



THE ROLE OF THEOLOGICAL WORKS ATTRIBUTED TO ABU HANIFA IN THE FORMATION OF SOUND ISLAMIC BELIEF

Sodikov Jurabek Sobirboyevich.

PhD, Associate Professor of the Islamic Studies and Study of Islamic

Civilization ICESCO chair. International Islamic

Studies Academy of Uzbekistan

Email: jurabeksodiq@gmail.com

Abstract

The scholarly legacy of Abu Hanifa occupies a prominent position not only in the field of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) but also in Islamic theology (aqidah). Through his intellectual endeavors, he laid the foundations for distinct scholarly traditions in both disciplines and played a pivotal role in formulating the fundamental principles that guided their subsequent development.

During Abu Hanifa's lifetime, the systematic writing and compilation of books had not yet become a widespread practice. Owing to the intellectual environment and scholarly conventions of the period, he did not author books personally; rather, he devoted himself to delivering oral legal opinions (fatwas) and teaching his students. Consequently, the works attributed to Abu Hanifa were transmitted by his disciples and later compiled into written form.

Keywords: Abu Hanifa, Islamic Creed (Aqidah), Hanafis, Maturidis, al-Fiqh al-Akbar, al-Alim wal-Muta'allim, al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ.

Introduction

The following theological and hadith-related treatises attributed to Abu Hanifa have survived to the present day:

Al-Fiqh al-Akbar – transmitted by Ḥammad ibn Abi Ḥanifa from his father;

Al-Alim wal-Muta'allim – transmitted by Abu Muqatil Ḥafṣ ibn Salim al-Samarqandi from Imam al-A'zam Abu Ḥanifa;

Epistle to Uthman al-Batti (Risalah ila Uthman al-Batti) – transmitted by Abu Yusuf from his teacher Abu Ḥanifa;



Al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ – transmitted by Abu Muṭī’ al-Balkhi from his teacher Abu Ḥanifa. This work is also regarded as a recension of Al-Fiqh al-Akbar narrated by Abu Muṭī’; Al-Waṣiyyah fi Aqīdat Ahl al-Sunnah (“The Testament on the Creed of Ahl al-Sunnah”) – transmitted by Abu Yusuf from Abu Ḥanifa; Al-Musnad – transmitted by Ḥasan ibn Ziyad al-Lu’lu’i.

In addition, several other Musnad collections were compiled on the basis of the hadiths that Imam al-A’ḏam employed in his teaching sessions.

Thus, a total of five works on Islamic creed (aqīdah) attributed to Abu Hanifa have reached us. Due to their concise nature, these works are generally classified as doctrinal treatises and textual manuals. Nevertheless, despite their brevity, they encompass all the major issues of Islamic theology. For this reason, they continue to serve as important sources for the Maturidis, who regard themselves as the intellectual heirs of Imam al-A’ḏam’s theological school and make extensive use of these works to the present day.

Main Part

Abu Maṣṣūr al-Maturidi based his theological doctrine on the works transmitted from Abu Hanifa, relying on them to formulate solutions to newly emerging and disputed theological issues. Discussing Abu Hanifa’s “al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ”, “al-Alim wal-Muta’allim”, his “Epistle to al-Battī”, and his testament addressed to Yusuf ibn Khalid, al-Maturidi states that he received these works through his teachers – Abu Naṣr Aḥmad ibn al-Abbas, Aḥmad ibn al-Abbas al-Juzjani, and Naṣr ibn Yaḥya al-Balkhi. They, in turn, had transmitted them from Abu Sulayman Musa al-Jurjani, a disciple of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybani.¹

This chain of transmission demonstrates the continuity of the Hanafī theological tradition and highlights the central role that Abu Hanifa’s creedal writings played in the formation and development of Maturidi theology.

Undoubtedly, the most renowned among the creedal works attributed to Abu Hanifa is “al-Fiqh al-Akbar”. It is considered one of the earliest treatises devoted specifically to Islamic creed (aqīdah). In this work, the fundamental doctrines that every Muslim is required to believe are presented in a concise and accessible manner.

As this text originated during the period of the Salaf (the early generations of Muslims), it does not engage extensively in rational or speculative theological

¹ Muḥammad Abu Zahra. *Tarikh al-Mazahib al-Islamiyya*. Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1995. – P. 165-166.



argumentation. This is because, during that era, there was no pressing need for such elaborate discussions. Nevertheless, the work has retained its significance throughout the centuries. Even today, “al-Fiqh al-Akbar” is widely taught among Hanafi and Maturidi communities in the historically prominent regions of Transoxiana (Ma Wara’ al-Nahr), Khurasan, Anatolia, the Indo-Sind region, and Syria. It is generally studied in a detailed manner through the numerous commentaries (shuruh) written on the text and continues to occupy a central place in the curricula of traditional Islamic educational institutions.

In some contemporary studies, it has been argued that “al-Fiqh al-Akbar” was not authored by Abu Hanifa. This view has been advanced primarily by scholars such as A.J.Wensinck, G.Joseph, J.Schacht, W.Rudolf, and a number of researchers influenced by their works.² According to these scholars, certain theological issues discussed in al-Fiqh al-Akbar had not yet become prominent during the lifetime of Imām al-A’zam. In reality, however, this position appears to stem from an incomplete understanding of the theological debates and doctrinal controversies that existed during Abu Hanifa’s era. Historical sources indicate that many of the theological questions addressed in al-Fiqh al-Akbar were already subjects of discussion among various intellectual and religious groups of the time. Consequently, the presence of such topics in the treatise does not, in itself, constitute sufficient evidence to deny Abu Hanifa’s authorship.

There has been no significant doubt in the Muslim scholarly tradition regarding the existence of Abu Hanifa’s “al-Fiqh al-Akbar”. Both Hanafi scholars and representatives of other legal and theological schools have consistently attributed this work to Imam al-A’zam himself. For instance, Abdul-Qahir al-Baghdadi (d. 429/1037) in his “al-Farq bayna al-Firaq”, notes that Abu Hanifa’s treatise “al-Radd ala-l-Qadariyya” is in fact identical with the work known as “al-Fiqh al-Akbar”.³

Abu al-Yusr al-Pazdawi (d. 493/1100), in his work “Uşul al-Din”, states: “The books of Imam al-A’zam that have reached us are “al-Alim wa al-Muta’allim” and “al-Fiqh al-Akbar”. He also cites from these works in his discussion on the subject of “the study of kalam” in the same treatise.⁴

² U.Rudolf. Maturidi va Samarqand Sunniy Theology. Tashkent: International Imam Bukhari Foundation, 2001. – P. 25.

³ Abdul-Qahir al-Baghdadi. Al-Farq bayna-l-Firaq. Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Sina, 1988. – P. 314.

⁴ Abul-Yusr al-Pazdawi. Uşul al-Din. Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariya, 2003. – P. 15.



Moreover, in nearly all manaqib (hagiographical) works dedicated to Imam al-A'zam Abu Hanifa, it is reported that he engaged in theological debates with various deviant sects of his time, including the Khawarij, Mu'tazila, Qadariyya, and Murji'a. In particular, it is mentioned that during his debate with Jahm ibn Şafwan (d. 128/746), one of the leading figures associated with early Mu'tazilite thought, Imam al-A'zam stated that mere recognition of God in the heart is not sufficient for a person to be considered a believer unless it is also affirmed by verbal profession.⁵ When all these reports are taken into consideration, the conclusion can be drawn that the work *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* is authentically attributed to Abu Hanifa.

In the work “*al-Fiqh al-Akbar*”, Imam al-A'zam clearly and explicitly articulates the eternal and pre-existent attributes of Allah, affirms that the Qur'an is the uncreated speech of Allah, emphasizes the necessity of belief in divine predestination (qadar), and establishes the doctrine of the infallibility (‘iṣmah) of the Prophets. This treatise later served as an important foundational source for subsequent theologians (mutakallimun), including scholars such as Imam al-Maturidi and Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'ari, among others.

In this work of Abu Hanifa, forty-four key theological issues⁶ are discussed, and there is no doubt that all the topics included were addressed in response to the intellectual and doctrinal needs of his time. At the same time, Imām al-A'zam Abu Hanifa made a distinct and significant contribution to the systematic development of Islamic creed (aqidah) and scholastic theology (kalam), a contribution that cannot be denied or overlooked.

In his treatise *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, Imām Abu Hanifa discusses the issue of human free will in actions, as well as questions related to faith (iman), disbelief (kufr), and the proper conduct of Muslims toward one another. In this work, he presents arguments against the views of the Mu'tazila and other deviant sects, thereby laying down foundational principles of the Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah. In particular, regarding voluntary human actions, he establishes a balanced position between the divine knowledge, will, and power of Allah and the human capacity for choice (ikhtiyar). According to his view, the human being is neither completely compelled nor

⁵ Sa'id al-Naysaburi. *Kitab al-I'tiqad: al-Aqida al-marwiyya 'an al-Imam al-A'zam Abi Ḥanifa*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2005. – P. 102.

⁶ Imam al-A'zam Abu Ḥanifa. *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar (text, critical study, and scholarly annotations) / trans. and ed. Ḥamidullah Aminov*. Tashkent: International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, 2021. – P. 42.



possesses absolute free will. He provides clear, reasoned responses to both the Qadariyya and Jabariyya doctrines, refuting their positions with theological and rational arguments.

In matters of faith (iman) and disbelief (kufr), Imam Abu Hanifa also adopts a moderate position. According to him, faith consists of affirmation in the heart and verbal profession by the tongue. It neither increases nor decreases in essence through deeds, although righteous actions play an important role in the perfection of faith.

The treatise also sets out important principles concerning how disagreements among Muslims should be addressed. Abu Hanifa strongly criticizes the practice of declaring other Muslims as unbelievers (takfir) openly and unjustly, and he advocates a scholarly, balanced, and fair approach to theological disputes and matters of belief.

In this way, the work “al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ” demonstrates that Imam al-A’zam was not only a jurist (faqih), but also a scholar with profound insight in the fields of Islamic theology (aqidah) and scholastic theology (kalam). In this treatise, he analyzes the issues of Islamic belief not only on a theoretical and scholarly basis but also from the perspective of the unity and stability of the Muslim community (ummah). This gives the work not only theological and doctrinal significance but also practical relevance. Most of the information concerning “al-Alim wal-Muta’allim” also indicates that it is genuinely attributable to Abu Hanifa. In particular, Abul-Mu’in al-Nasafi, one of the prominent representatives of the Maturidi tradition, in his “Tabsirat al-Adilla”, in the chapter entitled “The Faith of the Muqallid (the imitator)” states: “Abu Hanifa mentioned in his book “al-Alim wal-Muta’allim that...”.⁷

In the work, Abu Muqatil al-Samarqandi engages in a question-and-answer dialogue with his teacher Abu Hanifa on foundational matters of religious creed (uṣūl al-din). This dialogue was later compiled by Abu Muqatil himself into a book and titled “al-Alim wa al-Muta’allim”.

Regarding the issue of faith (iman), the work states that the existence of faith in a person does not require deeds as a condition; rather, the affirmation of the heart alone is sufficient for faith to be established. In other words, actions are not considered a constituent part (juz’) of faith. This view is also reflected in Abu Hanifa’s responses to his student within the same dialogue.

⁷ Abul-Mu’in al-Nasafi. *Tabsirat al-Adilla* / ed. Muḥammad Anwar Hamid Isa. Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li al-Turath, 2011. – Vol: I-II. – P. 154.



One of the distinctive features of this work is that theological issues are explained to the reader through comparative analysis and vivid illustrative examples. This approach contributes significantly to a deeper understanding of the essence of Ahl al-Sunnah theological doctrines.

In the work, the concept of kufr is also subjected to a thorough analysis, and extreme positions – such as excessively broad interpretations that lead to declaring every major sinner (ṣaḥīb al-kabirah) an unbeliever – are firmly rejected. Abu Hanifa emphasizes that faith is primarily based on conviction in the heart, and it is not nullified by any sin except polytheism (shirk) and explicit denial (inkar).

Similarly, in the issue of takfir, the work promotes caution and restraint from issuing severe judgments. This approach plays an important role in fostering social cohesion, unity, and tolerance within the Muslim community, as well as in preventing extremist interpretations. In particular, given the doctrinal and legal diversity among Muslim societies, Abu Hanifa’s moderate stance remains highly relevant even in the contemporary context.⁸

Conclusion

The above demonstrates that the works of Imam al-A’zam serve not only as a foundation for the in-depth study of purely theological knowledge, but also as a safeguard for the Muslim community against deviant beliefs and misguided interpretations. For this reason, his doctrinal views have, over the centuries, become one of the principal foundations of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah theology.

Today as well, Abu Hanifa’s scholarly legacy is widely recognized in the Muslim world and continues to be regarded as one of the primary sources in the study of both jurisprudential and theological issues. His works have preserved their relevance not only in religious doctrine but also in ethical, spiritual, and social life.

In general, all the themes addressed in Abu Hanifa’s works remain issues of enduring relevance within the discipline of Islamic creed (aqidah). At the same time, Imam al-A’zam made a distinct and undeniable contribution to the development of scholastic theology (kalam), particularly in the formation and systematization of the Maturidi theological tradition. Notably, the fact that Imam Abu Hanifa discussed many theological issues long before they became widely systematized and debated in later

⁸ A.Hasanov. Islamic Schools and Movements. Tashkent: Tashkent Islamic University, 2012. – P. 251.



periods further demonstrates the high scholarly status and intellectual depth he possessed.

References

1. Abdul-Qahir al-Baghdadi. Al-Farq bayna-l-Firaq. – Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Sina, 1988.
2. Abul-Mu'in al-Nasafi. Tabsirat al-Adilla / ed. Muḥammad Anwar Hamid Isa. – Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariya li al-Turath, 2011. Vol. I-II.
3. Abul-Yusr al-Pazdawi. Uṣul al-Din. – Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariya, 2003.
4. A.Hasanov. Islamic Schools and Movements. – Tashkent: Tashkent Islamic University, 2012.
5. Imam al-A'zam Abu Ḥanifa. Al-Fiqh al-Akbar (text, critical study, and scholarly annotations) / trans. and ed. Ḥamidullah Aminov. – Tashkent: International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, 2021.
6. Muḥammad Abu Zahra. Tarikh al-Mazahib al-Islamiyya. – Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1995.
7. U.Rudolf. Maturidi va Samarqand Sunniy Theology. – Tashkent: International Imam Bukhari Foundation, 2001.
8. Sa'id al-Naysaburi. Kitab al-I'tiqad: al-Aqida al-marwiyya 'an al-Imam al-A'zam Abi Ḥanifa . – Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2005.