

ABU HAFS NASAFI AND THE STUDY OF HIS SCIENTIFIC HERITAGE

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Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the life, intellectual legacy, and scholarly contributions of Najm ad-Din Abu Hafs Nasafi, a prominent 11th–12th-century encyclopedic thinker and theologian of the Islamic Golden Age. Widely recognized for his prolific authorship—exceeding 100 works—Nasafi's contributions span Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and hadith sciences. His most renowned work, al-‘Aqā’id, played a pivotal role in Sunni doctrinal formation and gained international scholarly recognition, particularly in 19th-century European Islamic studies. This research examines the historical context of Nasafi’s life, tracing his scholarly development from Nasaf to Samarkand, and explores the cultural and scientific vibrancy of the region during his time. The study also assesses his reception in medieval Islamic historiography, notably by Abu Sa’d al-Sam‘ānī, and evaluates modern academic works, including contemporary dissertations focused on his theological and encyclopedic outputs. Furthermore, the paper discusses Nasaf’s significance within the broader evolution of Islamic sciences in Transoxiana and the enduring legacy of the Nasaf tradition in hadith scholarship. By drawing on both primary biographical sources and secondary historical literature, this paper highlights the foundational role of Abu Hafs Nasafi in the development of Islamic intellectual traditions in Central Asia.

Keywords: Abu Hafs Nasafi, islamic intellectual history, Sunni theology (‘aqā’id), Central Asian scholarship, hadith sciences, Transoxiana islamic tradition.

Introduction

The encyclopedist Abu Hafs Nasafi is a thinker who worked in various fields of science in the Middle Ages. The total number of his works is more than 100. Abu Hafs Nasafi's work "al-'Aqo'id" was famous in the Islamic world, so it was of great interest to European Islamic scholars. In the first half of the 19th century, one of the researchers, V. Cureton, dedicated his work to this work and wrote a study entitled "The Pillar of the Religious Doctrine of the Sunnis."¹

¹ Cureton W. Pillar of Creed of the Sunnites. – London. – 1843.

In the past, small articles of a general nature about the life and scientific work of Abu Hafs were published in encyclopedias dedicated to Islam and in the contemporary press². Some of the scholar's works were published in the Muslim press. In them, the publishers provided information about the life, work, and works of Abu Hafs Nasafi³.

In recent years, dissertations dedicated to individual works of Abu Hafs Nasafi have been defended. In particular, S.A. Mukhammadaminov's dissertation entitled "Abu Hafs an-Nasafi's "Matla' an-nujum va majma' al-'ulum" and its role in the development of Islamic sciences in Central Asia (late 11th century - mid-12th century)" was devoted to a detailed study of another work of the scientist⁴. Also, A.A. Allokulov's PhD dissertation in historical sciences on the topic "Analysis of Abu Hafs Nasafi's "Aqeed" and its commentaries" was devoted to the study of the scholar's work in the field of aqeedah science and its commentaries⁵.

The full name of the scientist is given in the sources as Najm ad-din Abu Hafs Omar ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Ismail ibn Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Luqman al-Nasafi summa al-Samarkandi al-Hafiz al-Faqih al-Zahid al-Hanafi⁶.

But sometimes the ancient name of Nasaf is attributed to Nakhab, and the name of the author is also found in the form of an-Nakahbi instead of an-Nasafi⁷.

Since he was originally from Nasaf and spent most of his life in Samarkand, he was given the title "an-Nasafi summa as-Samarkandi" ("from Nasaf", later "from Samarkand"). The thinker is mainly known in the world of science under the name Abu Hafs Nasafi.

Abu Hafs Nasafi is mentioned in more than 20 medieval sources on Islamic history⁸. The first information about the scholar's life was provided by his later contemporary Abu Sa'd Abdulkarim ibn Muhammad as-Sam'ani al-Marwazi (d. 1167). For example, Abu Sa'd Sam'ani mentioned Abu Hafs Nasafi's name 27 times in his work "Kitab al-Ansab"⁹.

Later authors mainly repeat Abu Sa'd Sam'ani's information in their works and sometimes add new details to it. These details are taken from the works of Abu Hafs Nasafi, and in most cases provide information about the author's scientific background and interests. Abu Sa'd Sam'ani, who belongs to the Shafi'i school of thought, emphasizes that the Hanafi scholar Abu Hafs Nasafi was one of the most distinguished scholars, but criticizes some of his thoughts in

² Wensinck A.J. Al-Nasafi, III. Extract from the Encyclopaedia of Islam CD-ROM Edition v.1.0; Кавакжи. – Б. 73-74; Brockelmann C. Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur (бундан кейин: GAL). – Т. I. – Б. 426; Supplementband (бундан кейин: GAL SB). – Т. I. – Б. 757.

³ Uvatov U. Scholars of Samarkand // Uvatov U. Lessons from the wise. - T.: People's Heritage Publishing House named after Abdulla Qadiri, 1994. – P. 62-65.

⁴ Muhammadaminov S.A. Abu Hafs an-Nasafi's work "Matla' an-nujum va majma' al-'ulum" and its role in the development of Islamic sciences in Central Asia (late 11th century - mid-12th century). Candidate of Historical Sciences... dissertation author's ref. – T.: Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2012. – 26 p.

⁵ Allokulov A.A. Analysis of Abu Hafs Nasafi's work "Aqoid" and its commentaries. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Historical Sciences ... dissertation. author's ref. – T.: International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, 2018. – 26 p.

⁶ Abu Hafs 'Umar ibn Muhammad An-Nasafi. al-Qand fi zikr 'ulama' Samarkand / edited by Nazar Muhammad al-Faryabi. – Saudi Arabia: Maktabat al-Kawsar, 1991 (hereinafter: Qand. 1991). – P. 7; Abu Hafs 'Umar ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi. Kitab al-qand fi zikr 'ulama' Samarkand / edited by Yusuf al-Hadi. - Tehran: Oyina-yi miros, 1999 (hereinafter: Qand. 1999). – P. 15; Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Mahmud ibn al-Najjar al-Baghdadi. Zayl Tarikh Baghdad / edited by Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ato'. - Beirut: Dor al-kutub al-'ilmiya, 1997. – V: 20 (hereafter: Ibn al-Najjar). – P. 98-100.

⁷ Al-Ansab. – V: II. – P. 374.

⁸ Kavakji. – P. 89-93.

⁹ Al-Ansab. – V: II. – P. 148, 252, 260, 315, 324-25, 348, 373, 374, 385, 417, 434, 471; – V: III. – P. 8, 27, 121, 147, 172, 177, 448; – V: IV. – P. 416; – V: V. – P. 68, 185, 260, 517, 531, 548, 675; – V: V. – P. 340.

the field of hadith. Although he did not meet Abu Hafs Nasafi while he was alive, he proudly mentions that he received written permission for all of his works. Abu Sa'd Sam'ani concludes his opinion about Abu Hafs Nasafi with the following assessment of him: "He was one of those who loved hadith, but he was not fortunate enough to "understand" them" (fa-lam yurzak fahmahu)¹⁰.

There is some uncertainty about the year of birth of Abu Hafs Nasafi, as it is not clearly mentioned in the sources. This date is given in studies as "Abu Hafs Nasafi was probably born¹¹ in 461 or 462 AH", which corresponds to the years 1068-1070 AD. But in some literature, this number is given as 1068¹².

During the time of Abu Hafs, the city of Nasaf was the second largest scientific and cultural center in Transoxiana, after Samarkand and Bukhara. During the period we are considering, many scholars and scholars of hadith were produced in Nasaf¹³. For example, according to sources such as "Kitab al-Qand"¹⁴ and "Kitab al-Ansab", more than 3,000 prominent hadith scholars lived and worked in Transoxiana during the 8th-12th centuries.

More than 1,000 of them lived in Samarkand, more than 600 in Bukhara, of which more than 400 were connected with the life and activities of the city of Nasaf. Of the remaining 1,000 hadith scholars, more than 70 worked in Shosh, more than 60 in Fergana, the same number in Kesh, more than 50 in Termez, more than 40 in Khorezm, as well as in Ushrushana, Dabusiya, Kushaniya and other local regions. The figures given fully confirm the scientific and cultural importance of the aforementioned city of Nasaf on the scale of Transoxiana.

One of the main reasons for the high level of scientific development in Nasaf is the ancient history of the city. When describing it, it is appropriate to quote the words of Abu Sa'd Sam'ani, a world-renowned scholar from Merv who lived in the 12th century and was a younger contemporary of Abu Hafs Nasafi¹⁵:

"Nasaf is one of the cities of Transoxiana, also called Nakhshab. I lived there for about two months and heard hadith from its scholars. Many scholars in every field of knowledge have emerged from Nasaf, and their number is innumerable. Abu Tammam Hubayb ibn Aws¹⁶, in his ode to the Caliph al-Mu'tasim (833-842), says the following about Nasaf:

The Romans will be terrified of you from their cellars,
and the Turks will be afraid of you from behind Nasaf."

Indeed, Nasaf was located in the 9th century in the territories of the Abbasid Caliphate (749-1258) bordering the Turks. During the reign of Abu Hafs Nasaf, Nasaf was a major center of trade and craftsmanship, where science and technology flourished. Its ties with the capital of

¹⁰ Kitab al-qand, 1999. – P. 15-16.

¹¹ Kitab al-qand, 1999. – P. 7.

¹² Булгаков П.Г. Формуляры некоторых документов по частному праву из энциклопедии ан-Насафи // Материалы по истории науки и культуры народов Средней Азии. – Т.: FAN, 1991 (hereinafter: Bulgakov, 1991). – P. 67.

¹³ Kitab al-qand, 1999. – P. 7.

¹⁴ We will discuss Abu Hafs Nasafi's "Kitab al-Qand" in detail in Chapter I, §3.

¹⁵ Al-Ansab. – V: V. – P. 486-487.

¹⁶ Abu Tammam Hubayb ibn Aws al-Tu'i (788-845) is an Arab poet who wrote odes in praise of the Abbasid caliphs, in particular al-Mu'tasim: al-Munjid fi-l-alam. 5th edition. – Beirut, 1987. – P. 17.

the country, Samarkand, were very strong. This city was destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century, and the city of Karshi arose near it from the 14th century¹⁷.

Along with other sciences, the science of hadith has developed in Nasaf since ancient times. The great scholar of hadith, Imam Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (810-870), visited Nasaf during his scientific travels and made a great contribution to the development of the science of hadith there. Because the first period of the development of the science of hadith in Nasaf coincides with the years of Imam Bukhari's life. During Imam Bukhari's stay in Nasaf, several prominent scholars of hadith, such as Abu Zayd Tufail ibn Zayd (d. 892), Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Ma'qil an-Nasafi as-Sanjani (9th century), took lessons from him, and he himself was greatly influenced by the scholars of Nasaf. The great scholar of hadith was received with great respect by the scholars of Nasaf. They considered it an honor to have Imam Bukhari as a guest in their homes and to serve him¹⁸.

A distinctive feature of the Nasaf hadith scholars was that they paid more attention to asceticism. By asceticism, they did not mean renunciation of the world, but gentleness, gentleness, patience, and a focus on knowledge. In this, the scholars of Khorasan served as an example for them. Abu Abdurrahman Mu'adh ibn Ya'qub al-Nasafi al-Kasani (9th century), one of the first representatives of the science of hadith in Nasaf, cites narrations about asceticism from the Balkh hadith scholar Hatim ibn Ulwan al-Asamm az-Zahid (9th century). Al-Kasani built a mosque in Nasaf in 834. This mosque, according to the testimony of Abu Hafs Nasafi, existed in the 12th century. At the same time, he built a rabt, dug a well next to it, and prepared a place for ablution. The street on which these buildings are located was called "Abu Abdurrahman az-Zohid House", and in the 12th century it was called "Sikkat az-Zohid" ("Street of the Hermits")¹⁹.

The history of Nasaf is marked by the dynasties of famous hadith scholars. One of them, Abu Zayd Tufail ibn Zayd al-Nasafi (d. 892), made a great contribution to the development of hadith scholarship in Nasaf. At that time, it was customary to transmit hadiths from father to son, from generation to generation, and there were many such hadith families in Nasaf. In this case, hadith scholars received their initial knowledge from their fathers or grandfathers as teachers. Abu Zayd was the great-grandfather of one such hadith family in Nasaf.

¹⁷ Бартольд В.В. Сочинения. – Т. III: Работы по исторической географии. – М. – 1965. – С. 450.

¹⁸ Rahimjonov D. Imam Bukhari and Nasaf school of hadith // Lessons of Imam al-Bukhari. – 2000. – No. 2. – P. 91-93.

¹⁹ Kitab al-qand, 1999. – P. 244.