

# THE CANONIZATION OF *NAHJ AL-BALĀGHA* BETWEEN NAJAF AND ḤILLA

Sistani and the Iconic Authority of the *Marāji*'

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Despite the relatively narrow construction of their authority in substantive law, there is ample evidence from which to conclude that the *marāji*' wield authority in other realms too. While much of the scholarship on the *marja*'*iyya* has focused on their political authority in Muslim-majority societies, their status as cultural icons is arguably more important for understanding their global influence. This article examines how *marāji*' use their "iconic authority" to shape canons. In particular, it focuses on a recent statement by al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani that describes *Nahj al-balāgha* as an explanation of the meanings of the Quran. It is argued that, by seeking to organize and regulate reading practices, al-Sistani's statement contributes to the canonization of *Nahj al-balāgha*. To fully appreciate the significance of al-Sistani's statement, however, one needs to situate it within the history of the text. I argue that the School of Ḥilla is an excellent vantage point from which to view the history of the canonization of *Nahj al-balāghah* because it can be considered the formative period of Imāmī tradition in important respects. Evidence from the School of Ḥillah confirms that *Nahj al-balāghah* played a role in the organization and representation of Imāmī tradition, but there is little evidence of the notion that it is an explanation of the meanings of the Quran. Drawing upon J. Z. Smith's classic treatment of canon, I conclude that the novelty of this view is further evidence that *Nahj al-balāgha* is canonical.

In January of 2016, "a group of college students and social activists" sent one of the foremost authorities in the Imāmī Shī'ī world, al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani (b. 1930), a written request for advice.<sup>1</sup> The request stated:

We would like to ask Your Eminence for advice that can be useful to us in this day and age, [given] the role of the youth and what is required of them to play that role. Other advice that would be beneficial to the youth [would] also [be] appreciated.<sup>2</sup>

In his reply, Sistani emphasized the importance of faith, morality, hard work, family, charity, social responsibility, and a lifelong pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. He concluded his reply by instructing young people to familiarize themselves with three books: the Quran, *Nahj al-balāgha*, and *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-sajjādiyya*.<sup>3</sup> Compiled by al-Sharif al-Radi (d. 406/1015) in 400 /1010, *Nahj al-balāgha* is the earliest surviving collection of sermons, letters, and statements attributed to ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 40 /661).<sup>4</sup> Regarding *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sistani said:

This book explains the meanings of the Quran in an eloquent style that provokes a spirit of reflection, contemplation, learning, and wisdom. Therefore, one should read it whenever he has a chance and imagine that Imam Ali, may peace be upon him, is addressing him directly. Also, one should pay special attention to the letter of Imam Ali, may peace be upon him, to his son Imam al-Hasan, may peace be upon him.<sup>5</sup>

Sistani’s remarks are both a reflection and a formulation of the view that *Nahj al-balāgha* is a “canonical” text, second only to the Quran, which it explains as though it were an exegesis. The text of Sistani’s reply was translated into English, Persian, and Urdu and circulated widely throughout the Imāmī Shī‘ī community.<sup>6</sup> Like his earlier directions to those fighting ISIS, his advice to young people was viewed as a testament to the sagacity of the reclusive leader.<sup>7</sup>

Talk of canons understandably raises the eyebrows of Islamicists. Recapitulating the entire history of the concept is beyond the scope of this narrowly focused (and indeed modest) study,<sup>8</sup> but we can highlight a few points that are both essential and directly relevant to the subject at hand. First, because the study of canons began in the West as a way to understand Judaism and Christianity, it is fair to ask whether the use of the concept obscures more than it illuminates. Similarly, one might argue that the notion of scripture has not served Islamic Studies well because it collapses the distinction between, for example, the Quran and the *Masnavi*.<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Brown’s remarks on this question are worth quoting at length:

Although canon studies may be a product of the Western intellectual tradition, it has been demonstrated that even within one civilization the term “canon” is multivalent. Within this diversity, however, canon studies has recognized that when communities authorize texts this involves common historical processes that change the way these texts function and are used.<sup>10</sup>

Second, at least some of the skepticism of canon is rooted in the adage “There is no church in Islam.” For example, in his masterful study of Sunnī jurisprudence, Bernard Weiss states that, “[God] guides no council of elders or divines in the formation of a sacred canon...”<sup>11</sup> In other words, because “Islam has had no machinery comparable to the Ecumenical Councils of the Christian Church,” talk of canons (and indeed orthodoxy) is inappropriate.<sup>12</sup> This, however, is a narrow understanding of canon, one that only treats canon on “the ethereal plane of religious authority” with little regard for the actual circulation of texts.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in light of the role of the *marja‘iyya* in contemporary Imāmī Shī‘ism, the adage seems more like a wish than an inference. Finally, in the case of *Nahj al-balāgha* in particular, it is important not to reduce the notion of canon to “a criterion between truth and falsehood, inspired and un-inspired.”<sup>14</sup> Even among Imāmī Shī‘ī ulema, the question of whether ‘Ali b.

Abi Talib actually said everything attributed to him in *Nahj al-balāgha* is far from settled.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, it is well-known that when Henry Corbin asked the great ‘Allama Tabatabā’i about the authenticity of the text, he said, “For us the person who wrote *Nahj al-balāgha* is ‘Ali, even if he lived a century ago.”<sup>16</sup> Tabatabā’i’s reply reflects an important aspect of canonization: some texts acquire the “power to extend a communal vision through the imperial gravity that ‘proper taste’ and ‘proper edification’ exert in a society.”<sup>17</sup> In effect, *Nahj al-balāgha* offers believers a “taste” of the ‘Ali they know and love. Building upon these general remarks, the first part of this study treats canon as a function of the way social institutions organize and regulate reading practices.<sup>18</sup> This, I argue, takes place against the backdrop of the history of a text, which is the subject of the second part of this article. Finally, in the conclusion, I explain how the interplay between history and authority leads to the sort of innovation that is the *sine qua non* of canon.

## THE ICONIC AUTHORITY OF THE *MARJA*‘

In theory at least, the authority of a *marja*‘ *al-taqlīd* is limited to matters of substantive law (*fiqh*). Every contemporary manual of practice (*risālah* ‘*amaliyyah*) begins with a chapter on *taqlīd* that summarizes the basis of the authority of the *marja*‘. For example, Sistani’s own *Tawdīh al-masā’il* states:

However, in matters concerning the laws of religion – apart from those that are indispensable and indisputable [such as the obligation to perform prayers (*ṣalāh*)] – a person must either be a jurist (*mujtahid*) who is capable of ascertaining laws based on proofs, or he must follow a *mujtahid* [i.e. do *taqlīd*], or he must exercise precaution (*iḥtiyāt*) by performing his duty in a way that he is certain to have fulfilled his responsibility (*taklīf*).<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore:

In cases where it is known, albeit vaguely, that there are differences in the fatwas [as defined in Ruling 4 above] of the *mujtahids* in matters that are commonly encountered, it is necessary to follow the *mujtahid* who is the most learned (*a‘lam*), i.e. the one most capable of understanding the law (*ḥukm*) of Allah from among all the *mujtahids* of his time.<sup>20</sup>

The authority of the *marja*‘ is therefore based on the principle of *taqlīd* and the notion of *a‘lamiyyah*. In other words, they are viewed as experts in matters such as ritual prayer, commerce, and dietary laws; the authority of expertise itself is believed to be grounded in practical reason. In practice, however, the authority of the *marja*‘ often crosses into other realms, including politics, spirituality, and even theology.<sup>21</sup> For example, in a widely circulated recording, the contemporary *marja*‘, Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayyad (b. 1930), can be heard commenting on the validity of philosophical mysticism (*‘irfān*). He says:

And from another side, we heard that in his blessed seminary (*ḥawzah*) ‘*irfān* is taught in light of the book of Ibn al-‘Arabi. This is dangerous for the Ḥawzah, particularly our youth. [As

for] the book of Ibn al-ʿArabi, anyone who has read this book believes that he is an unbeliever (*zindīq*) and has no faith in Allah, the exalted and the holy. *ʿIrfān* is the divine law. Real *ʿirfān* is knowledge of the understanding of the House of the Prophet (*maʿrifat fiqh āl muḥammad*). This is real *ʿirfān*. And for this reason, adhering to real *ʿirfān* is knowledge of the divine law and knowledge of the understanding of the House of the Prophet, may God bless him and them. And acting upon it is the reality of piety (*taqwā*), which God alluded to by his saying, “In God’s eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of him (*atqākum*).” In narrations, the reality of piety has been explained as adhering to divine obligations and avoiding what God has forbidden. That is the reality of piety. *ʿIrfān* in the sense of the unveiling of truths (*kashf al-ḥaqāʾiq*) and the lifting of the curtain away from truths – as is their use of the term, in the sense of the unveiling of truths and knowledge of the unseen – is nothing but a delusion (*wahm*); there is no truth to it and it has no reality. And it conflicts with the explicit text of God’s saying, “No one [in the heavens or on earth] knows the unseen except for God,” and, “a messenger of his choosing.”<sup>22</sup>

In light of the significance of philosophical mysticism in the seminary of Qom, this was a remarkable statement. But it was also noteworthy as an instance of a *marjaʿ* stepping outside the bounds of his authority as a jurist to make a statement with wider cultural significance. In effect, he was defining Imāmī Shīʿī identity as a cultural icon.

Another example of the same phenomenon is mentioned at the beginning of the popular ethical treatise *Jihād bā nafs*, which is a Persian translation of the chapter on *jihād al-nafs* in *Wasāʾil al-shīʿah* by al-Hurr al-ʿAmili (d. 1104/1693). Whenever the late *marjaʿ* Muhammad Taqi Bahjat (d. 1430/2009), who was renowned as a man of great spiritual achievement, was asked for instructions for traversing the spiritual path (*dastūr-i ʿamal barāy-i sayr va sulūk*), he repeatedly said, “Each day, try to study one *ḥadīth* from *kitab jihād al-nafs* and try to act upon it. After one year, you will see that you have definitely changed.”<sup>23</sup> An Arabic edition of the same book alludes to this advice without mentioning Bahjat by name; the editors note that Bahjat’s advice along with the fact that referring to *Wasāʾil al-shīʿah* itself is “not easy for most believers” were two of the main reasons why they published it.<sup>24</sup> The omission of chains of transmission (in addition to other editorial changes) gives this work a different quality than the original compilation of *ḥadīth*. The English translation, which does not even mention *Wasāʾil al-shīʿah* on its front cover, also omits the chains of transmission.<sup>25</sup> If one did not know any better, one would assume it is an independent treatise by al-Hurr al-ʿAmili. In this case, not only did Bahjat succeed in shaping reading practices in the community, he shaped the perception of the text itself. What began as a reference for jurists became a manual for spiritual practice, illustrating once again how the *marājiʿ* can sometimes act as cultural icons to transform textual canons.

This aspect of the authority of the *marājiʿ* has not received as much attention in the scholarly literature as have other aspects of their authority. Like other cultural icons, the *marājiʿ* play an important role in the establishment of canons by organizing and regulating reading practices. Sistani’s advice to students and activists is a clear example of this role. To fully appreciate the significance of Sistani’s remark about *Nahj al-Balāgha*, however, one needs to understand its genealogy, which is intertwined with the history of the text itself. This presents a problem because, to date, there is no comprehensive history of the canonization

of this important text. In the absence of such a history, we run the risk of theorizing without attending to the actual reception and circulation of the physical book, something that is considered essential in the wider field of canon studies.<sup>26</sup> To overcome this problem in the short-term, we can examine the role that *Nahj al-balāgha* played in different stages of the evolution of Imāmī Shī‘ism. Furthermore, if we can differentiate between the relative significance of different stages and choose one that is more important to the overall formation of tradition, then our admittedly tentative conclusions will be stronger. As I argue below, the “School of Ḥilla” is an excellent vantage point from which the history of the canonization of *Nahj al-balāgha* may be viewed, because the School of Ḥilla can be considered the formative period of Imāmī Shī‘ī tradition in important respects.

## READING NAHJ AL-BALĀGHA IN ḤILLA

*Nahj al-balāgha* was studied, copied, and transmitted in Ḥilla. Before proceeding any further, however, it is necessary to delimit the School of Ḥilla in the context of the conventional periodization of Imāmī Shī‘ī law, which can be summarized as follows: The first stage begins in Medina and lasts until the time of Ja‘far al-Sadiq (d. 148 /765). From the middle of the 2nd/8th century to the beginning of the Greater Occultation in 329/941, Kufa was the main stage for the development of law.<sup>27</sup> The third period begins in Qom and Rayy in the first quarter of the 4th/10th century and lasts until the first half of the 5th/11th century – which is the time of al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 436/1044) and al-Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 460/1067) – moving to Baghdad along the way.<sup>28</sup> The fourth period is focused in Baghdad and lasts until the fall of Baghdad in 656/1258. The fifth period begins in Ḥilla in 656/1258 and lasts until the time of al-Shahid al-Thānī (d. 966/1559).<sup>29</sup> Finally, the sixth through the tenth stages are located in Jabal ‘Āmil,<sup>30</sup> Isfahan,<sup>31</sup> Bahrain, Karbala, and Najaf, respectively.<sup>32</sup> If, however, one wishes to speak about Imāmī Shī‘ism more broadly – that is to say, broader than just law – and if one views Imāmī Shī‘ism as a socially embodied, historically extended style of reasoning that emerges in a network of relationships of power, as I do, then the aforementioned periodization is not accurate.<sup>33</sup> If the School of Ḥilla is to be considered a period in the history of Imāmī Shī‘ism (and not simply Imāmī Shī‘ī law), then it must include the 6th/12th century, if for no other reason than Sadid al-Din al-Humsi / al-Himsi al-Razī’s (d. after 583/1187) role in carrying forth the theological tradition of Abu l-Husayn al-Basri (d. 436/1044).<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the 10th/16th century is much too late even if one only considers the history of Imāmī Shī‘ī law. Although great scholars like al-Fadil al-Miqdad (d. 826/1423) and Ibn Fahd (d. 841/1437–1438) will end up being excluded, it is nevertheless sensible to mark the end of the School of Ḥilla (and the beginning of the school of Jabal ‘Āmil) with the execution of al-Shahid al-Awwal in 786/1384 because he was the last major jurist to work within the parameters established by al-Tusi.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the School of Ḥilla comprises a period of approximately 300 years from the 6th/12th century to the 8th/14th century. Delimiting the School of Ḥilla geographically, however, is more difficult because networks of learning extend beyond the boundaries of any one locale.<sup>36</sup> For now, we can simply note that the school is larger than the city itself; it includes most of southern Iraq, important cities in the north, and even some cities in Syria and Iran.



Now that it is clear what we mean by the School of Ḥilla, we can note that outstanding and landmark works were written in several disciplines during this period. Jamal al-Din Ibn Tawus (d. 673/1274) rediscovered *Kitāb al-ḍu‘afā’* by Ibn al-Ghadā‘iri (d. ca. 411/1020) just as the methodology of the later scholars (*ṭarīqat al-muta‘akhkhirīn*) was being formulated.<sup>37</sup> This was important because Ibn al-Ghadā‘iri’s assessments of narrators were severe in comparison to the assessments of al-Tusi and al-Najashi (d. after 463/1071), and because al-‘Allama al-Hilli (d. 726/1325) used *Kitāb al-ḍu‘afā’* to evaluate narrators in his *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*.<sup>38</sup> Al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (d. 676/1277) reorganized substantive law and wrote two of the most influential books in the history of the discipline: *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfi‘* and *Sharā‘i‘ al-Islām*.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, his *Ma‘ārij al-uṣūl* contains the earliest positive gloss on the controversial term “*ijtihād*.”<sup>40</sup> Drawing upon the heritage of Sunnī jurisprudence, al-‘Allama al-Hilli developed the methodology of the later scholars to carve out a space for Imāmī Shī‘īs in the wider Islamic legal discourse. His *Ghāyat al-wuṣūl* and *Mabādi‘ al-wuṣūl* were based on *Mukhtaṣar al-Muntahā* by Ibn al-Hajīb (d. 646/1249) and *Minhāj al-wuṣūl* by al-Baydawi (d. ca. 685/1286), respectively. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 672/1274) and others integrated Avicenna’s metaphysics into Imāmī Shī‘ī theology,<sup>41</sup> and Maytham al-Bahrani (d. ca. 679/1280 and known as Ibn Maytham) is said to have helped introduce the ideas of Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 638/1241) into Imāmī Shī‘ism.<sup>42</sup> These are some of the most noteworthy examples of how the School of Ḥilla greatly expanded the horizons of Imāmī Shī‘ī scholars, transforming the landscape of Imāmī Shī‘ism in ways that continue to shape religious identities today.

It is no exaggeration to say that Ḥilla was the formative period of Imāmī Shī‘ism in important respects, making it an excellent vantage point from which the history of the canonization of a text like *Nahj al-balāgha* may be studied. To be clear, though, it is not simply an excellent vantage point. My argument is that, in the absence of a comprehensive history of the canonization of *Nahj al-balāgha*, Ḥilla is superior to other vantage points because of how significant it was to the formation of Imāmī Shī‘ī tradition overall. Similarly, when we seek to contextualize contemporary jurists’ responses to sociopolitical upheaval, we may be justified in looking back to the Mongols’ conquest of Baghdad, not because this is the only instance of such upheaval, but because it is prototypical. The analogy, like the comparative framework it seeks to justify, is imperfect, but that does not mean we cannot draw some tentative conclusions. This point is crucial because there are more than six centuries between Sistani and Ḥilla. It is important to study the reception and circulation of *Nahj al-balāgha* over this *longue durée*, but that lies beyond the scope of this modest study, which seeks to understand the iconic authority of the *marāji‘* vis-à-vis canon. In the remainder of this section, I will identify the individuals who studied, copied, and transmitted *Nahj al-balāgha* in Ḥilla and discuss how they are related to a larger network of learning and the transmission of knowledge in Ḥilla. Second, I will identify commentaries on *Nahj al-balāgha* from this time period and situate them in the broader history of commentaries on the book. Third, I will explore how these works can be mined for valuable historical information, including anecdotes that speak directly to the relationship between Shī‘īs and Sunnīs in this period, biographical details about individuals associated with Ḥilla, and information about relationships of patronage. Finally, I will briefly consider what this interest in *Nahj al-balāgha* tells us about Imāmī Shī‘ī attitudes toward the text. These details about the role of *Nahj al-balāgha* in Ḥilla illuminate an essential part of the historical context that enables

a contemporary *marja'* like Sistani to use his iconic authority to amend the community's understanding of the text. They seek to account for the physicality of the text as a crucial element of its canonization.

The bio-bibliographical sources mention several chains of transmission for *Nahj al-balāgha* which al-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al-Jalali has painstakingly collated in *Dirāsa ḥawl nahj al-balāgha*.<sup>43</sup> The most direct chain – which, it should be noted, includes many of the luminaries of the Imāmī Shi'ī tradition – is:

(i) Aqa Buzurg Tihrani (d. 1389/1970)—al-Nuri al-Tabrisi (d. 1320/1902)—al-Mirza Hashim al-Khwansari (d. 1317/1899)—al-Sayyid Sadr al-Din al-‘Amili (d. 1263/1847)—Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-‘Ulum (d. 1212/1797)—al-Wahid al-Bihbahani (d. 1206/1791)—his father—Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (d. 1111/1699)—Muhammad Taqī al-Majlisi (d. 1070/1660)—Baha' al-Din al-‘Amili (d. 1031/1622)—al-Husayn b. ‘Abd al-Samad (d. 984/1576)—al-Shahid al-Thani—al-Muhaqqiq al-Karaki (d. 940/1534)—Muhammad b. al-Mu'adhdhin al-Jizzini—Ḍiyā' al-Din ‘Ali—his father al-Shahid al-Awwal—al-Sayyid ‘Ali b. Muhammad b. Zuhra al-Halabi—Kamal al-Din b. Muhammad b. Zuhra—Shams al-Din Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Salih al-Qussini (d. before 700/1301)—his father—Rashid b. Ibrahim al-Bahrani (d. 605/1208)—al-Qadi ‘Ali b. ‘Abd al-Jabbar—Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi (d. 573/1177)—the two sayyids al-Murtada and al-Mujtaba, sons of al-Da‘ī Ibn al-Qasim al-Hasani—Abu Ja‘far al-Duryasti—al-Sharif al-Radi.<sup>44</sup>

Obviously, only the bold-faced segment of this chain pertains to the School of Ḥilla. Al-‘Allama al-Hilli recorded the following chain in his *ijāza* to the Bani Zuhra:

(ii) Sadid al-Din Yusuf b. al-Mutahhar al-Hilli (d. after ca. 665/1267), Jamal al-Din Ibn Tawus, and al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli—al-Sayyid Fikhar b. Ma‘add al-Musawi (d. 630/1233)—Shadhan b. Jibra‘il al-Qummi (d. after 584/1188)—Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Musawi—Ibn Qudama—al-Sharif al-Radi.<sup>45</sup>

Other relevant chains include:

(iii) Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi—‘Abd al-Rahim known as Ibn al-Ikhwa—Abu l-Fadl Muhammad b. Yahya al-Nā‘ili/al-Naqili—Abu Nasr ‘Abd al-Karim b. Muhammad Sibṭ Bishr al-Hafi—al-Sharif al-Radi.

(iv) Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi—Abu Nasr al-Ghazi—Abu Mansur al-‘Ukbari—al-Sharif al-Radi.

(v) Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi—‘Abd al-Rahim known as Ibn al-Ikhwa—al-Sayyida al-Naqiba bint al-Murtada—her uncle al-Sharif al-Radi.

(vi) al-Shahid al-Awwal—al-Sayyid Tāj al-Din Muhammad b. Qasim b. Mu‘ayya al-Dibaji (d. ca. 668/1270)—‘Ali b. ‘Abd al-Karim b. Tawus (d. after 741/1340)—his father (d. 693/1294)—‘Abd Allah b. Mahmud b. Baladji—al-Sayyid Kamal al-Din Haydar b. Muhammad b. Zayd al-Hasani (d. after 620/1223)—Ibn Shahrashub (d. 588/1192)—al-Muntaha b. Abi Zayd b. Kiya al-Jurjani—his father—al-Sharif al-Radi.

(vii) Ibn Shahrashub—al-Sayyid Abu l-Samsam Dhu l-Fiqar b. Ma‘bad al-Husayni al-Marwazi—Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Halawāi—al-Sharif al-Radi.<sup>46</sup>

Regarding (vi), in his *ijāza* to Zayn al-Din ‘Ali b. al-Khazin al-Ha‘iri, al-Shahid al-Awwal states that he transmits *Nahj al-balāgha* “from a large group” including Ibn Mu‘ayya.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, in his *ijāza* to Najm al-Din Khidr b. Muhammad b. Nu‘aym al-Matarabadi, Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Hammad al-Laythi al-Wasiti states that he read *Nahj al-balāgha* with his father who transmitted it with the following chain:

(viii) Maytham al-Bahrani—al-Qadi ‘Abd Allah b. Mahmud b. Baladji—al-Sayyid Kamal al-Din Haydar b. Muhammad b. Zayd al-Hasani—Ibn Shahrashub—al-Muntaha b. Abi Zayd b. Kiya al-Jurjani—his father—al-Sharif al-Radi.<sup>48</sup>

A few points about these chains of transmission need to be clarified. First, chains do not necessarily represent actual histories of transmission.<sup>49</sup> There are eight modes of transmission: *samā‘*, *qirā‘a*, *ijāza*, *munāwala*, *mukātaba*, *i‘lām*, *waṣiyya*, and *wijāda*.<sup>50</sup> For scholars interested in the history of the transmission of a text, the first three modes are the most important. *Samā‘* involves hearing something from a shaykh (whether he is speaking from memory or reading from his book). *Qirā‘a* involves reading something in the presence of someone who has the authority to judge whether it is accurate. *Ijāza* as a mode of transmission involves neither of these; it is simply permission.<sup>51</sup> As such, when neither *samā‘* nor *qirā‘a* are specified, it is difficult to say much about the relationship between the one granting the *ijāza* and the one receiving it, which is the case in the chains mentioned above. In other words, the chains cited above tell us more about the representation of tradition than the actual history of transmission. Second, Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi is perhaps the single most important link in these chains. Third, one of the individuals who transmitted *Nahj al-balāgha* was al-Sharif al-Radi’s niece al-Sayyida al-Naqība bint al-Murtada.<sup>52</sup> Finally, the chains themselves are less important than the attention *Nahj al-balāgha* has received generation after generation, which is how the authenticity of a text was normally assessed.<sup>53</sup>

## COMMENTARIES ON NAHJ AL-BALĀGHA FROM ḤILLA

One way to measure regard for the text is to enumerate commentaries. This metric is ultimately based on the value attached to the uniform or even common practice of scholars. Estimates range from 26 to 210.<sup>54</sup> The reason for this wide range is that some estimates include translations and commentaries on a single sermon like the *Shaqshaqiyya*, a single letter like ‘Ali’s letter to Malik al-Ashtar, or a single aphorism. Following the example of al-Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Tabatabāi in “*Nahj al-balāgha ‘ibar al-qurūn*,” we will only consider commentaries on the book itself, both complete and incomplete.<sup>55</sup>

The first commentary is likely to have been written in the beginning of the 6th/12th century by al-Sayyid Abu l-Rida al-Rawandi (d. ca. 550/1155). As al-Tabatabāi notes, there are several reasons why other individuals have incorrectly been identified as the first commentator on *Nahj al-balāgha*.<sup>56</sup> In *Kashf al-ḥujub*, al-Kanturi identified *A‘lām nahj al-balāgha*



by ‘Ali b. Nasir as the first commentary and Aqa Buzurg, ‘Abd al-Husayn al-Amini, and al-Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin all followed suit.<sup>57</sup> This, however, cannot be the first commentary because ‘Ali b. Nasir belongs to the 7th/13th century, which we know because he noted the death of Atabeg Uzbek in 622/1225 in *Zubdat al-tawārikh* and because he cites Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi. He may, however, have been the first to comment on the text in the 7th/13th century. Al-Sharif al-Murtada has also been identified as the first commentator. Although he commented on the *Shaqshaqiyya*,<sup>58</sup> there is no evidence that he took the sermon from his brother’s book; like his predecessors, al-Murtada had his own chains of transmission for the contents of *Nahj al-balāgha*. Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi’s commentary, *Minhāj al-barā‘a*, was completed at the end of Sha‘bān 556/August 1161 and there are three earlier commentaries. Finally, Farid-i Khurasan Abu l-Hasan ‘Ali b. Zayd al-Bayhaqi’s (d. 565/1170) *Ma‘ārij nahj al-balāgha* cannot be the first either because Abu Nasr Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Al-Bayhaqi al-Wabari’s commentary is quoted in it.

Although al-Wabari might have been the first, al-Tabataba‘i believed that al-Sayyid Abu l-Rida al-Rawandi was earlier.<sup>59</sup> We know that he came to Baghdad from Kāshān at an early age and found a holograph of *Nahj al-balāgha* there. He made a copy for himself based on the holograph, which was completed in Rabi‘ al-Awwal 511/July 1117, and he wrote explanatory notes on his copy over a period of time. Although we cannot be certain, given his teaching role in *al-Madrasa al-Majdiyya* – which is mentioned in ‘Abd al-Jalil al-Qazwini’s *Kitāb al-naqd* – and the nature of his commentary, it is quite possible that *Nahj al-balāgha* formed part of his sermons and teaching there.<sup>60</sup> Copies of *Nahj al-balāgha* based on Abu l-Rida al-Rawandi’s copy were extant in the 8th/14th century when Ibn al-‘Ata‘iqi (d. ca. 790/1308) wrote his commentary on *Nahj al-balāgha*. One of al-‘Allama al-Hilli’s students, Jamal al-Din Ahmad b. Balku al-Awi, made a copy for himself based on Abu l-Rida al-Rawandi’s copy in 723/1323.

The next commentary was written by the Ḥanafī al-Wabari, who also authored a commentary on *Mukhtaṣar al-ṭahāwī*. In *Ma‘ārij nahj al-balāgha*, which was completed in 552/1157, al-Bayhaqi identifies al-Wabari as one of his sources. He cites al-Wabari more than seventy times and notes that al-Wabari’s commentary was theological in nature. Al-Wabari’s commentary was also a source for Qutb al-Din al-Kaydari’s (d. after 610/1213) commentary. In it, al-Kaydari cites al-Wabari approximately fifty times. ‘Ali b. Nasir and Ibn al-‘Ata‘iqi also cite al-Wabari in their commentaries.

While it is unclear whether al-Bayhaqi was Shī‘ī, we know that he was a polymath. He wrote on language, the Quran, law, philosophy, theology, history, math, astronomy, astrology, and genealogy. Al-Bayhaqi states that one of his friends asked him to comment on expressions in *Nahj al-balāgha* and before that Abu l-Qasim ‘Ali b. al-Hasan al-Jawbaqi al-Nishaburi had asked him to write a commentary on the text too, which reveals something about the level of interest in the text in the 6th/12th century. Al-Bayhaqi states that he used the library of Abu l-Hasan ‘Ali b. Muhammad b. Yahya b. Hibat Allah al-Husayn to write his commentary *Ma‘ārij nahj al-balāgha*. The first volume was completed on 9 Rabi‘ al-Thānī 552/21 May 1157 and the second volume was completed about a month later on 13 Jumādī al-Awwal/23 June. As noted above, he drew upon al-Wabari’s commentary and al-Kaydari drew upon al-Bayhaqi’s commentary (and the commentary of Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi).<sup>61</sup>

Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi's commentary, *Minhāj al-barā'a*, was completed at the end of Sha'bān 556/August 1161. Largely a literary commentary, we know that Zayn al-Din Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Hamid read it under his supervision. Ibn Abi l-Hadid (d. after 650/1253) frequently cites it in his commentary and raises objections.<sup>62</sup> *Minhāj al-barā'a* was a source for both al-Kaydari and 'Ali b. Nasir. After Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi, there are commentaries by al-Mahabadi,<sup>63</sup> al-Kaydari,<sup>64</sup> Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210),<sup>65</sup> Ibn Abi l-Hadid, Maytham al-Bahrani, Radi al-Din b. Tawus (d. 664/1266),<sup>66</sup> Ibn al-Sa'ī (d. 674/1276), Ibn al-'Atā'iqi, and others, but these are the most important commentaries as far as the School of Ḥilla is concerned.<sup>67</sup>

As for evidence of *Nahj al-balāgha* being read and transmitted in Ḥilla, there are four important points: First, Ibn al-Abzur al-Husayni (d. 663/1265) read *Nahj al-balāgha* with Yahya b. Sa'id al-Hilli (d. 689/1290), the author of *al-Jāmi' li-l-sharā'i'*.<sup>68</sup> Yahya b. Sa'id granted Ibn al-Abzur an *ijāza* on 17 Sha'bān 655/30 August 1257 to transmit *Nahj al-balāgha*. In *Riyād al-'ulamā'*, al-Afandi states that he saw this *ijāza* in Yahya b. Sa'id's handwriting on the front of a copy of *Nahj al-balāgha*.<sup>69</sup> In it, Yahya b. Sa'id states that Ibn al-Abzur read *Nahj al-balāgha* with him from beginning to end and grants Ibn al-Abzur permission to transmit it from him with the following chain:

al-Sayyid Muhyi l-Din Abu Hamid Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah b. 'Ali b. Zuhra al-Husayni al-Ḥalabi—Ibn Shahrashub—Abu l-Samsam—al-Hulwani—al-Sharif al-Radi.

Yahya b. Sa'id also mentions the following chain:

Ibn Zuhra—al-Sayyid 'Izz al-Din Abu l-Harith Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. 'Ali al-Husayni—Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi—from the two sayyids al-Murtada and al-Mujtaba the sons of al-Da'ī al-Ḥalabi—Abu Ja'far al-Duryasti—al-Sharif al-Radi.<sup>70</sup>

Second, al-Sayyid Najm al-Din Abu 'Abd Allah al-Husayn b. Ardashir b. Muhammad al-Tabari also read *Nahj al-balāgha* with Yahya b. Sa'id and received an *ijāza* to transmit it from him. The *ijāza* was written on a copy of *Nahj al-balāgha* which al-Tabari made in 667/1269.<sup>71</sup> Third, the Ḥanafī judge and author of one of the principal texts (*mutūn*) of the Ḥanafī school, *al-Mukhtār li-l-fatwā*, Majd al-Din Abu l-Fadl 'Abd Allah b. Mahmud b. Mawdud al-Mawsili (d. 683/1284) held lectures on *Nahj al-balāgha* which 'Abd al-Karim Ibn Tawus attended.<sup>72</sup> Maytham al-Bahrani is also reported to have “heard” *Nahj al-balāgha* from al-Mawsili.<sup>73</sup> Al-Mawsili read it with the *naqīb* of Mosul, al-Sayyid Haydar b. Muhammad b. Zayd al-Husayni al-Mawsili.<sup>74</sup> Finally, al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. al-Husayn b. Hammad al-Laythi al-Wasiti read *Nahj al-balāgha* with his father who transmitted it from Maytham al-Bahrani.<sup>75</sup>

Like commentaries on the Quran, commentaries on *Nahj al-balāgha* could be very different in nature. We noted that al-Wabari's commentary was theological in nature whereas Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi's commentary was largely literary. Maytham al-Bahrani was probably the first scholar to read *Nahj al-balāgha* as a mystical text. Maytham was invited to Ḥilla to teach on account of his expertise in philosophy, theology, and mysticism.<sup>76</sup> Based on Kamal al-Din al-Laythi al-Wasiti's son al-Husayn's *ijāza* to Najm al-Din Khidr b. Muhammad b. Na'im al-Matarabadi, we know that Maytham granted Kamal al-Din an *ijāza* in 687/1288 to

transmit all of his writings, including, presumably, his commentaries on *Nahj al-Balāgha*. *Miṣbāḥ al-sālikīn* (better known as *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*) is the larger of Maytham's two commentaries on the text. In contrast to Ibn Abi l-Hadid's commentary, which focuses on history, Maytham's commentary is focused on philosophical and mystical themes. In Oraibi's words, "Theological issues are treated on philosophical grounds to the extent that *Nahj al-Balāgha* is presented as an advanced philosophical text."<sup>77</sup> *Miṣbāḥ al-sālikīn* was written in 677/1278 in honor of 'Ata Malik al-Juwayni, with whom Maytham had a good relationship. The significance of Maytham's commentary should be understood in light of the later tendency in Imāmī Shī'ism to read *ḥadīth* through the lens of philosophy and mysticism.<sup>78</sup>

As the title indicates, Maytham's *Ikhtiyār miṣbāḥ al-sālikīn*, is an abridgment of his larger commentary. 'Ata Malik al-Juwayni asked him to write a commentary suitable for his two young sons. It was written in 681/1282 and, like his larger commentary, 'Uraybi considered this a mystical text too.<sup>79</sup> Although some biographers have attributed a third commentary on *Nahj al-balāgha* to Maytham, 'Uraybi insists that he only wrote two. 'Uraybi's thesis is that Maytham introduced philosophical mysticism into Imāmī Shī'ism in Ḥilla, so he considered Maytham's two commentaries on *Nahj al-balāgha* to be, at least partially, mystical works. The evidence, however, seems thin. 'Uraybi's conclusions about the School of Ḥilla rest on the authorship of *al-Manhaj/al-Nahj al-mustaqīm 'alā ṭarīqat al-ḥakīm* and an explanatory treatise on the famous poem on the soul attributed to Avicenna, but the treatise on the poem has also been attributed to Ibn 'Arabi. Nevertheless, according to 'Uraybi, Maytham developed his mystical ideas in his commentaries on *Nahj al-balāgha*, which is why he was more successful at integrating these ideas into Imāmī Shī'ism than others.

While there is a great deal one could say about Ibn Abi l-Hadid's commentary, I will focus on its role in the School of Ḥilla. First, Ibn Abi l-Hadid quotes from the son of Ibn al-Bitriq al-Hilli (d. 600/1204), 'Ali (d. 642/1244), a noteworthy jurist and poet whom Ibn Shakir described as an "*uṣūlī*."<sup>80</sup> We have very little information about 'Ali. Apparently, he and Ibn Abi l-Hadid were friends because Ibn Abi l-Hadid refers to him as "our friend" (*ṣadīqu-nā*). Second, in his commentary on *Nahj al-balāgha*, Ibn Abi l-Hadid says that he was with al-Sayyid Safi al-Din Muhammad b. Ma'add al-Musawi (d. after 616/1219) in his home in Baghdad and Hasan b. Ma'ali al-Hilli, known as Ibn al-Baqillani (d. after 637/1240), was also present. Muhammad b. Ma'add and Ibn al-Baqillani were reading *ḥadīth* from al-Tabari's history. One of these *ḥadīth* was a report in which 'A'isha says, "Had I taken upon myself that which I turned my back on, no one but the Prophet's wives would have washed his body." Muhammad b. Ma'add asked Ibn al-Baqillani, "What do you think she meant by that?" to which he replied, "She envied your father because he could take pride in having washed the Prophet's body." So Muhammad b. Ma'add laughed and said, "Suppose she could have washed his body, did she have any of his other virtues?"<sup>81</sup> Third, al-Sayyid Fikhar b. Ma'add al-Musawi sent *al-Ḥujja 'alā l-dhāhib ilā kufr Abi Talib* to Ibn Abi l-Hadid and asked him to write something affirming that Abu Talib was Muslim.<sup>82</sup> Ibn Abi l-Hadid refrained from making a definite judgement on account of some doubts but that did not prevent him from praising Abu Talib highly, acknowledging that Islam could not have flourished without him, and writing lines of poetry on the front of the book.<sup>83</sup> Fourth, Ibn Abi l-Hadid wrote *al-Sab' al-'alawīyyāt*, his commentary on *Nahj al-balāgha*, and other books for the 'Abbāsīd vizier

Ibn al-ʿAlqami (d. 656/1258).<sup>84</sup> Finally, Ibn Abi l-Hadid quoted a note in the handwriting of Ibn Idris al-Hilli (d. 598/1202) in his commentary on *Nahj al-balāgha*.<sup>85</sup> All five points give us insight into the relationship between Imāmī Shīʿīs and Sunnīs in Ḥilla.

Based on the information presented above, we can make a few observations about how the scholars of Ḥilla viewed *Nahj al-balāgha*. First, there was a range of approaches to *Nahj al-balāgha*, including theological, literary, philosophical, mystical, and historical approaches. Therefore, the idea that *Nahj al-balāgha* was treated purely as a literary text is incorrect.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi clearly played an important role in the transmission of *Nahj al-balāgha* and his commentary was largely literary. To the extent that the chains of transmission reflect the actual history of transmission, we can say that, in comparison to Ḥilla, *Nahj al-balāgha* was more important in Khurasan. In fact, the rivalry between these two centers is also reflected in law, particularly in what is known as “*masʿalat al-mudāyaqa*.”<sup>87</sup> Ibn Abi l-Hadid’s commentary was important for the scholars of Ḥilla and it is noteworthy that no attempt was made to “Shīʿitize” him, which is to say that, for the scholars of Ḥilla, *Nahj al-balāgha* was not necessarily a Shīʿī text. This claim can be corroborated by examining Sunnī commentators and transmitters. Finally, there is the question of whether the scholars of Ḥilla were interested in *Nahj al-balāgha* as the speech of an infallible Imam or simply because of its contents. This question arises because *Nahj al-balāgha* had no role in the elaboration of substantive law, which suggests scholars did not believe that it constitutes evidence. The source of this misunderstanding is a failure to differentiate between different standards of evidence. The standard of evidence in law was those *ḥadīth* that had been included in “well-known writings” and related via the chains in al-Tusi’s *al-Tahdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār*. By this standard, *Nahj al-Balāgha* could not be considered evidence; however, the school of Ḥilla is also where the methodology of the later scholars developed, including new standards of evidence for law.

## THE CANONIZATION OF NAHJ AL-BALĀGHA

I began this article by referencing what was clearly an effort to organize and regulate reading practices in the Imāmī Shīʿī community by one of its most revered authorities. It is in this sense of the term that *Nahj al-balāgha* can rightly be considered part of the Imāmī canon today. As for the history of the canonization of the text, evidence from the School of Ḥilla – which can be considered the formative period of Imāmī Shīʿī tradition in important respects – confirms that *Nahj al-balāgha* played a role in the organization and representation of Imāmī Shīʿī tradition, though determining the actual history of transmission would require further paleographical and codicological evidence. What we found no evidence for in Ḥilla is the notion that *Nahj al-balāgha* is second only to the Quran or that it “explains the meanings of the Quran,” as Sistani stated in his capacity as a *marjaʿ*.<sup>88</sup> How does this affect our understanding of the history of its canonization? To answer this question, we turn to Jonathan Z. Smith’s classic essay “Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon.”<sup>89</sup> In this essay, Smith draws an insightful analogy between food and canon. He states:



A given foodstuff represents a radical, almost arbitrary, selection out of the incredible number of potential sources of nutriment that are at hand. But, once the selection is made, the most extraordinary attention is given to the variety of its preparation. That is to say, *if food is a phenomenon characterized by limitation, cuisine is a phenomenon characterized by variegation.*

The same sort of process may be observed with respect to every important human phenomenon and has received growing attention in recent studies of language, law, and taxonomy. An almost limitless horizon of possibilities that are at hand (in nature) is arbitrarily reduced (by culture) to a set of basic elements (in terms of the example – food). This initial arbitrariness is, at times, overcome by secondary explanations which attempt to account for the reduction (e.g., pork causes trichinosis). Then a most intense ingenuity is exercised to overcome the reduction (in terms of the example – cuisine), to introduce interest and variety. This ingenuity is usually accompanied by a complex set of rules.<sup>90</sup>

Similarly, Smith considers the “radical and arbitrary reduction represented by the notion of canon and the ingenuity represented by the rule-governed exegetical enterprise of applying the canon to every dimension of human life” to be the “most characteristic, persistent, and obsessive religious activity.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, it is precisely this cultural “process of arbitrary limitation and of overcoming limitation through ingenuity” that distinguishes canon.<sup>92</sup> Against the backdrop of Smith’s observations, something quite important about *Nahj al-balāgha* comes into focus: it is canonical, not in spite of disagreement as to what it is, but precisely because it has been read as theology, literature, philosophy, mysticism, history... and now exegesis. By adding yet another layer to our conception of what *Nahj al-Balāgha* is, Sistani’s statement reflects the most fundamental aspect of canon.

Despite the relatively narrow construction of their authority in substantive law, there is ample evidence from which to conclude that the *marāji‘* wield authority in other realms too, particularly because, as Zargar has shown, believers project their own aspirations onto them.<sup>93</sup> While much of the scholarship on the *marja‘iyya* has focused on their political authority in Muslim-majority societies, their status as cultural icons is arguably more important for understanding their global influence. It is in his capacity as a cultural icon that Sistani has the power to (re)shape the canon without ever needing to proffer legal or historical arguments publicly. At the same time, however, this iconic authority of the *marja‘* operates within horizons shaped by the expectations of his followers.<sup>94</sup> In this regard, the history of the canonization of *Nahj al-Balāgha* in the School of Ḥilla (and other seminal periods in the evolution of Imāmī Shi‘ism) furnishes the crucial context in which Sistani can use his authority to amend the community’s understanding of the book. It is a clear example of how change comes from above and below, and how it is made possible by a historical past, whether real or imagined.<sup>95</sup>

## NOTES

1. There is now a small body of secondary scholarship on Sistani, including: Wilfried Buchta, “Sayyid Ali al-Hussain al-Sistani. Irakischer Grossayatollah,” *Orient (Deutsches Orient-Institut)* 45, no. 3 (2004): 343–55;



Babak Rahimi, "Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the democratization of post-Saddam Iraq," *Middle Eastern Review of International Affairs* 8, no. 4 (2004): 12–19; Ahmed H. al-Rahim, "The Sistani factor," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (2005): 50–53; Robert Gleave, "Conceptions of authority in Iraqi Shi'ism: Baqir al-Hakim, Hā'iri and Sistani on *ijtihad*, *taqlid* and *Marja'īyya*," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007): 59–78; Babak Rahimi, "Public Islam and post-Baathist Iraq: the case of Ayatollah Sistani," *Sociology of Islam & Muslim Societies Newsletter* 2 (2008): 3–5; Abbas Kadhim, "Forging a third way: Sistani's *marja'īyya* between quietism and *wilāyat al-faqīh*," in *Iraq, democracy and the future of the Muslim world*, ed. Ali Paya and John L. Esposito (London: Routledge, 2010), 66–79; Sajjad Rizvi, "The making of a *marja'*: Sistani and Shi'i religious authority in the contemporary age," *Sociology of Islam* 6, no. 2 (2018): 165–189; Harith Hasan al-Qarawee, "The 'formal' *marja'*: Shi'i clerical authority and the state in post-2003 Iraq," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3 (2019): 481–497; and Ali-Reza Bhojani, "Al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani on *uṣūl al-fiqh* in Twelver Shī'i thought: its importance and historical phases," in *Visions of Sharī'ah: contemporary discussions in Shī'i legal theory*, ed. Ali-Reza Bhojani (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 205–213.

2. Al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani, "Advice from His Eminence Sayyid Ali al-Sistani (may the Almighty prolong his life) to the Believing Youth," The Official Website of the Office of His Eminence al-Sayyid Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani, <http://www.sistani.org/english/archive/25240> (accessed 25 October 2019).

3. Also known as *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-kāmila*, it contains some 54 texts of supplications attributed to 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (d. 95 /713). See Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shī'ite Literature* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 34–35. As Modarressi notes, although present-day Imāmis revere this book, it only gained popularity in the last four centuries. See Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār*, ed. M. B. Mahmudi and 'A. 'Alawi, 110 vols. (Beirut: Dar ihya al-turath al-'arabi, 1403 /1983), cx. 43 and 60–61. In his reply, Sistani singled out one supplication in particular known as Zayn al-'Abidin's supplication for noble moral traits (*makārim al-akhlāq*).

4. See Modarressi, *Tradition*, 13–15.

5. Al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani, "Advice from His Eminence Sayyid Ali al-Sistani (may the Almighty prolong his life) to the Believing Youth," The Official Website of the Office of His Eminence al-Sayyid Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani, <http://www.sistani.org/english/archive/25240> (accessed 25 October 2019). In the standard arrangement of the text, 'Ali's letter to his son al-Hasan is the 31st letter.

6. In North American, it was published and distributed by Sistani's liaison office, Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeya (I.M.A.M.). See "Youth: Advice from Grand Ayatullah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani," Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeya (I.M.A.M.), <http://www.imam-us.org/book/advice-to-youth> (accessed 25 October 2019).

7. Al-Sistani, al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni, "Advice and Guidance to the Fighters on the Battlefields," The Official Website of the Office of His Eminence al-Sayyid Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani, <http://www.sistani.org/english/archive/25036> (accessed 25 October 2019). On Sistani's role in Iraq after the invasion of 2003, see C. M. Sayej, *Patriotic Ayatollahs: Nationalism in Post-Saddam Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

8. For an excellent summary, see Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 20–31.

9. On this point, see Matthew B. Lynch, "A Persian Qur'an?: The *Masnavi-e Ma'navi* as Scripture," (Ph.D. diss. UNC Chapel Hill, 2019).

10. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim*, 36.

11. Bernard G. Weiss, *The Search for God's Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Din al-Amidi* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), 266. On the broader point, see further Bernard Lewis, "Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam," *Studia Islamica* I (1953): 57–8; Sir Richard Francis Burton, "Terminal Essay," in *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, vol. 10 (London: Burton

Club, n.d.), 181–2; Goldziher, *Islamic Theology and Law*, 162–3; and W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 5–6.

12. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 5–6

13. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim*, 34.

14. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim*, 25. This is the sense of Gerald T. Sheppard's term "Canon 1" in s.v. "Canon," *Encyclopedia of Religion*. For an example of a study that prioritizes this notion of canon, see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Applying the Canon in Islam: The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Ḥanafī Scholarship* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1996).

15. See, for example, Ridā Ustadi, *Madārik-i nahj al-balāgha* (Qom, 1396). See further H. Modarressi, *Tradition*, 14 note 67 and 68; Amina Inloes, "Was Imam 'Ali a misogynist? The portrayal of women in *Nahj al-Balāghah* and *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 8, no. 3 (2015): 325–65; and Imtiyaz 'Ali Khan 'Arshi, *Istinād-i nahj al-balāgha*, translated and annotated by Murtada Ayatollahzadah Shirazi (Tehran: Amīr KAbir, 1363/1984).

16. Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *A Shi'ite Anthology*, trans. by William C. Chittick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 9. See also Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam Ali* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 4–5 which cites Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Reply to Zailan Moris," in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, The Library of Living Philosophers, vol. 28, ed. L. E. Hahn, R. E. Auxier, L. W. Stone Jr. (Carbondale, IL, 2001), 635. See further, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tihriani, *Mihr-i Tābān* (Mashhad: Nūr-i Malakūt-i Qur'ān, 1425 AH), 53–4.

17. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim*, 28. See further Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 23 and 28.

18. See J. Guillory, "Canon," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 233–249. In this basic sense, canons are not necessarily closed.

19. Al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani, *Islamic Laws*, annotated and translated by Mohammed Ali Ismail, 3rd edition (Middlesex: The World Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities, 2017), 3. "Precaution" is one of four legal presumptions. In cases where one knows that there is a legal obligation, but one does not know exactly what to do, then, based on precaution, all options must be followed.

20. Sistani, *Islamic Laws*, 4.

21. There is a great deal of literature on the institution of the *marja'iyah*. See, for example, A. K. S. Lambton, "A reconsideration of the position of the *Marja' al-Taqlid* and the religious institution," *Studia Islamica* 20(1964): 115–135; P. Martin, "L'état islamique et la 'marja'iyya," *Cahiers de l'Orient* 8–9 (1988): 158–163; Devin J. Stewart, "Islamic Juridical Hierarchies and the Office of *Marji' al-Taqlid*," in *Shi'ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions*, ed. and trans. Lynda Clarke (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, 2001), 137–157; Linda Walbridge, ed., *The Most Learned of the Shi'ah: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); idem, *The Thread of Mu'awiya: The Making of a Marja' Taqlid*, ed. John Walbridge (Bloomington, IN: The Ramsay Press, 2014); Liyakat N. Takim, "The marja'iyya and the juristic challenges of the diaspora," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 3 (2017): 40–54; Robert Gleave, "Conceptions of Authority in Iraqi Shi'ism: Baqir al-Hakim, Ha'iri and Sistani on Ijtihad, Taqlid and Marja'iyah," *Theory, Culture and Society* 24, no. 2 (2007): 59–78; Sajjad H. Rizvi, "Shi'ism in Bahrain: Marja'iyya and politics," *Orient* 50, iv (2009): 16–24; Morgan Clarke, "Mutuality and immediacy between *marja'* and *muqallid*: evidence from male in vitro fertilization patients in Shi'i Lebanon," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, iii (2011): 409–427; Zackery Mirza Heern, "Thou Shalt Emulate the Most Knowledgeable Living Cleric: Redefinition of Islamic Law and Authority in Usuli Shi'ism," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 7, no. 3 (2014): 321–344; Devin Stewart, "An Eleventh-Century Justification of the Authority of Twelver Shiite

Jurists,” in *Festschrift for Patricia Crone*, ed. Asad Ahmad and Behnam Sadeghi (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 468–97; John Cappucci, “Selecting a Spiritual Authority: The *Marajī‘ al-Taqlid* among First- and Second-Wave Iraqi Shi‘a Muslims in Dearborn, Michigan,” *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015): 5–17; Thomas Fibiger, “*Marja‘iyyah* from Below: Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religious Authority,” *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies* 8, no. 4 (2015): 473–490; Ali Ahmad Rasekh, “Struggling with Political Limitation: Shaykh al-Mufid’s Approach to Shi‘i Juristic Authority,” *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2016): 63–94; Sajjad Rizvi, “The Making of a *Marja‘*: Sistani and Shi‘i Religious Authority in the Contemporary Age,” *Sociology of Islam* 6, no. 2 (2018): 165–189; and Harith Hasan al-Qarawee, “The ‘formal’ *marja‘*: Shi‘i clerical authority and the state in post-2003 Iraq,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, iii (2019): 481–497. For a criticism of the focus on *marja‘iyyah*, see Morgan Clarke and Mirjam Künkler, “De-centering Shi‘i Islam,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (2018): 1–17. A welcome (and long overdue) addition to the literature on authority is studies on female religious authority, including: Mirjam Künkler and Roja Fazaeli, “The Life of Two Mujtahidahs: Female Religious Authority in 20th Century Iran,” in *Women, Leadership, and Mosques*, eds. Masooda Bano and Hilary E. Kalmbach (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 127–160; Mona Tajalli, “Notions of Female Authority in Modern Shi‘i Thought,” *Religions* 2 (2011): 449–468; Asma Sayeed, “Women in Imāmī Biographical Collections,” in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought*, eds. Michael Cook, Najam Haider, Intisar Rabb, and Asma Sayeed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 81–97; and Mirjam Künkler and Devin Stewart, eds., *Female Religious Authority in Shi‘i Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming). Much of this literature concerns the political authority of the *marja‘*. On his religious authority in particular, see Ahmad Kazem Moussavi, “The establishment of the position of *Marja‘iyyat-i Taqlid* in the Twelver Shi‘i community,” *Iranian Studies* 18, I (1985): 35–51; *ibid.*, “The institutionalization of *Marja‘-i taqlid* in the nineteenth century Shi‘ite community,” *Muslim World* 84 iii–iv (1994): 279–299; and *ibid.*, *Religious Authority in Shi‘ite Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996). A more recent study of the nature of the religious authority of the *marja‘* is Cameron Zargar, “The Legal and Spiritual Authority of the *Marajī‘*,” (Ph.D. diss. UCLA, 2020). Zargar convincingly argues that the authority of the *marja‘* functions much like the authority of a cultural icon (although he does not use this term) rather than an expert.

22. My own translation. This recording can be viewed on YouTube. For example, see: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjjPNFDRWXw>> (accessed 8/17/20). Another contemporary *marja‘*, al-Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq al-Ruhani, has made similar remarks. For a broader view on the history of philosophical mysticism, see Ata Anzali, *Mysticism in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2017).

23. “*Kitāb-i Jihād bā nafs*,” Markaz-i tanzīm-o-nashr-i āthār-i āyat Allah bahjat, accessed 8/21/20, <https://bahjat.ir/fa/content/10552>.

24. Al-Hurr al-‘Amili, *Aḥādīth jihād al-nafs min kitāb wasā’il al-shī‘ah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Rida al-Hindi, 2nd ed. (Baghdad: Manshūrāt Majallat Dirāsāt ‘Ilmiyyah, 2016), 9.

25. Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Hurr al-‘Amili, *Combat with the Self*, trans. by Nazmina A. Virjee (London: ICAS Press, 2003).

26. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim*, 36.

27. On the role of Kufa in the development of Shi‘ism, see N. Haider, *The Origins of the Shi‘ah: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eight-Century Kufah* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

28. On this period, see A. J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi‘ism: Ḥadīth as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad* (Richmon, VA: Curzon, 2000). See also A. J. Newman, “Between Qumm and the West: The Occultation According to al-Kulayni and al-Katib al-Nu‘mani,” in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honor of Wilfred Madelung*, eds. F. Daftary and J. W. Meri (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 94–108.

29. There are two important secondary sources on the school of Ḥilla: H. W. Husayni, *Madrasat al-ḥilla wa-tarājim ‘ulamā’i-hā min al-nushū’ ila l-qimma* (Ḥilla: Markaz turāth al-ḥilla, 1438/2017) and Th. K. Khafaji, *Min mashāhīr a’lām al-ḥillā al-fayḥā’ ila l-qarn al-‘āshir al-hijrī* (Qom: Maktabat al-mar‘ashī al-najafī, 2007). Both of these incorporate material from an earlier and less significant work: Hadi Hamid Kamal al-Din, *Fuqahā’ al-fayḥā’ aw taṭawwur al-ḥaraka al-fikriyya fī l-ḥilla* (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-ma‘ārif, 1962).
30. On the legacy of the scholars of Jabal ‘Āmil in Safavid Iran, see R. J. Abisaab, *Converting Persia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), especially 147–173.
31. As is well known, Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr coined the term “Isfahan School of Philosophy” to describe a philosophical and mystical movement in the Safavid era. See S. Rizvi, “Isfahan School of Philosophy,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <http://iranicaonline.org/articles/isfahan-school-of-philosophy>, (accessed November 2, 2019). As a stage in the history of Imāmī law, the most important figure in this period was undoubtedly al-Muhaqqiq al-Karaki (d. 940/1534), whose commentary on al-‘Allama al-Hilli’s *al-Qawā‘id* titled *Jāmi‘ al-maqāsid* is one of the most important Imāmī books of “demonstrative law” (*al-fiqh al-istidlālī*) ever written. The most important development in this period was the expansion of law into social and political arenas, particularly questions of the authority of rulers and judges, on which numerous independent treatises were written. Additionally, this period saw the compilation of comprehensive collections of *ḥadīth*.
32. On this periodization, see M. M. al-Asifi, “Tārīkh fiqh āl al-bayt,” in *Riyāḍ al-masā’il fī bayān aḥkām al-shar‘ bi-l-dalā’il*, ed. S. ‘A. al-Tabatabā‘ī, 14 vols. (Qom: Mu’assasat al-nashr al-islāmī, 1412 H), i. 7–108.
33. On other periodizations, see H. Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shī‘ī Law: A Biobibliographical Study* (London: Ithaca Press, 1984), 23–58. As Modarressi notes, the scholars of *ḥadīth* use a different periodization, on which see Hasan al-Sadr, *Bughyat al-wu‘āt fī ṭabaqāt mashā’ikh al-ijāzāt*, ed. M. Ḥ. al-Najafi (n.p., n.d.).
34. On the significance of this tradition to Imāmī Shī‘ism, see S. Schmitdke, *The Theology of al-‘Allamah al-Hilli (d. 726/1325)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1991). M. J. McDermott, “Abu’l-Husayn al-Basri on God’s Volition,” in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honor of Wilfred Madelung*, eds. F. Daftary and J. W. Meri (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 86–93. In his preface to *al-Munqidh min al-taqlīd wa-l-murshid ila l-tawḥīd*, Sadid al-Din states that when he came to Iraq on his way back from Hejaz, a group of scholars from Ḥilla, including Warram b. Abi Firas (d. 605/1208), insisted that he visit Ḥilla. See Sadid al-Din al-Himmasī al-Razī, *al-Munqidh min al-taqlīd wa-l-murshid ila l-tawḥīd*, ed. n.n., 2 vols. (Qom: Mu’assasat al-nashr al-islāmī, 1412/1991–1992), i. 17–18. He stayed in Ḥilla for a few months and dictated the contents of *al-Munqidh* to a large gathering of students there. The book was completed on 9 Jumādā al-Awwal 581/8 August 1185.
35. See Al-Shahid al-Awwal Muhammad b. Makki al-‘Amili al-Jizzini, *Dhikrā l-shī‘ah fī aḥkām al-sharī‘a*, ed. n.n., 4 vols. (Qom: Mu’assasat āl al-bayt li-iḥyā’ al-turāth, 1419/1998), i. 44–54.
36. On the boundaries of the city itself, see G. Makdisi, “Notes on Ḥilla and the Mazyadids in Medieval Islam,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 74 (1954), 249–262.
37. See A. Afsaruddin, “An Insight into the Ḥadīth Methodology of Jamal al-Din Ahmad b. Tawus,” *Der Islam* 72 (1995), 25–46. The methodology of the later scholars is an approach to *ḥadīth* that prioritizes transmission by righteous Imāmīs over other criteria. For a summary of the difference between the methodologies of the early and later scholars, see Muhyi al-Din al-Musawi al-Ghurayfi, *Qawā‘id al-ḥadīth*, ed. S. M. R. al-Ghurayfi, 3 vols. (Qom: Mu’assasat al-sayyida al-ma‘ṣūma, 1429/2008), i. 15–42.
38. For a succinct discussion of *Kitāb al-ḍu‘afā’*, see J. Subhani, *Kulliyyāt fī ‘ilm al-rijāl* (Beirut: Dār al-mizān, 1990), 81–106.
39. On the influence of these two works, see H. Modarressi, *Introduction*, 65–70. Modarressi lists 36 commentaries on *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfi‘* and 114 commentaries on *Sharā‘i‘ al-Islām*. On approaches to the organization of substantive law, see H. Modarressi, *Introduction*, 13–18. Al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli organized substantive



law on the following basis: everything either requires the intention to draw close to God (*‘ibādāt*) or not (*mu‘āmalāt*); if not, then everything is either a transaction or not (*aḥkām*); if it is, then it either requires offer and acceptance (*‘uqūd*), or it is unilateral (*īqā‘āt*).

40. Al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli Ja‘far b. l-Hasan al-Hudhalī, *Ma‘ārij al-uṣūl*, ed. M. Ḥ. al-Riḍawī al-Kashmirī (Qom: Sarwar, 1423/2003), 179.

41. See A. H. al-Rahim “The Twelver Shī‘ī Reception of Avicenna in the Mongol Period,” in *Before and After Avicenna, Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group*, ed. D. C. Reisman (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 219–231. Robert Wisnovsky identifies al-‘Allama al-Hilli as one of three main figures who sought to, “appropriate the intellectual authority of Ṭūsī (and by extension, Avicenna) for the cause of Twelver Shi‘ism.” He also argues that al-‘Allama al-Hilli’s commentary on Avicenna’s *Kitāb al-shifā’* contains evidence of the role that sectarian theological commitments played in the elaboration of Avicennism after al-Tusi. See R. Wisnovsky, “Towards a Genealogy of Avicennism,” *Oriens* 42 (2014), 323–363 and R. Wisnovsky, “On the Emergence of Maragha Avicennism,” *Oriens* 46 (2018), 263–331.

42. See A. Oraibi, “Shī‘ī renaissance: a case study of the theosophical school of Bahrain in the 7th/13th century” (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1992).

43. S. M. Ḥ. Jalali, *Dirāsa ḥawl nahj al-balāgha* (Beirut: Mu‘assisat al-‘alamī li-l-maṭbū‘āt, 1421/2001).

44. S. M. Ḥ. Jalali, *Dirāsa*, 76–77.

45. Al-Majlisi, *Biḥār*, civ. 60–137.

46. S. M. Ḥ. Jalali, *Dirāsa*, 77–78.

47. For a discussion of this *ijāza*, see M. al-Amin, *A‘yān al-shī‘a*, ed. Ḥ. al-Amin, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ta‘āruf, 1986), vi. 276.

48. For a discussion of this *ijāza*, see J. Subhani, *Mawsū‘at ṭabaqāt al-fuqahā’* (Qom: Mu‘assasat al-imām al-Sadiq, 1418/1997), vii. 286.

49. Important studies of Imāmī Shī‘ī *ijāzāt* include: ‘A. Fayyad, *al-Ijāzāt al-‘ilmiyya ‘inda l-muslimīn* (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-irshād, 1967); R. Gleave, “The Ijāza from Yusuf Al-Bahrani (D. 1186/1772) to Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-‘Ulum (D. 1212/1797–8),” *Iran* 32 (1994), 115–123; S. Schmidtke, “The ijāza from ‘Abd Allah b. Salih al-Samahiji to Nasir al-Jarudi al-Qatifi: A Source for the Twelver Shi‘i Scholarly Tradition of Baḥrayn,” in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honor of Wilfred Madelung*, ed. F. Daftary and J. W. Meri (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 64–85; S. Schmidtke, “Forms and Functions of ‘Licenses to Transmit’ (Ijāzas) in 18th-Century-Iran: ‘Abd Allah al-Musawi al-Jaza‘iri al-Tustari’s (1112–73/1701–59) Ijāzah Kabira,” in *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, eds. G. Krämer and S. Schmidtke (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 95–127; and N. Kondo, “Shi‘i ‘Ulama and Ijāza during the Nineteenth Century,” *Orient* 44 (2006), 55–76.

50. For a detailed discussion of the modes of transmission, see al-Shahid al-Thani Zayn al-Din b. ‘Ali al-‘Amili, *al-Ri‘āya fī ‘ilm al-dirāya*, ed. ‘A. M. ‘A. al-Baqqaal, (Qom: 1433 H/2012 CE), 230–302. The technical apparatus employed in *ijāzāt* is based on the science of *ḥadīth*.

51. *Munāwala* can be accompanied by *ijāza* or not. *Mukātaba* involves a shaykh writing what he has heard for another. *I‘lām* involves a shaykh informing a student that this *ḥadīth* or book is subject to his *samā‘*. *Waṣiyya* is bequeathing a book to someone. *Wijāda* involves finding *ḥadīth* in the handwriting of their narrator.

52. On the range of women’s religious participation in Imāmī Shī‘ism, see. A. Sayeed, “Women in Imāmī Biographical Collections,” in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought: Studies in Honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi*, eds. M. Cook, N. Haider, I. Rabb, and A. Sayeed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 81–97.

53. On the attention that *Nahj al-balāgha* has received over the generations, see S. M. Ḥ. Jalali, *Dirāsa*, 125–177.

54. S. ‘A. Tabataba‘i, “Nahj al-balāgha ‘abr al-qurūn: shurūḥuh ḥasb al-tasalsul al-zamānī,” *Turāthu-nā* 35 and 36 (1414 H), 154–177: 154–156.



55. S. ‘A. Tabataba’i, “Nahj al-balāgha ‘abr al-qurūn,” 156.
56. S. ‘A. Tabataba’i, “Nahj al-balāgha ‘abr al-qurūn,” 156–160.
57. S. ‘A. Tabataba’i, “Nahj al-balāgha ‘abr al-qurūn,” 157.
58. His commentary is published in al-Sharif al-Murtada ‘Ali b. al-Husayn al-Musawi, *Rasā’il al-Sharif al-Murtada*, ed. M. Rajā’i, 4 vols. (Qom: Dār al-qur’ān al-karim, 1405/1984–1985), ii. 105–114.
59. His full name is al-Sayyid Diyā’ al-Din Abu l-Rida Fadl Allah b. ‘Ali b. ‘Ubayd Allah b. Muhammad al-‘Alawi al-Hasani al-Qashani. He was the teacher of Muntajab al-Din al-Qummi, who described him as, “the teacher of the imams of his time.” See J. Subhani, *Mawsū‘at*, vi. 227.
60. ‘Abd al-Jalil al-Qazwini, *Kitāb al-naqd*, ed. S. J. H. al-Urmawi (Tehran: 1331 HSh/1952 CE), 198.
61. On al-Bayhaqi and his commentary, see M. Mahdawi Damghani, “Abu l-Hasan-i Bayhaqi Farid-i Khorasan wa sharḥ-i nahj al-balāgha,” *Faṣlnāma-yi dānishkada-yi ilāhiyāt wa ma‘ārif-i mashhad* 1 (1347 HSh), 64–77.
62. For example, regarding the expression “*ḥattā la-qad wuṭī’a l-hasanān*” in the *Shaqshaqiyya*, Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi said that it means the two big toes of a man whereas Ibn Abi l-Hadid said that it means al-Hasan and al-Husayn. See Ibn Abi l-Hadid, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, ed. M. Abu l-Fadl Ibrahim, 20 vols. (Cairo: 1959–1964), i. 200.
63. Afdal al-Din l-Hasan b. ‘Ali b. Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Mahabadi was primarily a scholar of literature in the 6th/12th century, although he also wrote a refutation of astrology. He was a teacher of Muntajab al-Din al-Qummi whom he granted permission to transmit all of his writings and narrations. According to *Kitāb al-naqd*, he was definitely Shi‘ī. See S. ‘A. Tabataba’i, “Nahj al-balāgha ‘abr al-qurūn: shurūḥ ḥasb al-tasalsul al-zamanī,” *Turāthu-nā* 38 and 39 (1415 H), 298–319: 298–301.
64. Qutb al-Din Abu l-Hasan Muhammad b. al-Husayn b. Taj al-Din l-Hasan b. Zayn al-Din Muhammad b. al-Husayn b. Abi l-Mujahid al-Bayhaqi al-Nayshaburi al-Kaydari was a polymath. His commentary is titled *Ḥadā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq fī faṣr daqā’iq afṣaḥ al-khalā’iq*. He was a student of Ibn Hamza al-Tusi (d. first half of the 6th/12th century) – who wrote a note praising al-Kaydari’s commentary in 596/1200 – and some of his legal opinions are quoted in al-Shahid al-Awwal’s *Ghāyat al-murād*. His commentary was literary and theological in nature, but it also touched on questions of medicine and astronomy. The sources of his commentary include the commentaries of al-Wabari, al-Bayhaqi, and al-Qutb al-Rawandi. It was completed in Sha‘bān 576/1181. His other writings include: *al-Ḥadiqa l-anīqa* on poetry attributed to ‘Ali; *Anwār al-‘uqūl* also on poetry attributed to ‘Ali; *Iṣbāḥ al-shī‘a bi-maṣābiḥ al-sharī‘a* on law; *Mabāhij al-muhaj fī manāhij al-ḥujaj*, a Persian work on the biographies of the Prophet and the Imams; *Sharḥ al-ijāz* on grammar; *al-Durar fī daqā’iq al-naḥw* on grammar; *Baṣā’ir al-uns bi-ḥazā’ir al-quds*; *Kifāyat al-barāyā fī ma‘rifat al-anbiyā’ wa l-awliyā’*; *Lubāb al-albāb* on theology; *al-Barāhīn al-jaliyya fī ibṭāl al-dhawāt al-azaliyya*; *Sharī‘at al-sharī‘a* which is mentioned in *Ḥadā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq* where it is described as a “*tahdhīb*” of the book *al-Muhadhdhab*; *Tanbīh al-anām li-ri‘āyat al-imām*, which is mentioned in *Iṣbāḥ al-shī‘ah*; and lines of poetry. See S. ‘A. Tabataba’i, “Nahj al-balāgha ‘abr al-qurūn,” *Turāthu-nā* 38 and 39 (1415 H), 302–319.
65. Ibn al-Qifti mentions Fakhr al-Din al-Razi’s commentary in *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā’*. Ibn al-Qifti, *Ikhbār al-‘ulamā’ bi-akhbār al-ḥukamā’*, ed. I. Shams al-Din (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 2005), 221. It is incomplete.
66. Kohlberg mentions this commentary in his list of Radi al-Din b. Tawus’ writings. E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Tawus and His Library* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 55. It may be lost.
67. Although a commentary is attributed to al-‘Allama al-Hilli, this appears to be a mistake. The commentary in question was written by someone associated with the vizier Rashid al-Din al-Hamadani at the beginning of the 8th/14th century. Due to the fact that there are several instances in the commentary where Rashid al-Din asks the author to clarify the meaning of an obscure expression in *Nahj al-balāgha*, one could conjecture

that he was part of Rashid al-Din's entourage, perhaps one of the scholars associated with the "Traveling Madrasa" (*al-madrasa al-sayyāra*) which Rashid al-Din established. See 'A. al-'Utaridi, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha li-shāriḥ muḥaqqiq min a'lām al-qarn al-thāmin* (Qom: Bunyād nahj al-balāgha, 1375 HSh), 53.

68. J. Subhani, *Mawsū'at*, vii. 67

69. 'Abd Allah al-Afandi, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, ed. A. al-Husayni al-Ishkiwari, 6 vols. (Qom: al-Khayyām, 1401/1981), i. 267. See also M. al-Amin, *A'yān*, v. 212.

70. The entire *ijāza* is quoted in M. al-Amin, *A'yān*, v. 212.

71. The *ijāza* is listed in Aqa Buzurg, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, 26 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-aḍwā', 1983), i. 263. Aqa Buzurg does not mention when the *ijāza* was issued; however, we can speculate that it was issued in the same year that the copy was made.

72. J. Subhani, *Mawsū'at*, vii. 146.

73. J. Subhani, *Mawsū'at*, vii. 146.

74. J. Subhani, *Mawsū'at*, vii. 146.

75. See al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. al-Husayn b. Hammad al-Laythi al-Wasiti's *ijāza* to Najm al-Din Khidr b. Muhammad b. Na'im al-Matarabadi. See also Aqa Buzurg Muhammad Muhsin, *Muṣannaḥāt-i shī'a* (Mashhad: Bunyād-i pizhūhishhā-yi islāmī, 1372 HSh), i. 73 and A. al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 24 vols. (Qom: Markaz nashr al-thiqāfa al-islāmiyya fī al-'ālam, 1372 HSh), x. 235.

76. According to Subhani, Maytham also came to Baghdad where he stayed with al-Sayyid Safi al-Din Ibn al-A'sar al-Husayni, and met Ibn al-Fuwati. J. Subhani, *Mawsū'at*, vii. 286.

77. A. Oraibi, "Shī'i renaissance," 53.

78. For instance, in *Shi'ite Islam*, al-Tabataba'i says, "In the same way that from the beginning Shi'ism played an effective role in the formation of Islamic philosophical thought, it was also a principal factor in the further development and propagation of philosophy and the Islamic sciences." S. M. Ḥ. Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, ed. and trans. S. H. Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 95. In fact, one of the reasons why the shadow of doubt was cast on the authenticity of the contents of *Nahj al-balāgha* is the philosophical style of certain passages. See, for example, Ahmad Zaki's remarks quoted in S. M. Ḥ. Jalali, *Dirāsa*, 61–62. In particular, Ahmad Zaki observed that the sermon in which 'Ali purportedly describes the creation of the heavens and the earth exhibits a "logical style [that] was not known in the language of the Arabs and scholars did not use until after the translation of logic [into Arabic]."

79. A. Oraibi, "Shī'i renaissance," 50–51

80. Ibn Shakir, *Fawāt al-wafayāt wa-l-dhayl 'alayhā*, ed. I. 'Abbas, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār ṣādir, 1973–1974), iii. 112.

81. See M. al-Amin, *A'yān*, v. 313 for details about this anecdote.

82. For the broader context of this issue, see 'A. S. Muntafaqi, "Mu'jam mā ullifa 'an Abi Ṭā'ib," *Turāthu-nā* 3 and 4 (1421/2001), 163–233 and N. A. Husayn, "Treatises on the Salvation of Abu Talib," *Shii Studies Review* 1 (2017), 3–41.

83. See Ibn Abi l-Hadid, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, ed. M. A. Ibrahim, 20 vols. (Cairo: 1959–1964), xiv. 83.

84. M. al-Amin, *A'yān*, ix. 82.

85. Ibn Abi l-Hadid, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, 1: 13. He states that he read a statement in Ibn Idris's handwriting in which he had quoted the Shāfi'i jurist Abu Hamid al-Isfara'ini (d. 406 H/1016 CE).

86. In his introduction to *Nahj al-balāgha*, al-Sharif al-Radi states that a group of friends who were impressed with the literary quality of what he compiled of 'Ali's words asked him to compose another book comprising a selection of 'Ali's words. Al-Sharif al-Radi Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Musawi, *Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. F. al-Hassun (Qom: Markaz al-abḥāth al-'aqa'idīyya, 1419 H), 18–19.

87. The question is whether one has an obligation to make up missed prayers before offering the current prayer. On the larger context, see H. Ansari, “*Navīsanda-yi in du kitāb kīst? Ikhtilāfāt-i faqihān-i imāmī dar awākhīr-i sada-yi shishom bar sar-i yik mas’ala-yi fiqhī*,” *Barrasī-hā-yi Tārikhī*, entry posted 1392 Hsh, <http://ansari.kateban.com/post/2019> (accessed 10/21/18). This issue became an occasion to reconsider the arguments used by earlier scholars to arrive at a legal opinion and the points of disagreement. In this respect, a related issue may have been the evidentiary value of al-Tusi’s claims of consensus (*ijmā’āt al-shaykh*), on which see S. A. al-Musawi Rawdati, *Ijmā’āt fuqahā’ al-imāmiyya: ijmā’āt al-fuqahā’ al-mutaqaddimīn* (Beirut: Sharikat al-a‘lāmī li-l-maṭbū‘āt, 2011).
88. Sistani, though, is not the only contemporary *marja’* who has contributed to the canonization of *Nahj al-balāgha*. For similar statements by contemporary scholars who are regarded as *marāji’* by their followers, see Muhammad Mahdī al-Shirazi, *Nahj al-balāgha* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ulūm, 1429/2008), 7–8; Jawadi Amuli, *al-Hikma ‘inda l-imām ‘ali fī nahjih* (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, 1413/1992), 16–21; and Nasir Makarim al-Shirazi, *Nafahāt al-wilāya fī sharḥ nahj al-balāgha* (Qom: Sulaymānzādah, 1426 HQ), 1:1–8. See also Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya, *Fī zilāl nahj al-balāgha: muḥāwala li-fahm jadīd* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ulūm, 1972), 8–9.
89. J. Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon,” in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36–52.
90. J. Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence,” 40. Emphasis in the original.
91. J. Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence,” 43.
92. J. Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence,” 50.
93. Zargar, “The Legal and Spiritual Authority of the Marāji’,” 162–180 and 181–237.
94. For a striking example, see Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 160–161.
95. An early draft of this article was presented at The Shī‘ah Institute in December of 2017. I would like to thank the organizers of that symposium, titled *Nahj al-balāghah: The Word of ‘Ali*, for giving me the opportunity to share my research and receive critical feedback from colleagues. Since then, my understanding of the history of *Nahj al-balāgha* has evolved in conversations with Sayyid Sulayman Ali Hasan Abidi, Hasan Ansari, and Najam Haider. I am grateful to have such kind, generous, and knowledgeable friends. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the University of Colorado Boulder, Deborah Whitehead and Samuel Boyd, for helping me navigate the vast literature on canon formation in different religious traditions. Finally, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. Of course, I alone am responsible for any mistakes and shortcomings.