

The Commentaries on Nahjul Balaghah

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Article

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Since the times of al-Radi, Nahjul Balaghah has been a subject of study and interpretation. As reported earlier al Sayyid al-Murtada's daughter used to narrate her uncle's work, and the book had become a subject of study in academic circles. The Kitab nameh yi Nahjul Balaghah published in 1359 Sham/1980 in Persian from Iran, enlists 370 titles of various commentaries, translations, selections and books dealing with its madarik and masadir (sources) in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, English, Gujrati and French.

This bibliography cannot be considered to be complete in any way, for it is compiled in Iran and the compiler depended on secondary sources such as al-Dhari'ah, Kakh-e dilawiz, Nuqaba' al-bashar, etc., as he had no access to the works in other languages, particularly Indian languages. A large number of titles could have been added to this list with some research in the languages unfamiliar to the Persians. A selected bibliography on the basis of this Kitab-nameh and two other books was compiled and published in al-Tawhid, vol. II, no. 2.

Selected Commentaries on Nahjul Balaghah

1. Alam Nahjul Balaghah by al-Sayyid 'Ali ibn Nasir al-'Alawi, reportedly a contemporary of al-Radi. Firstly, this book refers to some other commentaries, which means it may not be the first. Secondly, its style is not that of the fifth century and the book may belong to a later period.
2. Ma'arij Nahjul Balaghah by Shaykh Abu al-Hasan Abu al-Qasim Zayd ibn Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Bayhaqi al-Nishaburi, popularly known as Farid-e Khurasan (d. 565/1169). This sharh is supposed to be based on the copy of Nahjul Balaghah that was approved by al-Radi himself.
3. Hada'iq al-haqa'iq: al-'isbah fi Sharh Nahjul Balaghah by Abu al-Hasan Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Bayhaqi al-Nishaburi, known as Qutb al-Din al-Kundari, compiled in 576/1180. Its one manuscript is in Madrasah-ye Fadiliyyah, Mashhad.
4. and 5. Al-Ma'arij fi Sharh Nahjul Balaghah (also called al-Mi'raj) and Minhaj al-bara'ah (written in 556/1170) by Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi (d. 573/1177).
6. An incomplete commentary by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (543 or 44-606/1149-50-1209), mentioned in Ta'rikh al-hukamd by Jamal al-Din al-Qifti.
7. A commentary attributed to 'Abd al Jabbar al-Mu'tazili, and also three other scholars contemporary of al-Shaykh al-Tusi (385-460/995-1067-68)

8. Sharh by Diya' al-Din Abu al-Rida Fadl Allah ibn 'Ali al-Rawandi (d. after 1065/66).

9. Sharh 'Izz al-Din ibn Abi al-Hadid al-Mu'tazili (d. 656/1258).

This is the most famous commentary on which several commentaries have been written. This has been translated into Persian, French and most probably in Urdu. Its selection *Ittiqat al-durar al-nukhab* was compiled in 1283/1866–67.

Commentaries written on it number at least fifteen, among the authors of which are such eminent names as Ahmad ibn Tawus (d. 637/1239), Sayyid Hashim al-Bahrani (d. 1107/1695–96), Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani (1186/1772–3), Shaykh Muhsin Karim 'Abd al-Husayn ibn Musa, Mahmud Mallah and others.

Critiques of his commentary were mainly directed against his position regarding the caliphate. Though Ibn Abi al-Hadid recognized al-Khutbat al-Shiqshiqiyah as genuinely attributed to al-'Imam 'Ali (as), he, however, tried to interpret it in accordance with Sunni belief in the legitimacy of al-Khilafat al-Rashidah.

10. Al-Sharh al-kabir by Ibn al-Maytham al-Bahrani (d. 679/1280). Ibn al-Maytham wrote other commentaries on the book also viz. *Mishah al-saliefn* and its abridgement *Mukhtasar Misbah al-salikin*, and *Minhaj al-'arifin*, a commentary on *Mi'at kalimah li-'Amir al-Mu'minin* by al-Jahiz.

11. Al-Dibaj al-mudī' fi sharh Nahjul Balaghah li al-Radi by Imam al-Mu'ayyad bi Allah Yahya ibn Hamzah al-'Alawi al-Yamani (d. 749/1348–9) which deals with the difficult words occurring in Nahjul Balaghah.

12. *Mulhaq Nahjul Balaghah*, a commentary written around the beginning of the eighth/ fourteenth century by Ahmad ibn Yahya, a manuscript of which copied in 729/1328–29 is in the *Kitabkhaneh-yi Astaneh-yi Quds Ridawi*, Mashhad.

13. Sharh al-nafa'is by an unknown Sunni author written in 759/1357–58 available in the *Kitabkhaneh-yi Astaneh-yi Quds Ridawi* Mashhad.

14. Sharh by Kamal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-'Ata'iqi al-Hilli compiled in 770/1368–69.

15. *Minhaj al-fasahah* by Kamal al-Din Husayn ibn Khwajah Sharaf al-Din 'Abd al-Haqq al-'Ardebili Ilahi (d. 950/1543–44).

16. *Minhaj al-wilayah* by Mulla 'Abd al-Baqi al-Sufi al-Tabrizi al-Khattat, known as Danishmand (d. 1039/1629–30).

17. Sharh by Abu Talib Taj al-Din 'Ali ibn Anjab, known as Ibn Sa'id (d. 674/1275–6).

18. Sharh by al-Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al Saffati (d. 650/1252–3).

19. Al-Tuhfat al-'Aliyyah fisharah Nahj al-balaghat at-Haydariyyah by Muhammad ibn Habib Allah, grandson of Khalifah Sultan, compiled in 881/1476.

20. Al-Mawdhib al-Ilahiyyah by al-Sayyid Afsah al-Din Muhammad al-Shirazi (the 9th century H.).

In later centuries, numerous commentaries were written in Arabic and Persian, details of which can be found in the Kitabnameh-yi Nahjul Balaghah and al-Tawhid (English), vol. II, no.2. In addition to these several other works were compiled with regard to the sources of the contents of Nahjul Balaghah in Arabic, Urdu and Persian, among which the following can be mentioned here:

Commentaries available in Persian

1. Rida Ustadi, Bahthi kutah piramun-e Nahjul Balaghah wa madarik-e an (1396/1976).
2. Kitabnameh-yi Nahjul Balaghah by the above-mentioned author (1359 Sham./ 1980).
3. Barrasi-yi Nahj al-baldghah wa asnad-e an by Sayyid Jawad Mustafawi.
4. Pizhuhishi dar asnad wa madarik-e Nahjul Balaghah by Sayyid Muhammad Ja'fari (1356 Sham./ 1977).

Commentaries available in Arabic

1. Mustatrafat Nahj al-baldghah by Shaykh Fakhr al-Din al-Turayhi (d. 1085/1674).
2. Masadir Nahjul Balaghah by 'Abd al-Zahra' al-Husayni al-Khatib, in four volumes (1386/1966-67).
3. Madarik Nahjul Balaghah by al Shaykh Hadi Kashif al Ghita' (d. 1361/1942), printed in 1354/1935.
4. Madarik Nahjul Balaghah by al Shaykh 'Abd Allah Ni'mah, published from Beirut
5. Mustadrak Nahjul Balaghah by Shaykh Kashif al Ghita, printed in 1354/1935.
6. Masadir Nahjul Balaghah by Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani (1301-1386/1883-84-1966-67)
7. Ma huwa Nahjul Balaghah by al Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani, compiled in 1352/1933-34 and printed the same year. Also translated into Persian and published twice.

A number of translations and commentaries on the Imam's letter to Malik al-'Ashtar have been written in Persian which number around fifty, of which some were in verse. The authors of some of these shuruh are persons of eminence like Mulla Muhammad Salih Rawghani, Muhammad Husayn Furughi Dhaka' al-Mulk (d. 1325/1907-08), Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Furughi (1257-1321 Sham./ 1878-1942), Ahmad ibn Hafiz Qatil Kirmani, known as Adib (d. 1329/ 1911), Sharif al-'Amili, and al-'Allamah al-Majlisi (d. 1111/1699-1700).

The complete text of Nahjul Balaghah was also translated in verse many a time. In Arabic, too, the letter to Malik al-'Ashtar was commented upon by numerous scholars. Al-Khutbat al-Shiqshiqiyyah had been also attracting the attention of Arab commentators and Persian translators.

Nahjul Balaghah's Persian translations started to appear much earlier than the Safawids came to power. Husayn ibn Sharaf al-Din Ardebili, a contemporary of Shah Isma'il Safawi, translated Nahjul Balaghah which was published in 1355/1936 with the Arabic text.

Among the popular Persian translations we can name the ones by Sayyid 'Ali Naqi Fayd al-'Islam, Jawad Fadil, and Asad Allah Mubashshiri. Among the early translations one was done by Nizam al-Din 'Ali ibn al-Hasan al-Gilani, which was completed in 1036/1626-27. The earliest Persian translation is by Mulla Fath Allah al-Kashani (d. 988/1580-81) under the title Tanbih al-ghafilin, a third printing of which came out of the press in 1313/1895-96. A popular revolutionary leader and scholar Ayatullah Sayyid Mahmud Taliqani (d. 1399/ 1979) also translated Nahjul Balaghah and published it with his commentary in 1326 Sham./1947.

Urdu translations of Nahjul Balaghah

1. al-'Isha'ah by Sayyid Awlad Hasan ibn Muhammad Hasan Amruhawī (d. 1338/1919-20), Nayrang-e fasahat by Dhakir Husayn Akhtar Dehlawi, and three other translations by Zafar Mahdi ibn Sayyid Warith Husayn Jalisi, Ra'is Ahmad Ja'fari (a Sunni author), and Mufti Ja'far Husayn. All these translations were accompanied by notes and comments.

2. I'jaz Husayn Badayuni (d. 1350/1931-32) compiled a book to explain difficult words of the book under the name Hall-e lughat-e Nahjul Balaghah.

3. Imtiyaz 'Ali Khan 'Arshi's Istinad-e Nahjul Balaghah has already been discussed. Aqa Buzurg al-Tehrani, in al-Dhari'ah ila tasanif al-Shi'ah, has referred to another Tarjumah wa sharh in Urdu by Sayyid 'Ali Azhar Khajwi al-Hindi (d. 1352/1933-34).

4. Sayyid Sibṭ al-Hasan al-Hanswi's work Minhaj Nahjul Balaghah is rated among the best of its kind in Urdu. A few years ago Mahmud Husayn Qaysar Amruhawī published a lengthy article in many parts in an Urdu journal on the sources of Nahjul Balaghah and the authenticity of the ascription of its contents to al-'Imam 'Ali (as).

There are, of course, a number of articles and booklets compiled about Nahjul Balaghah in Urdu.

Addendum: This information was sourced from:

The Early Imamiyah Shi'ite Thinkers

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