

Book Review

Maḥmūd, ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm. al-Layth ibn Sa‘d: Imām Ahl Miṣr. al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1974. 258 pp. Paperback. ISBN 9770252352

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For all the individuals that contributed greatly to the advancement of the early Islamic studies, not all achieved the same level of recognition. Imam Layth Ibn Sa'd (d. 175 AH / 791 CE) is known nowadays as one of the prominent scholars of his time. Despite being the companion of Imam Malik, a prolific rafer of hadith, and a leading jurist in Egypt, his legacy was not given enough attention. This book collected Layth's disparate writings and presented his thoughts and the life path in an accessible manner. The book under review aims to facilitate further historical and cultural insights into the life and achievements of the great scholar.



To begin with, the objectives of the book are explicitly defined. The author indicates that the present work is the part of a series of studies dedicated to the biographies of Islamic scholars and jurists. Furthermore, he highlights the significance of studying individuals who made outstanding contributions in both the hadith and fiqh spheres to identify the correlations between religion and jurisprudence. The author demonstrated his qualifications and outlined the goals of this undertaking, making the task ahead transparent.

The book is structured around two central themes – biography and jurisprudence. Following the introductory section and a chapter dedicated to the author's brief biography and motivations, the discussion focuses on the main topics associated with the life and legacy of Layth Ibn Sa'd. First, the book provides a thorough background about the scholar, including his years in Egypt, traveling and learning experiences, teachers, and pupils. The section dedicated to his personality features several interesting stories and episodes highlighting his kindness and hospitable nature. In particular, the author narrates hadith reporting and

conversation with Imam Malik, where Layth generously gave a thousand dinars to saffron for his children's clothing and received it back as a gift. Such episodes allow the readers to reflect on the positive traits of character that Islam preached and that Layth Ibn Sa'd embodied.

The discussion of Layth Ibn Sa'd's scholarly legacy involves a detailed account of his opinions on hadith reporting practices in the broader context of the scholarly debates of his time. The author cites extensively the comments of Yahya ibn Ma'in, Ibn Abi Hatim, and Abu Zur'ah, among others, to illustrate Layth's reputation as both a virtuous and knowledgeable scholar to underscore his adherence to morality. The inclusion of the reviews provided by his contemporaries adds credibility to the narration and serves as a solid basis for further reflection on the scholar's legacy. In addition, Ibn Sa'd is noted for his original thinking and careful analysis of hadith reliability and content. The author discusses this matter at length, outlining potential contradictions and the ways different religious scholars attempted to resolve them.

The study of Layth Ibn Sa'd's jurisprudence is certainly the most interesting part of the book. It contains a letter from the scholar to Imam Malik, where Ibn Sa'd describes his views on the relevant sources of law and discusses various contentious issues. This section is fascinating because it provides a grounded illustration of how disagreements between great minds of different Islamic schools were resolved. Ibn Sa'd and Malik hold differing opinions regarding the allowances and restrictions pertaining to the prayers during rain, single testimony in relevant cases, regulation on warfare, and numerous other issues. Despite evident contradictions in their views, the two scholars presented their stances respectfully, without undermining each other's positions. Hadith scholars and jurists are famous for their ability to disagree on theological matters while remaining committed to compassion and respect for each other. This quality, in particular, was noteworthy and deserving of deeper reflection.

Hadith form a significant part of Ibn Sa'd's legacy and jurisprudence. Therefore, a substantial part of the book is dedicated to analyzing the sources of his hadith collection, which are organized thematically. Apart from the reports on prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and hajj, Layth's collected hadith contain stories related to marriage, war, and other topics. The inclusion of Ibn Sa'd's collected hadith, alongside the comments on isnsad and matn, adds to the credibility of the author's arguments. The presentation of hadith materials is also important for demonstrating the

unique development trajectory of the Islamic legal traditions and its underlying philosophies. The narration follows the structure of Layth's hadith, which typically follow the pattern established by al-Bukhari, al-Muslim, and other tradition. The authors describe the hadith's isnsad and matn, presenting details regarding sources and content in an organized, methodical fashion. Such an approach is particularly beneficial for further analysis by the readers.

The book under review provides a valuable perspective on how Ibn Sa'd's teachings shaped his outlook on life. Ibn Sa'd believed that knowledge guided by reason was more reliable than reports provided by others, including traditional or anecdotal sources. Therefore, he carefully examined these sources, applying rational analysis and distinguishing between fabricated and authentic information. Ibn Sa'd's approach to knowledge mirrors that of his positive qualities of character. Although his personal morality was impeccable, Ibn Sa'd avoided extremism and accepted other scholars' viewpoints without judging them. These traits of the scholar's personality shine through in his contributions to Islamic jurisprudence and are worth pondering.

Sheikh Mustafa Abd al-Raziq, among other scholars, discusses Ibn Sa'd's mystical beliefs in his book, further illustrating this great scholar's multifaceted nature. Ibn Sa'd devoted much of his time and energy to exploring and developing Islam as an all-encompassing ideology while enjoying the good life provided by his wealth. This brief description of these mystical leanings is an intriguing detail not found elsewhere. However, the chapter might have been more involved if the author dedicated more pages to discussing Layth Ibn Sa'd as a Sufi.

The book under review has several strengths and weaknesses worth noting. First, although the book is rich in insights, it seems to be intended for a narrow audience specifically interested in Islamic studies, rather than a general audience. Thus, terms such as "isnad," "mattan," "jarh wa ta'dil", and "mutawatir" might seem overwhelming and even off-putting to less experienced readers. At the same time, providing such a detailed account of Ibn Sa'd's contributions is the strength of this book, as it fills a critical gap in research literature. This book offers a profound description of Islam's development from the perspective of one of the leading early scholars. Therefore, it may be of interest to a broader audience of academics who value well-documented research and enjoy reading about early Islamic social, cultural, and spiritual history.

Nevertheless, despite the wealth of information provided, the author could have elaborated more on Ibn Sa'd's thought process and methods. At several points, the narration reflects Ibn Sa'd's ideas, but not the ways in which Ibn Sa'd considered these ideas and the underlying principles. For example, it would have been interesting to learn more about how Ibn Sa'd reached a compromise between different, possibly conflicting religious traditions. His adherence to ethics seems to be the cornerstone of his positive traits of character. Ibn Sa'd was an outstanding scholar who could rationally analyze and synthesize different sources of information, distinguishing between fabricated and authentic data. Hadith narration is his way of expressing his personal beliefs and principles, which are largely related to ethics. More importantly, Ibn Sa'd respected others' viewpoints, freely adopting those that he found beneficial without judging the people holding these viewpoints. However, the shortcoming of the book under review is that not enough is said about these essential aspects of the scholar's legacy. Furthermore, a more comprehensive discussion of Ibn Sa'd's ideas within the context of different Islamic schools of thought would have been beneficial for a better appreciation of his contributions. Ibn Sa'd is famous for his controversial views and the disagreements with his followers about the interpretation of Islam. In particular, he often opposed Imam Malik and Abu Hanifa, as well as al-Shafi'i. The existing literature on Ibn Sa'd could offer more reflections on the reasons for such controversies stemming from individual differences between the scholars. Therefore, a chapter dedicated to the general overview of Ibn Sa'd's contributions would be beneficial for future research, both from the perspective of individual scholars and the general development of the Islamic culture and history.

All things considered, it may be stated that the book under review attempts to achieve its goals of presenting Ibn Sa'd's legacy. The highlight of this book is that it provides rich details on the life and work of an outstanding, yet often overlooked, Islamic scholar. In addition, the book serves as an excellent reference for those looking to expand their understanding of the early Islamic studies, particularly the intricacies of hadith and fiqh traditions. At the same time, the book's structure and organization could have been altered to manage the vast amount of information more efficiently. The abrupt transitions between sections dedicated to Ibn Sa'd's biography and hadith narration may appear disorienting at first but soon become apparent as a pattern the author followed. Moreover, the length of the book is justified, given the volume of information and the scope of the subject. The author did not attempt to

embellish Ibn Sa'd's legacy with excessive details; rather, he presented a solid foundation for future research endeavors.

The book under review is thus a valuable source of knowledge for both the academics and the curious minds interested in the life and work of an extraordinary individual. It demonstrates, with rare precision, the underlying principles shaping Ibn Sa'd's thoughts on Islam, jurisprudence, and society. By highlighting his contributions and achievements, the book under review also underscores the importance of ideological and ideological tolerance. In short, the book offers an insightful perspective on Ibn Sa'd's life and legacy and contributes to further endeavors in this fascinating field of the Islamic studies.

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