THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABŪ ḤANĪFA AND ZAYD IBN ʿALĪ

– An Assessment in the Context of an Account in

*al-Majmūʿ al-fiqh*–

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**Abstract**

This article analyzes various claims made by modern-day scholars about the educational connection between Zayd ibn ʿAli and Abū Ḥanīfa. In light of historical data, these claims are evaluated here on the basis of an account in *al-Majmūʿ al-ḥadīthī wa-l-fiqhī*, attributed to Zayd. The main findings of the article are as follows: 1. Apart from the account in *al-Majmūʿ*, there is no narration in early Islamic sources that is concerned with their educational relationship. 2. Abū Ḥanīfa saw Zayd, listened to his speeches, and recognized his superior qualities, but never served him as a disciple. 3. Before meeting in al-Kūfa, they did not recognize or interact with one another. Before meeting Zayd, Abū Ḥanīfa was a renowned *faqīh* in al-Kūfa, appreciated by friends of Zayd for his scientific authority. There was, however, no period of association between the two. Therefore, the argument that Abū Ḥanīfa served as a disciple of Zayd ibn ʿAli for two years in al-Ḥijāz or al-Kūfa is rejected.

Introduction

Several modern-day studies have presented various claims about the educational relationship between Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and Zayd ibn ʿAlī (d. 122/740). Certain researchers have claimed that Abū Ḥanīfa gained knowledge (ʿilm) from Zayd ibn ʿAlī, whereas others have gone one step further, arguing that Abū Ḥanīfa was Zayd’s disciple. Another group of studies refers to the accounts that list Zayd ibn ʿAlī among the masters (sheikhs) of Abū Ḥanīfa, although no such account exist. All of these assertions require close scrutiny.

Did Abū Ḥanīfa study with Zayd ibn ʿAlī? What references are used by those who defend this argument? What grounds do the opponents of this argument use to argue that an educational relationship between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibn ʿAlī existed?

In this article, we will determine how the various claims about this relationship have emerged, and explain the source of the ambiguity.

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Subsequently, we will analyze an account we consider to be highly important in the context of this study.

**The Educational Relationship between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibn ʿAlī as Described in Several Contemporary Studies**

The researcher who focused on the relationship between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibn ʿAlī the most was Muḥammad Abū Zahra (d. 1974). His works, *Abū Ḥanīfa: Ḥayāṭuḥ wa-ʾaṣrūḥًا - ārāʾuḥًا wa-fiqhūḥًا*, *al-Imām Zayd* and *Tārikh al-madhāhib al-İslāmiyya*, have served as a reference for subsequent studies. Thus, it is appropriate to begin by concentrating on Abū Zahra’s works.

Based on the works of Abū Zahra, we can conclude that Abū Ḥanīfa knew of Zayd ibn ʿAlī. Nevertheless, this knowledge was limited to information exchanged during their meetings and was not a relationship of master-apprentice. Abū Zahra writes:

> We do not suspect that Abū Ḥanīfa met Zayd ibn ʿAlī; but we do not believe that he was affiliated with him. On the contrary, he received knowledge from Zayd during their meetings, without any affiliation. ²

Abū Zahra bases his argument that Abū Ḥanīfa received ʿilm from Zayd ibn ʿAlī on the following account, cited from *al-Rawḍ al-naḍīr Sbarḥ Majmūʿ al-fiqḥ al-kabīr* by al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad al-Sayyāghī al-Ḥaymī al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 1221/1806):

> Abū Ḥanīfa said: I have seen Zayd ibn ʿAlī and his friends (*ablab*), but I have never seen a man more *faqīh*, wise, witty, or honest than him in his day. He was a peerless personality.³

Abū Zahra also mentions this account in his *al-Imām Zayd*.⁴ The source records statements made by Abū Ḥanīfa about Zayd, as well as references to the scientific discussions between the two. This is the source of Abū Zahra’s claim that Abū Ḥanīfa considered Zayd ibn ʿAlī

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⁴ Abū Zahra, *al-Imām Zayd*, 70.
to be the wisest scholar of his day. Contrary to our expectations, there is no record of an actual discussion or scientific debate between Zayd and Abū Ḥanīfa. Did Abū Zahra find this account sufficient to claim that Abū Ḥanīfa received ‘ilm from Zayd? We do not know. It is striking, however, that in the aforementioned works, despite the existence of quotations from such works as Tāriḥk Baghdaḍ by al-Khaṭṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), Manāqib Abī Ḥanīfa by Muwaffaq ibn Aḥmad al-Makkī (d. 568/1173), Manāqib Abī Ḥanīfa by Ibn al-Bazzāzī (d. 827/1424), and al-Kāmil fi l-tāriḥk by Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232), Abū Zahra only refers to al-Sayyāghī in this matter; this probably signifies that Abu Zahra does not have sufficient information, and prefers to leave the issue rather ambiguous. Was there any other information in al-Rawḍ al-naḍīr or other works that convinced Abū Zahra of such a view, even though he did not cite them? An examination of other works on the subject reveals even more ambiguity. For example, in his al-Imām al-Aʿẓam Abū Ḥanīfa, Muṣṭafā al-Shaḳa argues, “... But whatever the view on the issue is, Abū Ḥanīfa was a student of Zayd.” Shaḳa does not, however, refer to any source. In addition, just as in Abū Zahra’s works, even though al-Shaḳa cites accounts of meetings between Abū Ḥanīfa and Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan, we see that there is no evidence of his meeting with Zayd or having any association with him. The situation is almost identical in other studies on the subject.

Aside from the data in al-Rawḍ al-naḍīr, some works mention Zayd ibn Ḍālī as being one of the masters of Abū Ḥanīfa, while others do not. What is common in all of these studies is the lack of any

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5 Abū Zahra, al-Imām Zayd, 179.
6 For several examples, see Abū Zahra, Abū Ḥanīfa, 37, 38, 49, 73, 74; id., al-Imām Zayd, 44, 47, 51, 57, 58, 64, 71 et seq.; id., Tāriḥk al madhābīb al-Islāmiyya (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabi, n.d.), 348, 349, 351.
7 Al-Shaḳa, al-Imām al-Aʿẓam, 54.
8 ibid., 49-58; Abū Zahra, Abū Ḥanīfa, 80-81.
9 For other examples see al-Khaṭṭīb, al-Imām Zayd, 65; Özel, Hanefî Fikih Âlimleri, 14; Hamidullah, İmam-ı Azam ve Eseri, 17.
11 See Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿUthmān al-Dhababi, Manāqib al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfa ve sâḥibaybî Abî Yûsuf wa-Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan (Cai-
information that clearly defines the relationship between Abū Ḫanīfa and Zayd ibn ʿAlī. Maybe this is why Abū Zahra only relies on al-Rawḍ al-naḍīr in this matter. Can this work lead us to the source of the views on this subject? In our analysis, we found two points of reference for al-Sayyāḥī. One of these is al-Mawāʾīz wa-l-iʿtibār bi-dbikr al-khiṭṭaṭ wa-l-ʿāthār by Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442). The words, which are quoted by Abū Zahra from al-Rawḍ al-naḍīr and attributed to Abū Ḫanīfa, are cited by al-Sayyāḥī from this author. Other writers referred to by al-Sayyāḥī are Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf (d. 1191/1777) and Yahyā ibn al-Ḥusayn (ibn al-Muʿayyad billāh Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim) (d. 1090/1679), both of whom are Zaydī. Because these authors lived in a later era, they can be disregarded. The last two, however, have led us to examine the relationship between Abū Ḫanīfa and Zayd ibn ʿAlī in a different light. Thus far, theories about this connection have been based on general historical and biographical works on these figures, including works from the Zaydī world. Identifying the approach to the subject in these works enables an appropriate assessment of their theories.

Our second question, “Did the education of Abū Ḫanīfa by Zayd ibn ʿAlī consist of a two-year period of discipleship?” is not explicitly addressed by Abū Zahra. His statement, “We do not believe he was affiliated to Zayd ibn ʿAlī. On the contrary, he received knowledge from Zayd during their meetings, without any affiliation,” affirms that Abū Ḫanīfa was not a regular student of Zayd. However, Abū Zahra does not describe when these meetings took place or at what intervals they occurred. Similarly, Abū Zahra apparently quotes from al-Rawḍ al-naḍīr once again: “It is rumored that Abū Ḫanīfa was his student for two years (tatalmadha laḥäs sanātayn)”; however, what is being commented on here is whether Abū Ḫanīfa was a bound

13 As it would be more appropriate to handle the approaches of these people in later chapters of our study, they will not be discussed here.
14 Abū Zahra, Abū Ḫanīfa, 79.
disciple to Zayd. After writing, “It is rumored that he was his student for two years” without giving any references, Abū Zahra quotes from al-Sayyāghī: “I saw Zayd ibn ‘Alī and his friends ...” He writes, “We do not suspect that Abū Ḥanīfa met him; but we do not believe he was affiliated with Zayd ibn ‘Alī.” As Abū Zahra accepts that Abū Ḥanīfa met with Zayd ibn ‘Alī, even though it was not a form of regular discipleship, the question remains, when and where could these meetings have occurred, in al-Ḥijāz or in al-Kūfah? According to Abū Zahra, the answer is al-Kūfah.

In his work, *Abū Ḥanīfa*, Abū Zahra relates the accounts that Abū Ḥanīfa met Muḥammad al-Bāqir when he was still a disciple to Ḥammād, and met Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in al-Ḥira in the presence of al-Manṣūr, the second ‘Abbāsid Caliph. Abū Zahra does not provide any information about the time or place of Abū Ḥanīfa’s meeting with Zayd ibn ‘Alī. In his *al-Imām Zayd*, however, Abū Zahra claims that Abū Ḥanīfa met Zayd in al-Kūfah and, providing quotations about Zayd, heralds the intellectual discussions that would occur between them. This evidently does not contradict the fact that Abū Ḥanīfa may have met Zayd ibn ‘Alī during his sojourns in al-Ḥijāz; nonetheless, it is most likely that the two-year period of meetings mentioned happened when both were residing in the same region. These meetings must have occurred during Abū Ḥanīfa’s residence in al-Ḥijāz or Zayd’s sojourn in al-Kūfah. Abū Zahra does not relate anything else about Zayd’s time in al-Kūfah or his intellectual connections with Abū Ḥanīfa. As for Abū Ḥanīfa’s residing in al-Ḥijāz, Abū Zahra relates that this occurred long after the death of Zayd ibn ‘Alī. According to Abū Zahra, in 130/747-748, Abū Ḥanīfa escaped the torture of the Umayyad governor, ‘Umar ibn Hubayra, and sought refuge in Mecca, where he continued to live for two years. When the Umayyad Caliphate ended in 132/750, he returned to al-Kūfah and paid homage to al-Ṣaffāḥ, the first ‘Abbāsid Caliph, while continuing to live in Mecca until 136/753-54 due to unrest in ʿIrāq. Therefore, according to Abū Zahra, Abū Ḥanīfa resided in al-Ḥijāz only after Zayd’s death. As Abū

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Zahra gives no details about the sojourn of Zayd ibn ‘Ali in al-Kūfa, apart from relating their meeting in this city, he cannot claim that Abū Ḥanīfa was Zayd’s disciple for two years. Thus, it cannot be accurately claimed that Abū Zahra affirms Abū Ḥanīfa as a disciple of Zayd ibn ‘Ali for a period of two years. The emergence of such a claim, however, is not totally unrelated to the fact that Abū Zahra left the subject ambiguous. We will return to the sources of Abū Zahra that serve as the grounds for this assertion during our investigation of the third question. At this point, however, we must investigate whether this assertion originated in the works of Abū Zahra.

In his al-Imām al-Aʿẓam Abū Ḥanīfa, Muṣṭafā al-Shakʿa argues that Abū Ḥanīfa studied with Zayd ibn ‘Ali, but he offers no support for this assertion. Moreover, this suggestion, given without reference, contradicts the above-given findings of Abū Zahra. Then again, despite Abū Zahra’s assertion that Abū Ḥanīfa lived in al-Ḥijāz after 130/747-748, according to al-Shakʿa, the interaction between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibn ‘Ali happened during Abū Ḥanīfa’s stay in al-Ḥijāz. In other relevant studies, the same assertion is found without any references. In certain works, however, writers refer to al-Kashshāf by al-Zamakhsharī. İsmet Demir, for example, refers to him, stating: “Even though Abū Ḥanīfa was one year younger than Zayd ibn ‘Ali, he was the latter’s disciple for two years, and in a sense, made up for his deficiency in ḥadīth thanks to Zayd ibn ‘Ali, who was a master of ḥadīth from the school of ra’y”.

However, upon a closer analysis of al-Kashshāf, we see that al-Zamakhsharī says nothing about the educational relationship between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd. The description in this work refers to the reaction of Abū Ḥanīfa to Zayd ibn ‘Ali’s rebellion.

21 Erdoğan, “İbn Mesʿūd’dan Ebû Hanife’ye Rey Mektebi,” 332.
22 Al-Shakʿa, al-Imām al-Aʿẓam, 54.
24 Al-Zamakhsharī says the following: “Abū Ḥanīfa secretly placed a ḥaddūd on Zayd ibn ‘Ali to help and provide him with financial assistance and concerned with the necessity of rebelling together.” See al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, i, 318.
As explained above, one of the main sources in contemporary studies suggesting an educational connection between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibn ʿAlī is the following quote, attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa:

I have seen Zayd ibn ʿAlī and his friends, but have never seen a man more faqīh, wise, witty, or honest than him in his day. He was a peerless personality.\(^{25}\)

Abū Zahra takes this quote from al-Sayyāghī, who, in turn, took it from al-Maqrizī. Other contemporary works clarify that this quotation cannot be found in any source earlier than al-Maqrizī.\(^{26}\) Another support for the claim that Abū Ḥanīfa was a disciple of Zayd for two years is the statement by Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Muʿayyad bi-llāh ibn al-Qāsim, a Zaydī scholar, to whom al-Sayyāghī refers.

Al-Sayyāghī writes:

In the marginal notes (taʿlīq) of al-Majmūʿ transmitted by Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn, I saw that Abū Ḥanīfa was among the disciples of Zayd ibn ʿAlī, and that he took lessons from him for two years.\(^{27}\)

There is no other valid support for a period of two years in Zaydī literature. As a matter of fact, despite al-Sayyāghī being willing to collect all the material in favor of Zayd ibn ʿAlī and his al-Majmūʿ, and to examine all claims about them in his voluminous work, which is a commentary on al-Majmūʿ, he never cites Zaydī or Sunnī sources of the early period in support of this claim. Although carrying out a thorough analysis of several early Zaydī and Imāmī sources, we have been unable to find any evidence to support this assertion.\(^{28}\) Never-

\(^{25}\) Al-Sayyāghī, al-Rawḍ al-naḍīr, I, 50; cf. Abū Zahra, Abū Ḥanīfa, 79; id., al-Imām Zayd, 76.

\(^{26}\) At this stage, we would like to mention two works and their references that describe the words attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, with respect to the connection between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibn ʿAlī: Aḥmad Shawqī Ibrāhīm ʿAmarrājī, al-Ḥayāt al-siyāsyya wa-l-fikriyya li-l-Zaydiyya fī l-mashriq al-Islāmī (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2000), 37 (referring to al-Mawāʾirī by al-Maqrizī); Faḍlilla ʿAbd al-Amīr al-Shāmī, Tārīkk al-firqa al-Zaydiyya bayna l-qarnayn al-thānī wa-l-thālith li-l-bīḥra (Baghdād: Wizārat Turāth, 1974), 83 (referring to al-ʿĀlām by Ziriklī).

\(^{27}\) Al-Sayyāghī, al-Rawḍ al-naḍīr, I, 66.

\(^{28}\) In this matter, the following works can be referred to: al-Kutub al-arbaʿa; al-Rijāl by al-Najashi; Maqāṭil al-Ṭalibīyyin by Abū ʾl-Faraj al-Īṣfahānī; Amālī by Aḥmad ibn Ṛsā ibn Zayd; al-Aḥkām fī l-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām by Yaḥyā ibn Ḥusayn
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theless, even though there is an account in al-Majmūʿ, narrating that Abū Ḥanīfa and his companions went to a house in al-Kūfah where Zayd secretly lived and they met, the commentator does not cite this account when discussing whether or not Abū Ḥanīfa was a disciple of Zayd ibn ‘Ālī, and gives no detail or interpretation of the significance of this encounter. For this reason, this account must be carefully evaluated.

Evidence for the Relationship between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibn ‘Ālī

The principal source for the basis of our article is the following account found in al-Majmūʿ,30 attributed to Zayd ibn ‘Ālī:

قال أبوخالد رضي الله عنه لما دخل زيد بن علي عليهم السلام الكوفة استخفى في دار عبد الله بن الزبير [الاسدي] فبلغ ذلك آباه حتفه فكمل معاوية بن إسحاق السلمي ونصر بن خزيمة العبسي وسعيد بن خطيبي حتى دخلوا علي زيد بن علي عليهم السلام فقالوا بهذا رجل من قهاء الكوفة، فقال زيد بن علي عليهم السلام ما مفتتح الصلاة وما افتتحها وما تحريمه وما تحيلها، قال: فقال أبوحنيفة مفتتح الصلاة الطهور وتحريمه التكبير وتحيله التسليم وافتحاب الصلاة التكبير لأن النبي صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم كان إذا افتح الصلاة كبير ورفع يده والاستفتاح هو سبحانك اللهم وبحمده وبارك اسمك وتعالى جدك ولا إله غيرك لأنه روى عن النبي صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم أنه كان إذا افتح الصلاة قال ذلك فأعجب زيدا عليه السلام ذلك منه.

Abū Khālid said the following: When Zayd ibn ‘Ālī came to al-Kūfah, he hid in the house of ‘Abbād ibn al-Zubayr [al-Asadī]. When Abū


29 Al-Sayyāghī, al-Rawd al-naḍīr, II, 5-6.

Hanifa learned about this, he spoke to Mu‘awiya ibn Ishāq al-Sulami, Naṣr ibn Khuzayma al-‘Abṣi and Sa‘īd ibn Khuthaym. When they finally met with Zayd ibn ʿAlī, they said about Abū Ḥanifa: “This is one of the faqībs of al-Kūfah.” Thereupon, Zayd ibn ʿAlī asked: “What is the key (miṣṭāḥ), the initial words (iʃṭīḥāb), the initial prayer (iʃṭīfāb), the beginning (tābriḥ) and the end (tāḥliʿ) of the ʿṣalāt?” Abū Ḥanifa responded: “The key of the ʿṣalāt is purification (al-ṣubah); its beginning is takbīr; and its end is salām (al-taslīm). The ʿṣalāt begins with takbīr because the Prophet (pbuh) recited takbīr and raised his hands at the beginning of the ʿṣalāt. Here is the opening prayer: Glory be to You, O Allah, and all praises are due unto You, and blessed is Your name and high is Your majesty and there is no god but You. It is related from the Prophet (pbuh) that he recited this prayer when he wanted to begin the ʿṣalāt.” The answer pleased Zayd ibn ʿAlī.31

First, we have to stress the authenticity of the prayer at the end of this account, as it is attributed to the Prophet in both Sunnī and Shi‘ī ḥadīth sources.32 As for al-Majmūʿ which includes the account, there are varying opinions about its status.

According to Zaydīs, due to its content and its attribution to Imām Zayd, this is a reliable book of ḥadīth and fiqh.33 Sunnī ḥadīth and fiqh literature, however, does not attribute any value to the book. This is because Abū Khālid ʿAmr ibn Khālid, the first narrator of the book, said that he was the only one who narrated it from Zayd. Abū Khālid is a weak narrator who is heavily criticized by Sunnī scholars

32 For the account related as مفتاح الصلاة الطهور وتحريرهما التخليد وتحليلهما التسليم by Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, see al-Tirmidhī, ʿṢalāt,” 176. The ḥadīth has also been transmitted from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās through various chains of narrators. See Ibn Māja, “Ṯāhara,” 3; al-Tirmidhī, “Ṯāhara,” 3; “Ṣalāt,” 176. Some parts of this account are directly attributed to ʿAlī, related in four credible ḥadīth sources of the Imāmiyya; see Jaʿfar Subḥānī, Buḥūth fī l-milal wa-l-nilāḥ (Qum: Muʿassasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq, 1995), VII, 137-154.
of ‘ilm al-rijāl, and is not considered to be a competent scholar in ḥadīth narration.\(^{34}\)

Many accounts in the work can be found in both Shī‘ī and Sunnī ḥadīth sources. Nevertheless, it cannot be expected that any value be assigned by Imām Shī‘īs to this work due to their approach to the ḥadīth.\(^{35}\)

The first modern study of the subject is found in Corpus Iuris di Zaid Ibn ‘Alī (= Majmū‘ al-fiqh) edited by Griffini (d. 1925). The work was well received by certain experts from both the Western and Islamic worlds.\(^{36}\)

As for the content of the account, it is accepted that Abū Ḥanīfa’s response to Zayd ibn ‘Alī is accurate given its appearance in related sources. One of the versions appears in Musnad al-Imām Abū Ḥanīfa as follows:\(^{37}\)

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\(^{34}\) Al-Dhahabi, Mīzān al-ī‘tidāl (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, n.d.), III, 257.


The Prophet (pbuh) said: *Wudū’* is the key of the *ṣalāt*. *Takbīr* ends its connection with the world and *salām* restores its connection. The *salām* takes place in every two *rak‘ās*. The *ṣalāt* may be valid only if the Fātiḥa of the Book is recited, along with another [sūra].

This account, narrated by Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, is found in *al-Sunan* by al-Bayhaqī with the same wording and chain of narrators (‘an Abī Ḥanīfa ‘an Abī Sufyān ‘an Abī Naḍra ‘an Abī Sa‘īd al-Khudrī).38

Upon Zayd ibn ‘A‘īs’s question, “What is the key of the *ṣalāt*?” Abū Ḥanīfa answers: “The key of the *ṣalāt* is purification (*ṭubūr*).” In his response, he uses the word *ṭubūr*, whereas these narrations use the term *wudū’*. The word *ṭubūr* means the action of eliminating the condition of impurity and absence of *wudū’,* a state that hinders the performance of the *ṣalāt* in fiqh literature. It is synonymous with the word *wudū’,* which signifies purity from the condition that requires *wudū’.*39 Other subtle changes in the narrations are found in the translocation of the subject and verb. Considering that the expressions *wudū’* and *ṭubūr* are synonymous, there is no inconsistency between the beginning of these narrations and the one found in *al-Majmū‘*. The remainder of the narration is not found in *Musnad al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfa*. Nevertheless, Abū Ḥanīfa refers to this hadith by stating: “Here is the opening prayer: *Subḥānaka-l-lāhumma wa-bi-ḥamdiq wa-tabāraka-smuk wa-ta‘ālā jadduk wa-lā ilāha ghayrīuk.* As is related from the Prophet (pbuh), he said this prayer when he wanted to begin the *ṣalāt.*” This, despite being slightly modified, was narrated by Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī in other credible ḥadīth sources.40

The inaugural prayer of the *ṣalāt*, which is found in this account within Ḥanafi tradition, is replaced by other Qur’ānic-based wordings in Zaydi fiqh. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the narration is contrary to Zaydi fiqh. Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn Hādī l-l-ḥaqq

(d. 298/911), the founder of the Hādawī branch of Zaydiyya, after mentioning an inaugural prayer attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib – which is also found in al-Majmū‘ – writes: “This is the most beautiful prayer we ever heard among the ones said during inauguration.” Thus, he sees other inaugural prayers as valid in terms of fiqh.

Al-Sayyāghi also says “This inauguration is one that is rumored to belong to the Prophet, and it is known as ‘the inauguration of Ibn Mas‘ūd’ (istiḥāb Ibn Mas‘ūd) by ḥadīth scholars [abl al-ḥadīth].”

Before commenting on the aforementioned account, it is necessary to evaluate it from a historical point of view. Have historical sources ever recorded such an event? In other words, can we historically verify that Zayd ibn ‘Alī came to al-Kūfah, hid in this city, and met Abū Ḥanīfa there?

The account in al-Majmū‘ is found neither in historical works nor in biographies. Nevertheless, it is possible to obtain some clues as to the probability of the encounter. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) and Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232), who recorded historical events, give the date of the rebellion of Zayd ibn ‘Alī as 121/738-739 and his murder as 122/739-740. In spite of conflicting opinions about the residence of Zayd ibn ‘Alī in al-Kūfah, it is certain that he stayed there during the reign of Yūsuf ibn ‘Umar, who became governor of ‘Irāq following the dismissal of Khālid ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī. Al-Qasrī’s governorship of ‘Irāq took place between 105/723-724 and 120/737-738. The assignment of Yūsuf ibn ‘Umar as governor was in 121/738-739. In

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43 Al-Sayyāghi, al-Rawd al-naḍīr, II, 6.
light of the accounts in *Tārikh al-Ṭabarî*, Zayd ibn ‘Ali was sent by Caliph al-Hishâm ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 105-125/724-743) to Yūsuf ibn ‘Umar to confront Khālid al-Qasrî, the previous governor, regarding a past case.\(^46\) Zayd ibn ‘Ali did not, however, leave al-Kūfah immediately, rather staying there for another four or five months.\(^47\) Meanwhile, certain residents of al-Kūfah visited him and incited a rebellion.\(^48\) Thereafter, the governor, who had been warned by Caliph al-Hishâm, made continuous inquiries about Zayd and forced him to leave the city.\(^49\) Zayd ibn ‘Ali left the city, but returned upon promises of support by the al-Kūfah Shī‘is who had followed him to al-Qādisiyah.\(^50\) It was at this time that Zayd ibn ‘Ali hid in al-Kūfah.\(^51\) He spent two months of his secret eleven-month preparations for rebellion\(^52\) in Baṣra.\(^53\) According to an account in *al-Majmū‘*, upon his arrival in al-Kūfah Zayd hid. Therefore, Abū Ḥanīfa’s meeting with Zayd ibn ‘Ali during the latter’s secret residence in al-Kūfah could have been possible only a few months before Zayd’s death.\(^54\)

The Sunnī sources provide no reference to a meeting or dialogue between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd as related in *al-Majmū‘*, and there is no evidence to show that he was taught by Zayd.

Apart from this account on the educational relationship between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibn ‘Ali, some historical and biographical sources give several accounts of Abū Ḥanīfa’s opposition to the revolt of Zayd. Although they are not directly related to our subject, we would like to mention such accounts here in the hope of providing

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\(^46\) *Al-Ṭabarî, Tārikh*, VII, 161.

\(^47\) *Al-Ṭabarî, Tārikh*, VII, 167.

\(^48\) *Al-Ṭabarî, Tārikh*, VII, 166.

\(^49\) *Al-Ṭabarî, Tārikh*, VII, 169-171.


\(^51\) *Al-Ṭabarî, Tārikh*, VII, 171.

\(^52\) Al-Hārūnî, *al-Ifāda*, 47.

\(^53\) *Al-Ṭabarî, Tārikh*, VII, 171.

some clues. As related in *al-Ḥadāʾiq al-wardiyya fi manāqib aʿīmmat al-Zaydiyya* by al-Maḥṣulī (d. 652/1254), when Zayd ibn ʿAlī began to invite people in al-Kūfa to pay homage to him, he sent al-Fuḍayl ibn al-Zubayr to Abū Ḥanīfa. When Fuḍayl came to Abū Ḥanīfa and delivered the letter from Zayd ibn ʿAlī, Abū Ḥanīfa was speechless. Then, he cried, “Shame on you; what are you talking about?” Fuḍayl responded: “Why do you not help him? It is just to make jihād alongside him.” Abū Ḥanīfa asked, “Which faqīhs have joined him?” Fuḍayl responded, “Salama ibn Kuhayl, Yazīd ibn Abī Ziyād, Hāshim Hārūn ibn Ṣaʿd, Abū Hāshim al-Rumānī, Ḥajjāj ibn Dīnār and others.” Abū Ḥanīfa did not give his final answer that day. The following day, when he secretly met with the envoy, he declared: “Send him my regards. As for rebellion with you (al-khurāj maʿak), this I cannot do. However, I have assistance and power to help you in your jihād against your enemy; you and your companions may use this for mounts and weapons.” Thus, he subsidized Zayd ibn ʿAlī. The amount was rumored to be thirty thousand dirham or dīnār.⁵⁵

Abū Ḥanīfa said the following regarding the revolt of Zayd ibn ʿAlī: “This rebellion seems to be like the rising of the Prophet on the day of Badr.”⁵⁶ When asked why he had not joined in the war alongside Zayd ibn ʿAlī, he answered: “If I knew people would not desert him, contrary to what they did to his grandfather, I would certainly join him in jihād, since he is the just imām. It is for this reason that I provided him with financial support.”⁵⁷

**Assessment & Conclusion**

1. At the beginning of the account in *al-Majmūʿ*, it is said that Zayd ibn ʿAlī kept himself out of sight in a house when he arrived in

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When Abū Ḥanīfa was informed of the situation, and after discussing it with colleagues, he visited Zayd. Therefore, Abū Ḥanīfa acknowledged Zayd ibn ‘Alī. His decision may also indicate that Abū Ḥanīfa knew Zayd ibn ‘Alī beforehand. Their acquaintance may date back to the visits of Abū Ḥanīfa in al-Ḥijāz, or perhaps to Zayd’s sojourn in the city four to five months prior to his secret residence in al-Kūfa. Zayd ibn ‘Alī was in al-Kūfa due to a lawsuit, and he was confronted by the former governor in the mosque at the behest of Caliph al-Hishām. It is improbable that Abū Ḥanīfa, known for his love of the Ahl al-bayt, was unaware of or indifferent to the meeting. Therefore, it is clear that Abū Ḥanīfa already knew Zayd at the time. As to the question of whether Abū Ḥanīfa had known Zayd before the latter came to al-Kūfa, we have no credible information. It is known, however, that Abū Ḥanīfa met with Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Zayd’s older brother, in Medina. It is possible that Abū Ḥanīfa met him either during this period or after the demise of al-Bāqir in Medina, where Zayd lived, or in Mecca during ḥajj. The words attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa about Zayd ibn ‘Alī can be understood in this context. That is, Abū Ḥanīfa met Zayd, listened to his speeches and recognized his superior intellect. However, did Zayd ibn ‘Alī know Abū Ḥanīfa? Was it a one-sided recognition, or a mutual acquaintance? The account of al-Majmū‘ relates that during the meeting, Abū Ḥanīfa was introduced to Zayd ibn ‘Alī as “a man among the faqīhs of al-Kūfa,” not as his student. Furthermore, the narrator Abū Khālid reports that he had been with Zayd ibn ‘Alī for five years in Medina before the latter came to al-Kūfa. He claims that he lived with Zayd for months and followed him, even during ḥajj. He sat at Zayd’s feet while in al-Kūfa, up until the time of his assassination.58 As even this narrator, who reports that he was always with Zayd, describes Abū Ḥanīfa’s introduction to Zayd in such a manner, it is clear that there was no mutual interaction between the two before this event.

Again, based on the statements of the narrator, we can conclude that this meeting occurred during Zayd’s secret sojourn in al-Kūfa. As a matter of fact, because Zayd hid in the house of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr al-Asadi, it is likely that this meeting happened during Zayd’s secret residence, which began after his return from al-Qādisiyya and

which lasted eleven months. Therefore, we can reach the following conclusions:

First, prior to the meeting, Abū Ḥanīfa was a well-known faqīh in al-Kūfa, whose scientific authority is highly regarded by friends of Zayd. Accordingly, Zayd’s friends introduced him as one among the faqūs of al-Kūfa. During the meeting, Abū Ḥanīfa did not open the conversation with Zayd. Instead, he caught Zayd’s attention with his reference to the ḥadīth in response to Zayd’s test.

Second, there is no source to confirm that Abū Ḥanīfa studied from Zayd ibn ʿAlī for two years following the meeting. Therefore, it is impossible to suggest his dwelling in al-Kūfa was for this purpose. Additionally, at the time, Zayd ibn ʿAlī was too busy with preparations for the rebellion, making such a relationship unlikely.

2. As described above, the main source for the two-year discipleship of Abū Ḥanīfa under Zayd ibn ʿAlī is Yahyā ibn al-Ḥusayn, who is a Zaydī. This assertion, however, based on this narrator of al-Majmūʿ, contradicts the account in al-Majmūʿ. Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf (d. 1191/1777), another narrator and commentator of al-Majmūʿ, claims the due to the Umayyad government, Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd could meet only in secret. Again, according to the account in al-Majmūʿ, their meeting was a secret one. It has been demonstrated, however, that Zayd ibn ʿAlī did not know Abū Ḥanīfa prior to this meeting. Moreover, this meeting is not proof that Abū Ḥanīfa studied with Zayd. Even if we accept that the beginning of his sojourn in al-Kūfa coincided with the meeting, it is well known that this period did not exceed one year. In addition, this period was during a time when Zayd ibn ʿAlī was constantly pursued by the governor’s men and thus was continuously on the move. It is improbable he continued teaching during such a period. There is no satisfactory information which supports the assertion that Abū Ḥanīfa was a disciple of Zayd for two years while in al-Ḥijāz. In fact, what is certain about Abū Ḥanīfa’s time in al-Ḥijāz is that it occurred between 130/747-748 and 132/749-750, long after Zayd ibn ʿAlī’s death.

59 Al-Ṭabarī, Tārikh, VII, 172, 173; al-Hārūnī, al-Ifāda, 47.
60 Al-Sayyāghī, al-Rawd al-naḍīr, I, 66.
61 Al-Ṭabarī, Tārikh, VII, 172-173; al-Hārūnī, al-Ifāda, 47.
3. According to the account in *al-Majmūʿ*, the dialogue between Zayd ibn ʿAli and Abū Ḥanīfa reveals that Abū Ḥanīfa’s answers are based on a ḥadīth. Zayd did not ask him for its source. In *Musnad al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfa*, however, which compiles the ḥadīths narrated by Abū Ḥanīfa, it is explicitly stated that he attributed this account to the Prophet via narrators who were not among the Ahl al-bayt. Therefore, his response in the presence of a great scholar and faqīh like Zayd ibn ʿAlī, and Zayd’s satisfaction with this response, indicate that Abū Ḥanīfa possessed a high-level of knowledge. The ignorance of Zayd’s narrators and writers, who claim that Abū Ḥanīfa was a student of Zayd, based on the abovementioned meanings derived from Abū Khalīd’s narration, indicate that their assessment is inaccurate. This conclusion is supported by the fact that al-Sayyāghī, while evaluating the argument that Abū Ḥanīfa studied with Zayd ibn ʿAlī for two years in *al-Rawḍ al-naṣīr*, does not go beyond referring to this belief in the introduction to the book, and provides no further information about the connection between the two.⁶³

4. The most important support for those who support the claim that Abū Ḥanīfa was a disciple of Zayd ibn ʿAlī is the following quote: “I have seen Zayd ibn ʿAlī and his friends, but never have I seen a man more faqīh, wise, witty, or honest than him in his day. He was a peerless personality.” There is, however, no source for these statements prior to the one related by al-Maqrīzī.⁶⁴

5. Aside from Zayd’s father ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, his elder brother Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan, Zayd ibn ʿAlī is also mentioned as one of the teachers of Abū Ḥanīfa; there is an impression that the last one was added on to the former names. There are historical sources for Abū Ḥanīfa’s meeting with Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and studying with them.⁶⁵

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⁶⁴ Here, it should be noted that Abū Ḥanīfa also uttered similar words about Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, however, the interpretation of this as if Abū Ḥanīfa was a student of Jaʿfar has been reasonably criticized. See İsmail Hakki Ünal, “Ebû Hanife Üzerine Bir Sohbet [A Conversation on Abû Ḥanīfa],” *İslāmî Araştırmalar (Ebû Hanife Özel Sayısı) Islamic Researches (Special Issue: Abû Ḥanîfa)* 15/1-2 (2002), 327. Mehmet Atalan, “Ebû Hanife ve Ali Oğulları [Abû Ḥanîfa and the ‘Alids],” *Dinî Araştırmalar [Religious Studies]* 8/24 (2006), 165-167.
However, the only source for his meeting and having a dialogue with Zayd is the dubious account found in *al-Majmūʿ*.

6. Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibnʿAlī are contemporaries. Abū Ḥanīfa was born in 80/699-700. The earliest birth date given for Zayd ibnʿAlī is 75/694-695. Other dates given are 76/695-696, 78/697-698, and even 80/699-700 as Zayd’s year of birth. Even if 75/694-695 is accurate, the age difference is insignificant, as there was no shame in studying from someone who was the same age or a few years older. It is striking, however, that Zayd is not considered to be among the ṣaḥāba and older ṭabīʿūn. It is unlikely that Abū Ḥanīfa would have studied from a peer when many ṭabīʿūn scholars and other prominent figures of Ahl al-bayt, such as ʿAlī ibn ʿAl-Ḥusayn (d. 94/713) and his son Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/732), were available. Although in *Musnad al-Imām Abū Ḥanīfa*, there are reports which Abū Ḥanīfa transmitted from Muḥammad al-Bāqir, a man respected in both Sunni and Shiʿi circles due to his scientific authority, and also from ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, who were alive after al-Bāqir’s death, there is no narration from Zayd ibnʿAlī.

The educational and jurisprudential methodology of Abū Ḥanīfa also casts doubt upon the belief that he was a disciple of Zayd. It has been documented that Abū Ḥanīfa hashed out problems in a circle of experts from various backgrounds. Abū Ḥanīfa once stated that he always accepted the words of the ṣaḥāba in controversial matters, but as for the opinions of the ṭabīʿūn, such as Ibrāhīm, al-Shābī, Ibn Sīrīn, ʿĀṭāʾ, and Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, he added, “I can judge as they

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Zayd ibn ‘Alī could be regarded to be one of the younger tübi‘ün.

7. Abû Ḥanīfa lists some of his teachers and talks extensively about Ḥammād while making no mention of Zayd ibn ‘Alī.74 When he was asked about the source of his knowledge, he stated, “I was in the spring of knowledge and affiliated with one of the faqīhs there.” The faqīh mentioned is Ḥammād ibn Abī Sulaymān (d. 120/738).75 During Zayd ibn ‘Alī’s lifetime Abû Ḥanīfa was a prominent disciple of the educational circle of Ḥammād in al-Kūfa, where there was a strong intellectual tradition from the time of ʿUmar. After Ḥammād’s death, Abû Ḥanīfa was assigned to be the head of this group, which was comprised of many faqīhs. Ḥammād passed away one or two years before the death of Zayd ibn ‘Alī.76 Subsequently, Abû Ḥanīfa was placed in charge of the education in his master’s group, while Zayd ibn ‘Alī secretly prepared for revolt.77

8. According to accounts of Abû Ḥanīfa’s involvement in Zayd’s revolt, it is reported that he provided financial support for Zayd ibn ‘Alī, but did not pay homage to him. Abû Ḥanīfa had already reached the necessary intellectual maturity to construct his own attitude and behavior. These accounts, however, are considered unilaterally, in favor of the assertion that he was a disciple of Zayd.

In conclusion, according to the sources at our disposal, there is no credible evidence that Abû Ḥanīfa studied with Zayd ibn ‘Alī, particularly in respect to the account in al-Majmū‘. This account considers Abû Ḥanīfa to be a renowned faqīh even before meeting Zayd. Abû

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74 In his own words, he followed his lessons for 18 years. When the Caliph al-Manṣūr asked him from whom he had received knowledge, he answered, “From Ḥammād, from ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalīb, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Maṣʿūd and ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās through Ibrāhīm.” For this and similar quotes, see Abû Bakr al-Khaṭṭāb Ahmad ibn ‘Alī al-Baghdādī, Tārikh Bagdādī aw Madīnat al-salām (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), XIII, 334; Abû Zahra, Abû Ḥanīfa, 30.
75 See Abû Zahra, Abû Ḥanīfa, 71; id., Tārikh al-madbāhib, 333, 335.
76 Al-Dhahabī, Manāqib, 11.
77 Al-Makkî, Manāqib, 61.
Relationship between Abū Ḥanīfa and Zayd ibn ‘Alī

Abū Jayb, Saʿdī, al-Qāmūs al-fiqḥī (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1982).
______ Tārikk al-madhâbih al-Islāmiyya (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, n.d.).
Bakkal, Ali, İslâm Fikri Mezhepleri [Islamic Legal Sects] (İstanbul: Rağbet Yayinevi, 2004).
Demir, İsmet, İmâm-ı Âzam Ebû Hanife: Hayatı, İslâm Hukukü ve Hanefi Mezhebi ni Tedvindeki Metodu [al-Imâm al-ʿAzâm Abû Ḥanîfa: His Life and His Place in the Formation of Islamic Law and Ḥanafism] (İstanbul: Seçil Ofset, 2005).

Referencing Abū Ḥanīfa was perhaps mistakenly considered to be one of the disciples of Zayd ibn ‘Alī because of his explicit sympathy toward the Ahl al-bayt, his support for Zayd ibn ‘Alī’s revolt, and his words of praise for Zayd’s scholarship. Later, this belief became a common conviction that has been disseminated through recent works on the subject.


Hamûdullah, Muḥammad, İmâm-ı Âzam ve Eseri [al-İmâm al-A‘zam and His Heritage] (translated into Turkish by Kemal Kuçu; İstanbul: Çağaloğlu Yayınevi, 1963).


Subûn, Ja‘far, Buḫūth fi l-milal wa-l-niḍâl, 7 vols., (Qum: Mu‘assasat al-Imâm al-Īṣâqî; Cairo: Dâr al-Ma‘ṣûf, n.d.).

Ünal, İsmail Hakki, “Ebû Hanife Üzerine Bir Sohbet [A Conversation on Abû Ḥanîfa],” İslâmî Araştırmalar (Ebû Hanîfe Özel Sayısı) [Islamic Researches (Special Issue: Abû Ḥanîfa)] 15/1-2 (2002), 309-333.

