

**KARDARI'S "NAHJ AL-FARADIS": ITS MANUSCRIPTS AND IDEOLOGICAL-ARTISTIC FEATURES**

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**Annotation:** This article examines "*Nahj al-Faradis*", one of the most significant monuments of fourteenth-century Turkic literature, Islamic thought, and Sufi tradition. The study analyzes the work's historical, religious, moral, and literary features, highlighting its importance as a source for the study of Old Uzbek language and medieval Turkic culture. The findings demonstrate that "*Nahj al-Faradis*" combines historical authenticity with artistic expression and moral instruction, making it a valuable source for the study of Turkic literary heritage, Islamic education, and Sufi ethics. The article underscores the necessity of further textual research, critical editions, and broader scholarly engagement with this unique work.

**Keywords:** "*Nahj al-Faradis*", Turkic literature, Old Uzbek language, Sufism, Islamic education, prophetic narratives, Golden Horde, medieval literature, moral instruction, textual studies.

In the fourteenth century, the Turkic language and literature in Central Asia and the territories of the Golden Horde entered a new stage of development. The need to fill the cultural and intellectual vacuum that emerged after the collapse of the Khwarazmshah state, together with the conversion of the ruling Chinggisid dynasties to Islam, created an important historical foundation for the composition of religious and ethical works.

One of such rare literary sources is the work "*Nahj ul-farodis*" ("The Open Path of Paradise") written by Mahmud ibn Ali al-Bulghari al-Sarayi al-Kardari. In its time, this work served as a unique spiritual bridge for the wide dissemination of the history and morality of Islam and the explanation of mystical ideas in a simple Turkish language.

The fact that the work was created in the same period and region as "*Qissasi Rabghuzi*" further enhances its literary value. Although both works are written in the spirit of presenting the lives of the prophets as examples, "*Nahj ul-Faradis*" has the additional advantage of containing information about the companions, the four leading Sunni imams, and separate chapters devoted to the description of good deeds that bring one closer to Allah Almighty and evil deeds that distance one from Him.

It is known that "*Qisas Rabguziy*" was written at the suggestion of Nasiruddin Toqbobogabek, and the widespread distribution of "*Nahj ul-farodis*", which was similar in content, indicates the high attention paid to Islamic culture by the ruling class of that time and the spiritual need in society. Science and culture, which flourished during the reign of the Khorezmshahs, suffered serious losses after the Mongol invasion, but the conversion of the Genghis sultans to a new religion began the process of scientific, moral, and educational revival.

**Scientific debates about the identity of the author**

The name of the author of the work is Mahmud ibn Ali. There are different opinions in the scientific literature regarding the author's pseudonym al-Bulgari as-Sarayi al-Kardari. Some researchers suggest that he was born in the Bulgar region and later lived and worked in the



capital of the Golden Horde, Sarai. However, scholars disagree about the origin of the pseudonym “Kardari”.

In particular, such Turkological scholars as Z.V. Tagan, F. Koprulu, and Y. Ekman associate the pseudonym “al-Kardariy” with the fact that the author was born and raised in the city of Kardar in the ancient land of Khorezm. This idea is also supported by the Turkish scholar Y. Kemal, who prepared the Crimean version of “Nahj ul-farodis” in 1930. According to him, the city of Kardar was located in the territory of Khorezm, to the east of Old Urgench, between the present-day Ena Kalemi and Chimbay, and was considered an important cultural center in the past. On this basis, Y. Kemal claims that Mahmud ibn Ali belonged to the land of Khorezm.

The Tatar scholar B. Yafarov offers a different approach to this issue. He notes that the term “Kard” is used in a number of sources in conjunction with the word “Bulgar”. In particular, the occurrence of the term “Kard Bulgar” in the work of Shahobiddin Marjonii “Mostafod ul-Akhbor” indicates the existence of a Persian poem associated with this name in a manuscript stored at the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg under the number B 344. Based on this evidence, B. Yafarov concludes that the name Kardar may refer to a specific village, city or administrative district on the territory of the Bulgar state.

There is also an ethnic approach to the issue of the author’s birthplace. In particular, the well-known Turkologist Emir Najip, relying on the St. Petersburg copy of “Nahj ul-farodis”, emphasizes that many Kazakh clans and tribes lived within the Golden Horde. According to him, the tribes included in the “Small Juz” led a nomadic lifestyle in areas close to cultural centers located in the lower reaches of the Volga River. The “Small Juz”, in turn, consisted of associations such as “Olim uli”, “Boy uli” and “Yetti uruğ”, and the “Yetti uruğ” also included the “Kardar” clan. On this basis, Emir Najip puts forward the idea that the author of the work can be associated with the Kardar clan by origin and describes his biography as “a person who was born in Bulgar, lived and worked in the city of Saray, and came from the Kardar clan.”

Literary sources also play an important role in determining the identity of the author. In particular, the chapter dedicated to Alisher Navoi in Davlatshah Samarkandi’s “Tazkirat ush-shuaro” (“The Garden of Poets”) contains the following verse (qit’a) about the poet with the pseudonym Kardari:

Turkiysin ko‘rub qilurlar erdi tarku tavba ham,  
Gar tirik bo‘lsalar erdi Lutfiy birlan Kardariy.  
Bovujudi forsi dar janbi she’ri komilash,  
Chist ash’ori Zahiru kist bori Anvariyy?

That is, if Lutfi and Kardari were alive, other poets would have seen their Turkish poems and stopped writing and repented. Even if Zahir Faryabi and Anvari wrote perfectly in Persian, they are nothing compared to the poetry of Lutfi and Kardari.

The person of the poet with the pseudonym Kardari mentioned in this article has long been the subject of debate in scientific literature. Literary scholar Maqsud Shaykhzoda, in his article “From the History of Tazkirachilik”, stated that this Kardari was Mahmud ibn Ali, who was born in the city of Kardar in the Khorezm region and died in 761 AH (1359–1360 AD). In his opinion, this person was the author of the religious and moral work “Nahj ul-farodis” and spent a certain part of his life in the capital of the Golden Horde, Sarai.

Based on the analysis of the historical, geographical, ethnic and literary sources presented above, it can be concluded that Mahmud ibn Ali Kohna was born in the city of Kardar, one of the ancient cultural centers located in the north-east of the city of Urgench, between the cities of Chimboi and Nukus in the territory of present-day Karakalpakstan.



The mention of Kardari along with Lutfi in Davlatshah Samarkandi's "Tazkirat ush-shuaro" and the analysis of Maqsud Shaykhzadeh confirm that the author was a prominent representative of the Khorezm literary milieu. The author died in 761 AH (1360 AD).

### Scientific considerations on the study of the work

The introduction and study of the work "Nahj ul-Faradis" to the world's scholars is directly related to the research of famous Turkologists. This unique manuscript was first discovered by Ahmad Zaki Validi, who in his article "Old Turkish Works Written in Khorezm" provides valuable information about the work and its author. The scholar proved that the manuscript is in pure Khorezm Turkish and that the author's death date (761 AH) was confirmed, proving that the work belongs to the Khorezm literary milieu.

The work has been systematically studied internationally by Hungarian scholar János Eckmann and Turkish scholars Semih Tezcan and Hamza Zulfikar. Through the efforts of Janos Eckmann, a facsimile of the oldest copy, number 879, kept in the "New Mosque" section of the Suleymaniye Library in Istanbul, was created and an "Introduction" article was published, devoted to its scientific description.

The article notes that this manuscript, known as the "New Mosque" copy of "Nahj ul-Faradis", stored under number 879, was first discovered by Ahmad Zaki Validi, who stated the following about the work and its author in the article "Old Turkic Works Written in Khorezm": "*The author of this book is a Khorezmian. The language is pure Khorezmian Turkish, and its author died in 761 (Hijri). This indicates that the author is also a Khorezmian*" [Eckmann, Jenos. 2004]. J. Eckmann draws attention to the fact that this information was provided by a researcher who was closely familiar with the linguistic features of the work.

The Tatar scholar Shahobiddin Marjani, in his historical book "Kitabu mustafidi al-akhbar fi qasatiyy Kazan va Bulgari," denies the author's introduction of the work as "Mahmud bin Ali as-Sarai mansha' and al-Bulgari mevlevi...", relying on the opinions of Ahmad Zaki Walidi. It turns out that the "Bulgari" nisbas belongs to the scribe who copied another manuscript of the work. [Eckmann, Jenos. 2004, III -XII].

Later, a complete three-volume edition of the work was published in Turkey, which included a facsimile of the manuscript, a Latin transliteration, and an annotated glossary.

In the field of local philology, Maqsud Shaykhzoda, in his article "From the History of Tazkirachilik", substantiated the identity of the author of the work and his identity as Kardari, mentioned in the tazkir of Davlatshah Samarkandi. Also, the German scholar N. Hoffmann, in his research, provided information about this Turkic poet and his work "Nahj ul-faradis".

### Currently, 12 manuscript copies of the work are known to the world of science:

**Kazan copies:** A total of 7 copies are kept in Tatarstan (4 in the Lobochevsky Library, 2 in the Institute of Language and Literature, and 1 in the Pedagogical University).

**Russian copies:** 2 in St. Petersburg, 1 each in Ufa, Ulyanovsk, and Astrakhan.

**Istanbul copy:** The rarest and oldest copy, kept in the "New Mosque" department of the Suleymaniye Library under number 879.

The oldest and most complete copy is manuscript number 879, kept in the "New Mosque" department of the Suleymaniye Library in Istanbul. It was copied in 1360, during the author's lifetime, and consists of 222 leaves (444 pages). At the end of the manuscript, the scribe wrote that the author of the work died two or three days later.

The work continues to attract considerable scholarly interest to this day. Researchers have studied not only its literary, historical, mystical, and religious-ethical aspects, but also its



linguistic features. Moreover, the text has been published in facsimile and transliterated editions. For example, the work was published in Turkey in three volumes under the title “Nehcū’l-Ferâdîs” (Cennetlerin Açık Yolu) (“The Clear Path to Paradise”):

the first volume is a facsimile,  
the second volume is transliteration in Latin script,  
the third volume consists of an explanation and a dictionary.

The significance of the work and its immense scholarly value place upon researchers of Sufism the task of reexamining it in greater depth. Conducting a textual study of the work, preparing it for publication with due consideration of the linguistic features characteristic of Old Uzbek, and undertaking a comprehensive academic analysis are of great importance for introducing this unique source to Uzbek readers. The existence of numerous manuscript copies, its extensive study by Turkologists, the publication of many scholarly articles and monographs devoted to it, and its availability in facsimile and transliterated editions all provide favorable conditions for further research and interpretation of the work.

### **Content and genre characteristics of the work**

One of the distinctive features of “Nahj al-Faradis” is the predominance of artistic expression and the tradition of religious preaching within the work. Whereas purely juridical (fiqh) or theological (aqidah) texts usually present events in a concise and strictly documentary manner based on authoritative sources, “Nahj al-Faradis” places greater emphasis on the mystical, moral-educational, and literary dimensions of its subject matter. The very title of the work, “The Clear Path to Paradise,” reflects its nature not merely as a religious guidebook but also as a literary masterpiece aimed at cultivating the human spirit and promoting moral refinement.

Specific themes and ideas are presented through stories and legends related to those subjects in order to enhance their emotional impact on the reader. This literary technique significantly increases the value of the work as a moral-educational and Sufi source, while also contributing to its lasting influence and firm place in the minds of its readers.

The work consists of four chapters, each of which contains ten sections.

**1. Chapter One:** The virtues and exemplary life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

**2. Chapter Two:** The lives of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (the Four Caliphs), the Companions, and the founders of the four Sunni schools of law (Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam al-Shafi‘i, Imam Malik, and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal).

**3. Chapter Three:** Righteous deeds that bring a person closer to Allah, such as patience, worship, gratitude, and similar virtues.

**4. Chapter Four:** A description of sinful and reprehensible acts that distance a person from Allah.

From the perspective of genre, “Nahj al-Faradis” is a didactic Sufi work with strong hagiographic elements, focusing on the lives of saints and other eminent religious figures. Structurally, the work is based on the interpretation of forty hadiths, each of which is supplemented with relevant stories and narratives. The text contains numerous instructive accounts concerning prophets, Companions, and the founders of the four legal schools, as well as prominent Sufi figures such as Rabi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, Malik ibn Dinar, and Fudayl ibn ‘Iyad. These narratives serve both educational and spiritual purposes, reinforcing the moral and mystical themes of the work.

In the work, historical events are presented in a literary, didactic, and Sufi spirit rather than through the strict and documentary style characteristic of scholarly historical accounts. The title



“The Clear Path to Paradise” itself reflects the work’s close connection with the fundamental principles of Islam and its profound moral and spiritual message. It underscores the author's intention not only to convey religious knowledge but also to guide readers toward ethical refinement and spiritual development.

Although this work belongs to the “Qisasi al-Anbiya” (Stories of the Prophets) tradition, it gives primary attention to authentic accounts of prophetic history and reliable narratives concerning historical events. In particular, its presentation of historical reports related to the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), supported by Qur’anic verses and hadiths, significantly enhances the scholarly and educational value of the work. By combining historical narration with religious sources, the author provides readers with both factual knowledge and moral instruction, thereby strengthening the work’s intellectual and spiritual significance.

### **Conclusion**

“Nahj al-Faradis” is an important source for the study of fourteenth-century Turkic literature, Islamic learning, and the history of Sufism. The work not only promotes religious and ethical values but also possesses exceptional significance for the study of the grammatical and stylistic features of the early Uzbek literary language. Therefore, conducting a thorough textual investigation of the work, preparing it for publication with due consideration of the characteristics of Old Uzbek, and incorporating it more extensively into academic scholarship remain important scholarly tasks.

The significance of the work is further enhanced by the fact that it was written in the same century and within the same geographical and cultural environment – the Golden Horde and its surrounding regions – as the Qisas al-Rabghuzi. Like “Qisasi al-Rabghuzi,” “Nahj al-Faradis” is a prose work with strong Sufi elements that presents the lives of the prophets as moral exemplars. At the same time, “Nahj al-Faradis” offers additional material on the Companions of the Prophet, the founders of the four Sunni schools of law, and detailed discussions of virtuous deeds that draw individuals closer to Allah as well as sinful acts that distance them from Him. The presence of separate chapters and sections devoted to these subjects constitutes one of the work’s most valuable features.

The creation and widespread circulation of two renowned works with closely related themes during the same historical period and socio-political environment indicate the considerable attention given to Islam by the Chinggisid rulers of the era. They also reflect the substantial demand in Central Asia and neighboring regions for literature devoted to the stories of the prophets. Following the collapse of the Khwarazmian state, Islamic culture which had flourished under its patronage – suffered significant setbacks, creating a major cultural, educational, and intellectual vacuum. The need to fill this gap, together with the adoption and promotion of Islam by the ruling Chinggisid dynasty, provided favorable conditions for the production of works such as Nahj al-Faradis.

Another distinctive characteristic of these works is the prominence of emotional expression and literary artistry. In purely religious texts, events are typically presented in a precise manner based on authoritative and authentic sources. In “Nahj al-Faradis,” however, greater attention is devoted to the literary, mystical, and moral-educational dimensions of the subject matter than to its strictly scholarly aspects. The title “The Clear Path to Paradise” itself reflects the inclusion of literary passages imbued with Sufi and ethical teachings, highlighting the work’s broader spiritual and educational purpose.

In conclusion, this work, deeply rooted in the traditions of hadith and prophetic biography, stands as one of the rare treasures of Turkic literature. Its historical value, rich linguistic heritage,



abundance of Turkic expressions, and profound mystical and ethical content make it an indispensable source for scholars of literature, language, religion, and cultural history.

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