

ABU NU'AYM AL-IŞFAHĀNĪ (d. 430/1038): Conflicting Opinions

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Abstract:

Abu Nu'aym al-Işfahānī (d. 430/1038) is a renowned figure with a glorious reputation. He is known as a hadith traditionist, historiographer, advocate of Sufism, and author of many works, the most celebrated of which is Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aşfiyā'. Nonetheless, despite his glorious reputation, some scholars have criticized him and his renowned Ḥilya. Scholarship, in its turn, both classical and modern, has served Abu Nu'aym no justice. Classical Arabic literature presents some information about his life and works in scattered short biographical entries. Modern scholarship has even less to offer in this regard. None of the existent sources presents a single biography that delivers a precise examination of Abu Nu'aym's status treating the opinions of both supporters and critics. This paper evaluates the conflicting opinions. It puts the puzzle pieces together to deliver a focused study of particular biographical details in Abu Nu'aym's life that examine the praise he has received from his proponents as well as the criticism from his opponents. This paper is the result of a project that assessed every available biographical entry on Abu Nu'aym in both classical and modern literature to determine the different opinions on the scholar concerned. It delivers a list of all the literature that has a biographical mention of Abu Nu'aym and that which has been examined for this study. This paper reveals that information about Abu Nu'aym in primarily classical sources proved that criticism may be biased and religio-politically driven.

Keywords: *Abu Nu'aym al-Işfahānī; biography; criticism; Sufism; ṭabaqāt*

A. Introduction

In the medieval biographical dictionaries and in the Sufi handbooks, where one would normally expect to find substantial records about relevant figures, little is mentioned about the life and the activities of the hadith traditionist (*muḥaddith*) Abu Nu'aym al-Işfahānī. Nonetheless, the little scattered information that has been reported is of great importance once collected and put together as it then offers a deeper insight into his life.

Distinguishing the relevant sources and pointing out the key ones is a prerequisite for utilizing the provided information efficiently. Thus, the sources that contain a biographical record of Abu Nu'aym are herein divided into three categories:

(1) Classical, (2) Post-Classical, and (3) Modern. This division is based on specific periods, during which the relevant sources were written.

The 'Classical' period is considered to be between the 6th/12th and 8th/14th centuries. The works that fall into this category are:

- *Al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya* by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373).¹
- *Al-'Ibar fī khabar man ghabar; Mizān al-i'tidāl fī naqd al-rijāl; Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*; and *Tadhkirat al-huffāz* by Shams al-Dīn Muhammad al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348).²
- *Mu'jam al-buldān* by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229).³
- *Al-Muntaẓam fī tawārīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam* by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200).⁴
- *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya al-kubrā* by Tāj al-Dīn Abd al-Wahhāb al-Subkī (d. 771/1369).⁵
- *Tabyīn kadhib al-muftarī fī-ma nusiba ilā al-imām Abī al-Hasan al-Ash'arī* by Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176).⁶
- *Wafayāt al-a'yān* by Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1293).⁷

The 'Post-Classical' period is considered to be between the 9th/15th and 11th/17th centuries. The works that fall into this category are:

- *Lisān al-mīzān* by Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449).⁸
- *Ṭabaqāt al-huffāz* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).⁹
- *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* by Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'arānī (d. 925/1519).¹⁰
- *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab* by Ibn al-'Imād (d. 1089/1679).¹¹

¹ Ismail Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya Wa-l-Nihāya*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1986).

² Muhammad Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, 2nd ed. (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'arif al-Nizāmiyya, 1915); Muhammad Al-Dhahabī, *Al-'Ibar Fī Khabar Man Ghabar*, ed. Fu'ād Sayyid (Kuwait: al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1960); Muhammad Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān Al-I'tidāl Fī Naqd Al-Rijāl*, ed. Ali Al-Bajawī (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1963); Muhammad Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1981).

³ Yāqūt Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam Al-Buldān*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhause, 1866).

⁴ Abd al-Rahman Ibn Al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam Fī Tawārīkh Al-Mulūk Wa-l-Umam* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995).

⁵ Abd al-Wahhāb Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, ed. Mahmud Al-Ṭanaḥī and Abd al-Fattah Al-Ḥulw (Cairo: al-Ḥalabī, 1964).

⁶ Ali ibn 'Asākir, *Tabyīn Kadhib Al-Muftarī Fī-Ma Nusiba Ilā Al-Imām Abī Al-Hasan Al-Ash'arī* (Damascus: Matba'at al-Tawthīq, 1928).

⁷ Ahmad Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt Al-A'yān: Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary*, trans. Bn Mac Guckin de Slane (Paris: Benjamin Dupart, 1842); Ahmad Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt Al-A'yān: Biographies of Illustrious Men*, ed. Iḥsān Abbas (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1968).

⁸ Ibn Ḥajar Al-'Asqalānī, *Lisān Al-Mīzān*, ed. Adil Abd al-Mawjūd and Ali Mu'awwad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996).

⁹ Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Huffāz*, ed. Ali Umar (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1973).

¹⁰ Abd al-Wahhāb Al-Sha'arānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt Al-Kubrā* (Cairo: Maktabat wa-Matba'at Muhammad Ali Ṣubayḥ wa-Awladih, 1897).

¹¹ Abd al-Ḥayy Ibn Al-'Imād, *Shadharāt Al-Dhahab Fī Akhbār Man Dhahab*, ed. Mahmud Al-Arna'ūt (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, n.d.).

The remaining works constitute the 'Modern' category, which covers works written in the 14th/20th century and beyond. These are:

- *Abu Nu'aym, ḥayātuhu wa-kitābuhu al-Ḥilya* by Muhammad al-Ṣabbāgh.¹²
- *Abu Nu'aym's Sources for Ḥilyat al-awliyā', Sufi and Traditionist* by Christopher Melchert.¹³
- *Al-A'lām* by Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī (d. 1395/1976).¹⁴
- *A'lām al-muḥaddithīn* by Muhammad Abu Shahbah (d. 1403/1983).¹⁵
- *A'yān al-shī'a* by Muḥsin al-Amīn (d. 1371/1952).¹⁶
- *Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abu Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī: al-faqīh al-muḥaddith al-ṣūfī al-mu'arriḥ* by Abd al-Ḥafīẓ al-Qaranī (d. 1434/2013).¹⁷
- *Abu Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī* by Johannes Pedersen (d. 1977).¹⁸
- Fārūq Ḥamāda's edition of *Kitāb al-Ḍu'afā'* by Abu Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī.¹⁹
- *Jāmi' karamāt al-awliyā'* by Yusuf al-Nabhānī (d. 1350/1932).²⁰
- Muhammad al-Shāfi'ī's edition of *al-Musnad al-mustakhraj 'alā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* by Abu Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī.²¹
- *Sufi Apologia in the Guise of Biography: The Case of Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* by Meis Al-Kaisi.²²

It should be noted that the information presented in the following text is primarily based on the sources which belong to the first two categories, 'Classical' and 'Post-Classical.' The 'Modern' sources are referred to only when and if they provide additional information.

This paper presents a concise biography of Abu Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, which sheds light on his life, and accounts for all views and backgrounds, both positive and negative. All the available sources have been consulted to conclude what is in this study. The main objective was to examine the two opposing opinions of Abu Nu'aym

¹² Muhammad Al-Ṣabbāgh, *Abu Nu'aym, Ḥayātuhu Wa-Kitābuhu Al-Ḥilya*, 2nd ed. (Dār al-I'tiṣām, 1978).

¹³ Christopher Melchert, "Abū Nu'aym's Sources for Ḥilyat Al-awliyā', Sufi and Traditionist," in *Les Maîtres Soufis et Leurs Disciples Des IIIe-Ve Siècles de l'hégire (IXe-XIe)*, ed. G. Gobillot and J. Thibon (Damascus: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2012), 145–59, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.ifpo.3078>.

¹⁴ Khayr al-Dīn Al-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām* (Cairo: al-Mu'allif, 1927).

¹⁵ Muhammad Abu Shahbah, *A'lām Al-Muḥaddithīn*, 1962.

¹⁶ Muḥsin Al-Amīn, *A'yān Al-Shī'a* (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf li-l-Maṭba'āt, 1986).

¹⁷ Abd al-Ḥafīẓ Al-Qaranī, *Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abu Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī: Al-Faqīh Al-Muḥaddith Al-Ṣūfī Al-Mu'arriḥ* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1987).

¹⁸ J. Pedersen, "Abū Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al., 2nd ed., 2012, https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0239.

¹⁹ Abu Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb Al-Ḍu'afā'*, ed. Fārūq Ḥamāda (Casablanca: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1984).

²⁰ Yusuf Al-Nabhānī, *Jāmi' Karamāt Al-Awliyā'* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya al-Kubrā, 1911).

²¹ Abu Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Musnad Al-Mustakhraj 'alā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muhammad Al-Shāfi'ī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996).

²² Meis Al-Kaisi, "Sufi Apologia in the Guise of Biography: The Case of Abū Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī's Ḥilyat Al-Awliyā' Wa-Ṭabaqāt Al-Aṣfiyā'," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 115–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2015.1075378>.

al-Iṣfahānī, whom the majority accepted as an authority and the opposing minority rejected due to his favoritism of the *Ash'arī* creed, Sufism, and also due to an assumed association with sectarianism. This paper unfolds everything that has come down to us in literature in this regard.

B. The Life of Abu Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī and his Status in Islamic Intellectual History

Abu Nu'aym al- Iṣfahānī, whose full name is Ahmad b. Abd Allah b. Ahmad b. Ishāq b. Musa b. Mihrān al-Mahrānī al-Iṣfahānī (or al-Aṣbahānī) al-Ṣūfī²³ al-Aḥwal (squint-eyed),²⁴ was born in Rajab 336/Jan-Feb 948.²⁵ He is primarily remembered as a *Shāfi'ī* jurist, a hadith transmitter, and as the author of many famous works, out of which *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* is always mentioned.²⁶

Abu Nu'aym's father, Abd Allah b. Ahmad was one of Isfahan's fine scholars and narrators. Qaranī introduces him by saying: "He was a great scholar who narrated numerous Hadith."²⁷ Some classical scholars introduce Abu Nu'aym as the maternal grandson of Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Bannā' (n.d.), who was a well-known ascetic and Sufi scholar.²⁸ However, Abu Nu'aym himself mentions in his *Dhikr akhbār Iṣbahān* that his father, Abd Allah b. Ahmad b. Ishāq b. Musa b. Mihrān (231-365/846-976), was the grandson of Muhammad al-Bannā'. He says: "My father, may God have mercy on him, died in the month of *Rajab* in the year 365 and was buried next to his maternal grandfather Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Bannā' al-Ṣūfī."²⁹ In addition, Abu Nu'aym mentions Muhammad al-Bannā' in the introduction to his *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* as his forerunner.³⁰

²³ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 275; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 18; Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Huffāz*, 423.

²⁴ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 275; Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Huffāz*, 423.

²⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 275; Al-Sha'arānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt Al-Kubrā*, I, 56; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 18; Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Huffāz*, 423. reports year 336/948 as well but does not offer a specific month. Other sources report different birthdates. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān*, I, 74, for instance, says that "according to some" Abu Nu'aym was born in 334/945, while Ḥamawī, *K. Mu'jam al-buldān*, I, 389 reports Rajab 330/March-Apr 942, and Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, III, 6, reports Rajab 353/Jul-Aug 964.

²⁶ For a study on the *Hilya* see Al-Kaisi, "Sufi Apologia in the Guise of Biography: The Case of Abū Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī's *Ḥilyat Al-Awliyā' Wa-Ṭabaqāt Al-Aṣfiyā'*."

²⁷ Al-Qaranī, *Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abu Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī: Al-Faqīh Al-Muhaddith Al-Ṣūfī Al-Mu'arrikh*, 49.

²⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 275; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 18; Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Huffāz*, 423.

²⁹ Abu Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dhikr Akhbār Iṣfahān (Geschichte Iṣbahans)*, ed. Sven Dederling (Leiden: Brill, 1931), II, 93.

³⁰ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 275; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 18; Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Huffāz*, 423.

³⁰ Abu Nu'aim Al-Isfahani, *Hilyat Al-Auliya Wa-Tabaqat Al-Asfiya*, vol. II (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr li l-Tiba'a wa l-Nasyr wa l-Tawzi, 1996), I, 34.

Abu Nu'aym's father played a great role in laying down the tracks for his son's education from the age of six.³¹ He had him taught by important teachers, such as Khaythama b. Sulaymān al-Aṭrābilsī, and Abu al-Abbas al-Aṣamm.³² Consequently, Abu Nu'aym had the unique opportunity to narrate exclusive anecdotes, which constituted the building blocks to his subsequent works. In *Dhikr akhbār Iṣbahān*, Abu Nu'aym also talks about his ancestor Mihrān, who was a client (*mawlā*) to Abd Allah b. Mu'āwiya b. Abd Allah b. Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 129/746-7), and the first of his kin to accept Islam.³³

Abu Nu'aym was a Sunni *Shāfi'ī* scholar who followed the *Ash'arī* creed.³⁴ However, there are hypotheses suggesting that Abu Nu'aym was disposed towards Shiism on account of various factors.³⁵ According to Qaranī, one of these factors relates to Abu Nu'aym's ancestor Mihrān mentioned above.³⁶ Qaranī emphasizes that a freedman follows the creed of his master and thus the attribution of Shiism to Abu Nu'aym. Another ground to these factors, offered by Qaranī, is the appearance of Abu Nu'aym's biography in some works on the Shiites, such as *A'yān al-shī'a* by Muḥsin al-Amīn, and *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* by Mīrzā Muhammad Bāqir. However, the author of *A'yān al-shī'a*, Amīn himself, states that Abu Nu'aym was a Sunni scholar, (*min 'ulamā' ahl al-sunna*) who had written enormously on *ahl al-bayt* (family of the Prophet), which had mislead many to think that he was a Shiite.³⁷ Amīn's justification for the inclusion of the biography is based upon the mention of Abu Nu'aym's Shiite friends.

Abu Nu'aym possessed a distinguished reputation and was praised by many famous scholars and historians, who had spoken of him in their writings and described him as a great Sufi and a famous traditionist. He was an authority on *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *ṭaṣawwuf* (Sufism), and was proficient in memorization and accuracy.³⁸ In *Mīzān al-i'tidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*, Dhahabī reported that Abu Nu'aym was one of the greatest scholars as well as a truthful traditionist, whose station of Imam was accepted by people unanimously.³⁹ In his other work, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, alongside Suyūṭī in *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥuffāz* and 'Asqalānī in *Lisān al-mīzān*, Dhahabī

³¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 275; Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Huffāz*, 423.

³² Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 275; Al-Dhahabī, *Al-'Ibar Fī Khabar Man Ghabar*, III, 170; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 454; Al-'Imād, *Shadharāt Al-Dhahab Fī Akhbār Man Dhahab*, V, 149; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 18–19.

³³ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dhikr Akhbār Iṣfahān (Geschichte Iṣbahans)*, II, 93.

³⁴ Al-Qaranī, *Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abu Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī: Al-Faqīh Al-Muḥaddith Al-Ṣūfi Al-Mu'arrikh*, 73; Al-Ṣabbāgh, *Abu Nu'aym, Ḥayātuḥu Wa-Kitābuhu Al-Ḥilya*, 14–15.

³⁵ Al-Amīn, *A'yān Al-Shī'a*, III, 7; Al-Qaranī, *Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abu Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī: Al-Faqīh Al-Muḥaddith Al-Ṣūfi Al-Mu'arrikh*, 83.

³⁶ Al-Qaranī, *Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abu Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī: Al-Faqīh Al-Muḥaddith Al-Ṣūfi Al-Mu'arrikh*, 83.

³⁷ Al-Amīn, *A'yān Al-Shī'a*, III, 7.

³⁸ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 18.

³⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān Al-I'tidāl Fī Naqd Al-Rijāl*, I, 111.

presented Abu Nu'aym as a great *ḥāfiẓ* and the traditionist of their time.⁴⁰ Also, Ibn al-Najjār (d. 643/1245) considered Abu Nu'aym to be at the top of the traditionists and as one of the renowned religious figures (*huwwa tāj al-muḥaddithīn wa-aḥḥad a'lām al-dīn*).⁴¹ Moreover, in *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, alongside Subkī in *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, Dhahabī mentions that Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Mardawayh (n.d.) had once said that people used to seek Abu Nu'aym as he was the *asnad* (most reliable) and the *aḥfaz* (most highly competent in knowing and memorizing hadith) *muḥaddith* at his time, and that the *ḥuffāz* of the world used to gather around him.⁴² Also, al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), one of Abu Nu'aym's many students, said that he had not seen anyone *aḥfaz* than Abu Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī and Abī Ḥāzim al-A'raj (n.d.).⁴³ Furthermore, in his famous book *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, Ibn Khallikān wrote:

The celebrated *ḥāfiẓ* Abū Noaim (*sic*) Aḥmad Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ishāk Ibn Mūsā Ibn Mihrān al-Iṣbahānī (*native of Ispahan*), author of the *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, and one of the principal traditionalists, was a *ḥāfiẓ* of the highest authority: he had studied under men of the first merit, who themselves received from him useful information.⁴⁴

Dhahabī and Subkī narrate that Hamza b. al-Abbas al-'Ilawī (n.d.) confirmed that for fourteen years Abu Nu'aym had been reckoned, by hadith scholars, to be the best hadith-authority.⁴⁵ He continued by saying that the hadith scholars also mentioned that the *Ḥilya*, after its completion, was highly valued and was sold for four hundred dinars in Nishapur. Also, in *Tabyīn kadhīb al-muftaī*, Ibn 'Asākir said that Abu Nu'aym had compiled famous works, such as the *Ḥilya* and many others involving hadith sciences.⁴⁶ He proceeded by stating that Abu Nu'aym's reputation had reached distant lands and that people had benefited from his marvelous work. Moreover, on the authority of Abu Ṭāhir al-Silafī (d. 576/1180), who collected anecdotes on Abu Nu'aym, Alī b. al-Mufaḍḍal (n.d.) said that the number of those who had transmitted hadith from Abu

⁴⁰ Al-'Asqalānī, *Lisān Al-Mīzān*, I, 308f; Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 275; Al-Suyūfī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Huffāz*, 423. Ibn Khallikān explains that the "*ḥāfiẓ* (pl. *ḥuffāz*) is the person who knows the Qur'ān by heart. However, this title is given more specifically to those doctors who have learned by heart the contents of the six great collections of Traditions, and who can cite the names of the persons by whom each tradition has been successively handed down, and who can point out those traditionists whose authority cannot be admitted without limitation and those who merit full confidence. The word *ḥāfiẓ* is sometimes made use of to designate a narrator of historical traditions." See Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt Al-A'yān* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Bulāq, 1871), I, 57, footnote 1. Moreover, this title is given to those who have memorised 100 thousand hadith with their full chain of transmitters.

⁴¹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 21.

⁴² Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 459; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 21.

⁴³ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 276.

⁴⁴ Khallikān, *Wafayāt Al-A'yān*, I, 74.

⁴⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 276; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 459; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 21.

⁴⁶ 'Asākir, *Tabyīn Kadhīb Al-Muftaī Fī-Ma Nusiba Ilā Al-Imām Abī Al-Hasan Al-Ash'arī*, 246.

Nu'aym was about eighty and that there had not been any work as estimable as the *Hilya*.⁴⁷

There is a number of factors that assisted Abu Nu'aym in achieving an eminent reputation as well as a significant status and made him a renowned figure in the hadith tradition. The very first and the most important factor that was to grant him the titles of *al-imam al-jalīl* (honorable and great imam), *al-ḥāfiẓ*, and *al-muḥaddith*, was his long and intensive journey in learning, which started with his father at the age of six and ceased at the age of ninety-four. He had learned from reputable scholars, traveled extensively seeking knowledge, and gained trust and respect from all his students. The consulted sources report a total of 46 different teachers and 70 students. Moreover, Abu Nu'aym's broad knowledge in the different fields, namely Hadith, Sufism, history, and jurisprudence made him proficient. Dhahabī described Abu Nu'aym as "the imam, the *ḥāfiẓ*, the reliable and erudite scholar of Islam."⁴⁸ Abu Nu'aym's reputation for being a trustworthy source had emerged from his referral to reliable and continuous chains of hadith transmitters. This enabled his works to be greatly recognized and could be considered as yet another factor on the list. The many significant books he had written granted him the fame of an author of many works (*ṣāḥib al-taṣānīf*) and this was definitely another crucial factor of his success. The consulted sources report a total of 75 different works, some of which have survived and others only known to us as titles of lost works. In fact, Abu Nu'aym's works may be categorized into three categories; (1) those that have been published, (2) those available in manuscript form only, and (3) those that have been lost. The largest and most famous of all his works is a multivolume biographical encyclopedia named *Hilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*. It includes 689 biographies on great figures of Islam, who have been known for their piety, asceticism, and great learning. *Hilyat al-awliyā'* has been published numerous times between 1932 and 2018 in both print and eBook formats in three different languages. Nonetheless, none of the existent editions, as far as I have examined, may be considered truly critical. Abu Nu'aym's second-largest work is *Dhikr akhbār Iṣbahān*. It contains biographies of people who were related to Isfahan, mainly scholars, listed after a short history and topography of the town. This work also has been published several times.

Abu Nu'aym died in Isfahan on Monday 21st of Muharram year 430/1038, and his grave is said, by Ḥamawī, to be in Mardabān.⁴⁹ However, there have been many discrepancies about the exact month and day of his death. Suyūṭī states that Abu Nu'aym died in the month of Muharram 430/Oct 1038.⁵⁰ Others confirm that he died

⁴⁷ 'Asākīr, *Tabyīn Kadhib Al-Muftarī Fī-Ma Nusiba Ilā Al-Imām Abī Al-Hasan Al-Ash'arī*; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 458.

⁴⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 454.

⁴⁹ Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam Al-Buldān*, I, 398.

⁵⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Ḥuffāz*, 423.

on Monday the 20th of Muharram 430/22nd Oct 1038.⁵¹ Though Ibn Khallikān, alongside Ibn 'Asākir, claims the month of Ṣafar 430/Nov 1038 to be the date of Abu Nu'aym's death, he still states that "others placed his death on Monday 21st of Muharram of that year."⁵² Nevertheless, Ibn 'Asākir also states that he had been told that Abu Nu'aym died at the age of 94, on Monday 21st of Muharram 430/23rd Oct 1038, and was buried on the same day after the noon prayers.⁵³ Ibn Kathīr, however, places Abu Nu'aym's death on the 28th of Muharram 430/30th Oct 1038, whereas Ibn al-Jawzī reports it on the 12th of Muharram 430/14th Oct 1038.⁵⁴

C. Criticism against Abu Nu'aym

The majority of scholars, in different centuries, have always spoken well of Abu Nu'aym, and have always admired his works as well as accepted his station of Imam. Nevertheless, although Abu Nu'aym is remembered as one of the principal traditionists, and as a *ḥāfiẓ* of the highest authority, we still find some scholars who have criticized him and his *Ḥilya*. It should be noted that there are two characteristics in Abu Nu'aym's personality that might have been the cause of some of the criticism directed towards him, namely Sufism and the *Ash'arī* creed which are connected through bridges of harmony and sympathy. In his biography of Abu Nu'aym, Dhahabī cites Abu Ṭāhir al-Silafī saying:

Abu Nu'aym was rejected at that time due to his affiliation to his school of thought as there was an exaggerated fanaticism between the *Ḥanābila* and the *Ash'ariyya* that resulted in civil strife.⁵⁵

The criticism of some scholars towards Abu Nu'aym was of different intensities as it was based on different grounds. The strife between the *Ḥanābila* and the *Ash'ariyya* caused sharp criticism of Abu Nu'aym by his fellow townsman, the Hanbali jurist, Abu Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ishāq b. Yaḥya b. Manda, known as Ibn Manda (d. 395/1005), and led to physical attacks on him. Abu Nu'aym was even expelled from the mosque of Isfahan and was later exiled from the whole town. Fortunately, his absence from the town at that time had saved his life since, according to sources, the

⁵¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 279; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 462; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 22; Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam Al-Buldān*, I, 398. However, this date cannot be correct since 20th Muharram year 430 AH was a Sunday.

⁵² 'Asākir, *Tabyīn Kadhib Al-Muftarī Fī-Ma Nusiba Ilā Al-Imām Abī Al-Hasan Al-Ash'arī*, 246; Khallikān, *Wafayāt Al-A'yān*, I, 74.

⁵³ 'Asākir, *Tabyīn Kadhib Al-Muftarī Fī-Ma Nusiba Ilā Al-Imām Abī Al-Hasan Al-Ash'arī*, 246.

⁵⁴ Al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam Fī Tawārīkh Al-Mulūk Wa-l-Umam*, IX, 292; Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya Wa-l-Nihāya*, VI (11), 48-49.

⁵⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 277; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 459. On Hanbalites, see H. Laoust, "Ḥanābila," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0263. See also, Mohd Hameedullah Khan, *The Schools of Islamic Jurisprudence: A Comparative Study*, 2nd ed. (India: Kitab Bhavan, 1997), 110–20.

Turkish Sultan Sebük Tigin conquered Isfahan and massacred the people assembled in the mosque at the Friday service.⁵⁶ This is reckoned as one of Abu Nu'aym's graces (*karāmāt*).⁵⁷

The conflict between Abu Nu'aym and Ibn Manda is mostly known since any mention of either one of them would bring it clearly to the surface. In his biography on Ibn Manda, Dhahabī says: "Ibn Manda deprecated and accused the *ḥāfiẓ* Abu Nu'aym and repudiated him regarding his impugment [of narrators] due to the enmity between them."⁵⁸ In his biography on Abu Nu'aym, he says: "Ibn Manda comments regarding Abu Nu'aym are shocking, and I do not like to make mention of them; similarly, I do not accept either of their statements about the other."⁵⁹ These statements show that both Abu Nu'aym and Ibn Manda openly displayed their disrespect towards each other. Further, in Abu Nu'aym's biography, Dhahabī explains:

The statements of contemporaries concerning each other aren't to be taken into consideration, especially if it appears to be based on enmity, creed, or envy. No one is saved from this except those whom God has protected; I know of no period in history in which people avoided this except for the prophets and the righteous.⁶⁰

Then, he pins it down further to *al-balā' al-ladhī bayn al-rajulayn huwwa l-i'tiqād*.⁶¹ This clearly explains the impetus behind the dispute, namely creedal matters.

However, the conflict between the jurists and the Sufis, which arose during the 3rd/9th century, might have been another reason behind the dispute between Abu Nu'aym and Ibn Manda. This conflict originated with the blossoming of Sufism, which shifted from a state of worship and asceticism to a state of theoretical Sufism. Hence, different Sufi schools emerged with new methods revealed, and each school had its own students and teachers. Sufis had deemed themselves as providentially selected celestial individuals, as saints and God's Friends (*awliyā'*), whose spiritual accomplishments were akin to the experience of the Prophets. They also laid claim to an unconditional relationship of mutual love between themselves and God. This provoked the hostilities of the scholars of law and religion, namely the '*ulamā'*'.

This relationship of mutual love between the mystic and God seemed to have been the main point of controversy, in particular when such a claim was made public. Once the feeling of a visionary experience of God or a symbolically-mediated

⁵⁶ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 277f; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 460; Al-Nabhānī, *Jāmi' Karamāt Al-Awliyā'*, I, 293; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 21f. Khan Sebük Tigin is the founder of the Ghaznavid Empire, which was a state in the region of today's Afghanistan that existed from 963 to 1187 AD.

⁵⁷ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 460; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 22.

⁵⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 479.

⁵⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān Al-I'tidāl Fī Naqd Al-Rijāl*, I, 111.

⁶⁰ Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān Al-I'tidāl Fī Naqd Al-Rijāl*.

⁶¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 479.

encounter became a public malicious scandal, Sufis were maltreated by society and prosecuted by the government. Subsequent to public exposure, Sufi doctrines were assaulted and undermined by the scholars of law and religion and eventually labeled as heretical.⁶²

Another form of sharp criticism against Abu Nu'aym, over a century after his death, was by the Hanbali scholar Ibn al-Jawzī. From his short biography on Abu Nu'aym, which he provides in *Al-Muntazam fī tawārīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*, and from his other references to Abu Nu'aym, one can sense the dislike Ibn al-Jawzī had towards him.⁶³ He presents Abu Nu'aym as a person who learned and compiled tremendously (*sami'a al-kathīr wa-ṣannafā al-kathīr*) but thereafter stresses Abu Nu'aym's propensity towards the Ash'ariyya saying: *wa-kāna yamīl ilā madhhab al-ash'ariyya maylan kathīran*. He proceeds by reporting a critique stated by Abu Bakr Ahmad b. Ali b. Thābit: "Abū Nu'aym used to mix up the hadith he heard directly with those he was given permission to narrate without distinguishing one from the other,"⁶⁴ followed by al-Nakhshabī's critique: "Even though Abu Nu'aym did not hear the whole of al-Ḥārith's *musnad* from Abī Bakr b. Khilād, he still narrated all of it,"⁶⁵ avoiding any proposals of defense to mitigate the attacks. However, Dhahabī and Subkī present evidence to defend Abu Nu'aym and exculpate him from all suspicion imputed to him.⁶⁶ For instance, we find a critical statement by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī on Abu Nu'aym in which he says:

I have seen Abu Nu'aym being careless regarding several things, such as indicating direct narration of hadith for which he was only given [written] authorization to transmit without clarifying it as such.⁶⁷

Dhahabī retaliates and renders assertions to the contrary in all his consulted works. In *Tadhkirat al-huffāz*, he admits that such accusations could be applicable but

⁶² For more details on the subject see Gerhard Böwering, "Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. F. de Jong and B. Radke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), esp. 53-59. See also Al-Qaranī, *Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abu Nu'aym Al-Isfahānī: Al-Faqīh Al-Muḥaddith Al-Ṣūfī Al-Mu'arrikh*, 73-77.

⁶³ Al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntazam Fī Tawārīkh Al-Mulūk Wa-l-Umam*, IX, 292; Ibn Al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat Al-Ṣafwa*, ed. M. Fakhūrī (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa'y, 1973), I, 20-31; Ibn Al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, ed. M. M. al-Dimashqī et Al., 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ra'id al-'Arabī, 1949), 165.

⁶⁴ Al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntazam Fī Tawārīkh Al-Mulūk Wa-l-Umam*, IX, 292.

⁶⁵ Al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntazam Fī Tawārīkh Al-Mulūk Wa-l-Umam*.

⁶⁶ For more details on what was said against these utterances and some others, see Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 278; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 460-62; Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 22-25. It should also be mentioned that right at the beginning of his biography on Abū Nu'aym, Dhahabī in *Mizān al-i'tidāl*, I, 111, stated that things have been said about Abū Nu'aym without evidence '*takallama fīhi balā hujja*'.

⁶⁷ Cited in Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 23; Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 278; Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān Al-I'tidāl Fī Naqd Al-Rijāl*, I, 111; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 460.

only in a few cases.⁶⁸ He then emphasizes that Abu Nu'aym was careful in selecting the appropriate terminology when transmitting a hadith and offers clarifying examples. In *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'* Dhahabī argues: "Indicating direct narration when transmitting a hadith via authorization only is a well-known position, which was commonly practiced by the traditionists of Andalusia, where it became widespread."⁶⁹ Hence, Dhahabī bases his defense upon the disagreement that exists between the scholars on *ijāza*, emphasizing that this was the *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence) that Abu Nu'aym and many others followed. At the end he comments:

Thus, whatever al-Khaṭīb imagined and presumed is invalid and Abu Nu'aym is not to be accused; on the contrary, he is trustworthy and a scholar who is erudite in this discipline.⁷⁰

Subkī, however, dismisses Khaṭīb's statement, mentioned above, by saying: "It is not proven that al-Khaṭīb said this and as such, cannot be considered a vilification."⁷¹ Then he says: "Using the phrase *akhbaranā* when referring to a tradition received via [written] authorization is a matter of dispute," which complies with the deduced statement by Dhahabī.⁷²

It is noteworthy that, although Dhahabī defends and disagrees with what has been reported about Abu Nu'aym, he still censures the disrespect and the spleen Abu Nu'aym had shown in his writings against Ibn Manda. He then continues to criticize both, Abu Nu'aym and Ibn Manda by saying: "Both of them are acceptable to me; neither of them is guilty of anything other than narrating fabricated traditions without declaring them as such."⁷³ I beg to disagree with Dhahabī on this matter as narrating a fabricated hadith without clarifying is by no means acceptable and whoever is guilty of such actions cannot be called a trustworthy transmitter. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "He who tells a lie on me intentionally, let him take his seat in the Hellfire."⁷⁴

If we go back to Ibn al-Jawzī, we would observe, once again, criticism of Abu Nu'aym and the *Ḥilya* in *Talbīs Iblīs*.⁷⁵ There, he claims that Abu Nu'aym mentioned in the *Ḥilya* disowned and disgraceful affairs about Sufism and that he rebelliously

⁶⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat Al-Huffāz*, III, 278.

⁶⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 461. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that in *Mizān al-i'tidāl*, I, 111, Dhahabī argued against saying "*akhbaranā*" without "*ijāzatan*" by stating that "this was an opinion that Abū Nu'aym, as well as others, held whereas in fact it was a form of deception."

⁷⁰ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*.

⁷¹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*, IV, 24.

⁷² Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'iyya Al-Kubrā*.

⁷³ Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān Al-I'tidāl Fī Naqd Al-Rijāl*, I, 111.

⁷⁴ Muhammad Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001), no. 107.

⁷⁵ Al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, 165.

included among the Sufis Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, and the superiors of the Companions, and narrated the unthinkable about them.⁷⁶

Moreover, in Ibn al-Jawzī's *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* we find more substantial criticism of Abu Nu'aym and the *Hilya*, which discusses thirteen points in the sequence presented below:⁷⁷

1. Ibn al-Jawzī argues that the main intent of the *Hilya* is to offer followers a clearer and more defined track of Sufism by providing reports on those devout and pious individuals that cover different aspects of their morals and positions.⁷⁸ He says that in some cases the biographies divert from the main aim of the work and report related materials only with nothing on the subject himself. For instance, the biography of Ja'far b. Sulaymān al-Ḍuba'ī (d. 178/794) is mainly composed of his reports on Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 131/749), rather than information about Ja'far himself.
2. Ibn al-Jawzī censures the topics of the materials presented in the biographies. He points out that on some occasions Abu Nu'aym was not careful in choosing the appropriate information that would be congruent with the orientation of the work. For example, in the case of Mujāhid b. Jabr, a Successor and a *mufassir* from Mecca (d. 104/722), Abu Nu'aym filled his biography with parts of his *tafsir* (exegeses) of the Quran.
3. Another crucial point Ibn al-Jawzī criticizes is the repetition of material in the inter-related biographies. For instance, sayings of Hasan al-Baṣri, which were reported in his biography, were repeated in his friends' biographies.⁷⁹
4. Long Hadith transmissions within one biography, is another point that Ibn al-Jawzī debates. He says that such long transmissions could result in deviation from the main characteristics of the subject. He also remarks that the Hadith does not have a common theme and that they discuss topics that are not in harmony with asceticism, the subject of the work from his point of view.⁸⁰
5. Ibn al-Jawzī says that Abu Nu'aym included many doubtful and non-authentic hadith for the sake of lengthening his work as well as passing on some of his tales. He accuses Abu Nu'aym of obscuring facts that could consequently mislead people.

⁷⁶ Al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*.

⁷⁷ Al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat Al-Ṣafwa*, I, 20–31. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, I, 20-31.

⁷⁸ See Al-Kaisi, "Sufi Apologia in the Guise of Biography: The Case of Abū Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī's *Hilyat Al-Awliyā' Wa-Ṭabaqāt Al-Aṣfiyā'*." for an analysis of and a discussion about the main intent of the *Hilya*.

⁷⁹ For a theory of multiple authorship, which explains the inconsistencies in the *Hilya*, see Jawid Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from Al-Sulamī to Jāmī* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), chap. 2. See also Al-Kaisi, "Sufi Apologia in the Guise of Biography: The Case of Abū Nu'aym Al-Iṣfahānī's *Hilyat Al-Awliyā' Wa-Ṭabaqāt Al-Aṣfiyā'*."

⁸⁰ I agree with Ibn al-Jawzī on the fact that many times the Hadith transmission discusses topics which are not in harmony with the biography's theme not to mention the remainder of the work, the content of which is mainly ascetic.

6. Ibn al-Jawzī criticizes Abu Nu'aym for using rhymed prose that almost does not lead to a comprehensible meaning or purpose.
7. Another point in Ibn al-Jawzī's critique is attributing Sufism to individuals who are usually not identified as Sufis, for instance, Abu Bakr, Uthman, and al-Shāfi'ī.⁸¹
8. Ibn al-Jawzī contends Abu Nu'aym's unnecessary lengthening of meaningless narration, which does not serve the main subject.
9. Abu Nu'aym attributed some inappropriate, irrelevant behavior and conduct to Sufism. Ibn al-Jawzī explains that such quotations could pose jeopardy to those novices who still lack the appropriate knowledge to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable conduct.
10. Ibn al-Jawzī argues that Abu Nu'aym did not adhere to any criteria in organizing his work and consequently confuses the reader.⁸²
11. Ibn al-Jawzī debates that Abu Nu'aym failed to provide a biography on the most superior ascetic, namely the Prophet Muhammad.
12. Ibn al-Jawzī argues that Abu Nu'aym had left out many individuals who are well known for their piety and exertion.⁸³
13. Finally, Ibn al-Jawzī debates that Sufi women had only a minute portion of the *Ḥilya* which he considers disadvantageous since male ascetics could use such sections to correct their own conduct.

D. Conclusion

The 4th/10th century celebrated author Abu Nu'aym al-Iṣḫānī lived a long life of 90 years during which he studied under a number of teachers, taught many students, and wrote numerous works. Apart from those works that seem to have been lost, many survived in manuscript form and received attention by modern scholarship, the result of which is the availability of many of his works in print today. The most significant of Abu Nu'aym's works is, with no doubt, the multivolume *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*, which is available in both print and eBook formats as well as in abbreviated versions and short translations of selected extracts. His second-largest work, which has also been published, is *Dhikr akhbār Iṣḫān*, containing biographies of Isfahani scholars.

⁸¹ See Al-Kaisi, "Sufi Apologia in the Guise of Biography: The Case of Abū Nu'aym Al-Iṣḫānī's *Ḥilyat Al-Awliyā' Wa-Ṭabaqāt Al-Aṣfiyā'*." For an analysis and comments on this particular issue.

⁸² For a discussion on the usage of a number of competing organisational principles in the arrangement of the *Ḥilya*, see Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism*, which suggest that they may not have been applied by a single author and support his theory of multiple authorship. However, it should be noted that the overall scheme of the *Ḥilya* is chronological and the material is arranged according to *ṭabaqāt* (generations). See Al-Kaisi, "Sufi Apologia."

⁸³ See Al-Kaisi, "Sufi Apologia," for an analysis and comments on this particular issue.

Abu Nu'aym is known for his distinguished reputation as a great Sufi, famous traditionist, an authority on *fiqh*, and a great *ḥāfiẓ*. Muslim scholarship has generally accepted Abu Nu'aym and, in fact, celebrated his status as a scholar. Nonetheless, as much fame and renowned reputation had Abu Nu'aym gained as much criticism was given by those who saw him not worthy of the reputable status he had won. The criticism against Abu Nu'aym was based on different grounds. Some scholars seem to have had some personal disagreements with Abu Nu'aym, while others questioned his credibility in reporting Hadith, and others have accused him of misrepresenting Sufism. Abu Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī is certainly not unique in this respect as it stands to reason that no one would be accepted unanimously by all. It is, however, of great significance to recognize that which has been said both in his favor as well as against him. This paper has outlined all the available opinions by using a critical approach inclusive of a detailed analysis of what has been mentioned about Abu Nu'aym in both classical and modern literature.

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