadith in interpretation of the Quran according to the teachings of Ahlul-Bayt (a.s.). It is written by Seyyed Hashim Al-Bahrani died in 1107 A.H. It suffices us in introduction of the author to quote the words of Sheikh Muhammad Hasan Al-Najafi; the author of Al-Jawaher (died in 1266 A.H). In his discussion about the jurisprudential meaning of 'justice' he asserted: "Had the meaning of justice been a natural good character (Malaka) not a good appearance, none would have been regarded 'just' other than people like Al-Moqaddas Al-Ardebili and Seyyed Hashim Al-Bahrani." [11](#)

Tafsir Nooru-Thaqalayn (the light of the two precious things)

Tafsir Nooru-Thaqalayn is very similar to Al-Borhan and the author Sheikh Abd Ali Ibn Jom'a known as Al-Howayzi was a contemporary of Al-Bahrani. Nooru-Thaqalayn is published in five volumes with the annotations of Sheikh Mahallati.

Hadith books related to the Imams (a.s.)

I would like to bring the lesson to an end by mentioning the names of some Hadith books that are claimed to be written or dictated by the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt (a.s.). These books include:

1. Mesbahu-Shari'a (Lantern of the Path)¹ claimed to be dictated by Imam Sadiq (a.s.) to Fodhayl Ibn Eyadh.
2. Fiqhul-Redha: Related to Imam Redha (a.s.) [12](#)
3. Tafsir of the Quran related to Imam Al-Askari (a.s.)

In short, the authority of none of these books to the Imams (a.s.) is authentic and hence they remain like other books of Hadith that the validity of their Hadith has to be examined. We have ample evidences that none of the Imams of Ahul-Bayt (a.s.) including their special ambassadors left any literature behind that we have access to, for the reasons discussed in the lesson four.

[1.](#) Kolayn is a village near Rey on the left side of the Tehran-Qom highway-Iran

[2.](#) Al-Mamaqani: Tanqihul-Maqal 3:203

[3.](#) Sobhani: Kolliyat Fi Elmel-Rejal, p.360

[4.](#) Haeri: The Shi'a Encyclopaedia 6: 148

[5.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Words 81

[6.](#) Al-Bayaan Wal-Tabyeen 1:83. al-Jahiz stated that in spite of the fact that he was not very fond of Imam Ali (a.s.)

[7.](#) See Nahjul-Balagha, Sermon 193

[8.](#) Such as al-Thahabi in Mizanul-E'tedal 2:201 and Ibn Hajar in Lisanul-Mizan 4:223

[9.](#) Al-Bayan 1:172

[10.](#) 'Elalu-Sharaye', p. 144

[11.](#) Jawaherul-Kalam 13:295

[12. http://www.aqaed.com/ahlulbait/books/feqh-reza/a1.html](http://www.aqaed.com/ahlulbait/books/feqh-reza/a1.html) [1]

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