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THE DEVELOPMENT OF HADITH SCHOLARSHIP IN MAWARANNAHR AND THE ROLE OF ABDULLAH SUBAZMUNIY

Abstract. *This article examines the flourishing of science and culture in Mawarannahr during the 9th–10th centuries, focusing in particular on the development of hadith scholarship in Bukhara. It analyzes the life of the renowned scholar Abdullah Subazmuniy and his pivotal role in the evolution of the Bukhara school of hadith. The article discusses how Subazmuniy attained the prestigious title “Ustoz” (the Teacher) and his activities at the Samanid court. It also critically examines the unfounded accusations leveled against him owing to the biased approach of certain traditionists, while underscoring the significance of his works in the Islamic world and his contribution to the development of the Hanafi school.*

Keywords: *Golden Age, mutaba‘a, shawahid, hadith schools, al-jarh wa‘l-ta‘dil, da‘if, thiqah, mawdu‘.*

INTRODUCTION

Studying the history of how the science of hadith entered the Mawarannahr region is of considerable importance. While Islamic sciences in Mawarannahr were initially propagated by Arab and Khurasani scholars during the first half of the 8th century, by the second half of that century scholars from among the local population had begun to emerge (Muratov, 2025:21). Interest in hadith gradually grew in distinct administrative centers of the Islamic world during the final three decades of the first Hijri century (690–720) (Juynboll, 1983:6), and the emergence of hadith scholarship in Mawarannahr, particularly Bukhara, is closely tied to this period. Among the early Arab military commanders who entered Bukhara were Companions and Successors who transmitted to the local population what they knew of the Prophet (peace be upon him); one such transmitter-commander was Abu Uthman Sa‘id ibn Uthman ibn ‘Affan al-Qurashi (d. 60/680).

Other transmitters likewise rendered considerable service to the establishment of hadith scholarship in this region (Muratov, 2025:22).

As the number of hadiths grew over time, so did the ranks of those who studied them critically. Alongside the criticism of weak and unreliable hadiths, the process of compiling authentic ones into collections also began (Rahimjonov, 2020:84). The third/ninth century is considered the “Golden Age” in the history of hadith scholarship: the discipline that had developed since the mid-8th century engaged more than four hundred authors over the following two to three centuries. By the third century, hadith had emerged as a distinct, independently grounded science, no longer studied merely as a branch of fiqh.

The authors of the six canonical hadith collections (al-Sihah al-Sittah), recognized as the most authoritative sources in the entire Islamic world, lived and worked during this period. Almost all six muhaddiths were from Central Asia: Imam al-Bukhari (194/810–256/870), Imam Muslim ibn Hajjaj (206/819–261/874), Imam al-Tirmidhi (209/824–279/892), Imam Abu Dawud al-Sijistani (202/817–275/880), Imam al-Nasa’i (215/830–303/915), and Imam Ibn Majah (209/824–273/886) (Ma’naviyat yulduzlari, 1999).

MAIN PART

Biography and Sources of His Name. Among the muhaddiths of Bukhara is Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Subazmuniy (258–340/872–952), a renowned Bukharan jurist and traditionist whose full name is Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Ya‘qub ibn Harith ibn Khalil Ustoz Imam Hafiz Faqih al-Subazmuniy al-Harithi al-Kalabadi (Zahabi, 2001:424). He was born in the village of Subazmun, located half a farsakh (1.5 km) from Bukhara. Najmiddin Umar al-Nasafi states in *Al-Qand fi Dhikr Ulama’ Samarqand* that he was born on a Wednesday in the month of Rabi‘ al-Akhir of 258/872 (Nasafi, n.d.:195).

The nisba “Subazmuniy” refers to his birthplace, though the name appears in different forms across sources: as “Subazyun” in Yaqut al-Hamawi’s *Mu‘jam al-Buldan* and Ibn Qutlubugha’s *Taj al-Tarajim*, and as “Sabazmun” in al-Zirikli’s *A‘lam*. The form “Subazmun” is found in al-Sam‘ani’s *al-Ansab*, whose author lived close to Subazmuniy’s era and was familiar with the villages around Bukhara. The name also appears as

Sapidmun and Safidmun in waqf documents from the 14th–16th centuries (Muratov, 2025:14). Kalabadh refers to a major district in the upper part of Bukhara where the jurist lived and worked (Uvatov, 2010:277). Although Arabic sources render the nisba as Kalabadhi (Kalabadhi), Persian and Turkic sources – including ‘Alisher Navoi’s *Nasayim al-Muhabbat* – use the form Kalabadi, which appears to be the original (Rahimov, 2017:44–45).

Title “Ustoz” and Travels. Abdullah Subazmuniy was a Hanafi jurist, traditionist, and linguist (Muratov, 2025:29). He received the Teacher for his service at the “Dar al-Sultan” palace of the great Amir Isma‘il ibn Ahmad al-Samani (260/874–295/907), where he addressed jurisprudential questions (Sam‘oni, 1998, 1:212). The court regularly consulted Subazmuniy, and as none of his counsel was ever found to be erroneous, he came to be known by this title. He also earned the epithets al-jawwal and al-rahhal (the great traveler) for his extensive journeys to Khurasan, Iraq, and Hijaz, during which he taught hadith and literature. His scholarly travels carried him from Mawarannahr as far as Egypt (Muratov, 2025:29).

Subazmuniy passed away on Friday, the 5th of Shawwal 340 (4 March 952). His grave lies in his native village of Subazmun (Sukhareva, 1976:82). Ahmad ibn Mahmud al-Bukhari’s *Tarikh-i Mullazada* confirms this, noting in the chapter on “the graves at Subadmun” that “the pure grave of the great shaykh and renowned imam Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Ya‘qub ibn Harith al-Subadmuniy is located there” (Buxori, 2019:92). The Hanafi jurist Abdulhay al-Laknawi (d. 1304/1887) likewise corroborates this in his *al-Fawa'id al-Bahiyya* (Laknavi, 1906:291). At present, however, the cemetery is no longer in operation and the exact location of his grave cannot be determined (Muratov, 2025:32).

Teachers, Students, and Works. The frequent appearance of his father’s and uncle’s names in the chains of transmission within Subazmuniy’s works testifies that he was raised in a family of hadith experts (Uvatov, 2010:277). According to *Kashf al-Athar*, the scholar had three hundred and twenty teachers. He received his initial education from his father, Muhammad ibn Ya‘qub ibn Harith, and his uncle, Jabra‘il ibn Ya‘qub ibn Harith, who was also a hadith transmitter. His teachers also included Abu Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Layth al-Shaybani al-Bukhari (d. 303/919) and Abu Hafs Ahmad al-Sikijkasi al-Bukhari (d. 315/927) (Uvatov, 2014:9).

Many scholars studied hadith and fiqh under Subazmuniy, the most famous being Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Fadl al-Kamari (913–991). Chains of transmission bearing Subazmuniy’s name appear in 33 places in *al-Fawa’id al-Bahiyya*, all linked to Muhammad ibn Fadl (Uvatov, 2011:193). These chains reach scholars such as Burhan al-Din al-Marghinani (d. 593/1197) and ‘Ala’ al-Din al-Samarqandi (d. 552/1157). Abu Bakr al-Kalabadi also regarded him as a teacher in fiqh and hadith. From this it follows that the views of Abu Hafs al-Kabir and al-Saghir, who laid the foundations of the Hanafi school in Mawarannahr, were further developed through Subazmuniy and his student Muhammad ibn Fadl (Uvatov, 2014:9).

Sources mention that Subazmuniy authored several works (Yo’ldoshev & Qurbonov, 2001:10), reporting seven students and three jurisprudential works (Qoriyev, 2020:37). Two have come down to us: *Musnad Abi Hanifa* and *Kashf al-Athar fi Manaqib Abi Hanifa* (briefly, *Kashf al-Athar*). The latter is preserved at the Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan under number 3105, while no information is available on Uzbek copies of *Musnad Abi Hanifa* (Muratov, 2025:34). Professor A. Muminov refers to *Kashf al-Athar* as a second name for *Musnad Abi Hanifa* (Muminov, 2018:54), and counts it among the fifteen musnads attributed to Imam Abu Hanifa (Muminov, 2015:30). However, *Musnad* and *Kashf al-Athar* are in fact distinct works; Subazmuniy himself refers to the *Musnad* within *Kashf al-Athar* (Muratov, 2025:35). A third work was identified during research: al-Zahabi notes that Subazmuniy also wrote *Kitab Wahm al-Ṭabaqa al-Zulma Aba Hanifa ma Ra’aytuh* (Zahabi, 1996a:425), though no further information about this work survives.

Scholarly Assessments and Criticism. Information about Subazmuniy’s life and intellectual legacy is sparse. Brief notices appear in the works of Abu Hafs al-Nasafi (d. 537/1142), ‘Abd al-Karim al-Sam‘ani (d. 562/1167), ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Qurashi (d. 775/1373), Abdulhay al-Laknawi (d. 1305/1887), Ibn Qutlubugha (d. 746/1475), Hajji Khalifa (d. 1018/1609), and ‘Abdulhay ibn al-‘Imad al-Hanbali (d. 1090/1679) (Uvatov, 2014:6).

Later scholars expressed varied opinions about him. Abu Abdullah al-Naysaburi (d. 405/1014) said: “Trustworthy persons remained silent about him, and he had peculiarities in hadith” (Zahabi, 1996b, 12:87). Al-Zahabi added that Subazmuniy “exerted great effort in writing *Musnad al-Imam al-A‘zam*, but it contains unusual narrations not actually transmitted by Imam Abu Hanifa, which appeared correct to Abu Muhammad” (Zahabi,

1996a:424). When Hamza al-Sahmi (d. 427/1036) asked Abu Zur'a Ahmad ibn al-Husayn al-Razi (d. 264/878) about him, al-Razi replied: "Weak" (Zahabi, 1985:60).

The traditionist al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (392/1002–463/1071) wrote in *Tarikh Baghdad*: "He is the author of strange, munkar, and unusual narrations." Dr. Khaldun al-Ahdab (1933–2020), who wrote *Zawa'id Tarikh Baghdad* as a supplement to al-Khatib's work, classified a hadith narrated by Subazmuniy as fabricated (*mawdu'*) and described him as an unreliable transmitter. However, in his *Makanat al-Imam Abi Hanifa bayna al-Muhaddithin*, al-Ahdab himself acknowledged: "As al-Zahabi said, Abu Zur'a called Abdullah Subazmuniy weak. Yet al-Khatib al-Baghdadi did not approach Subazmuniy's activity impartially – he accused him of fabricating hadith. The reason they called him 'weak' is that Subazmuniy made frequent use of *tadlis* (concealing transmitter defects). But *tadlis* is entirely different from acting on a basis of falsehood" (Muhammad Qosim, 1993:276).

Other criticisms include those of Ibn al-Jawzi (citing Abu Sa'id al-Rawwas's claim that "he is accused of fabricating hadith"), Ahmad al-Sulaymani ("he would attach this isnad to that matn and that matn to this isnad, which is a kind of fabrication"), and Khalil ("He is known by the name 'Ustoz' and has knowledge in this field, but he is regarded as weak") (Subazmuni, 2010:27). According to al-Ansab, hadith preservers mentioned him in their historical works and noted that he related munkar and false narrations (Sam'oni, 1998, 1:212). Although al-Zahabi in *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* and *Tarikh al-Islam* noted that "Ibn Manda held a positive view of him and transmitted from him," the author of *Taj al-Tarajim*, Ibn Qutlubugha, mentions that Ibn Manda also said: "He is not trustworthy; he has munkar narrations" (Ibn Qutlubug'o, 1962:175–176).

Refutation of Accusations. It is significant that almost all scholars who classified Subazmuniy as "weak" were not from the Hanafi school, and their one-sided approach to the issue cannot be ignored (Muratov, 2025:31). He was recognized as a master of *istinbat* and *ijtihad*. Even the shaykh and traditionist Wali Allah al-Dihlawi listed him among the *ashab al-wujuh* (those whose opinions are referred to) of the Hanafi jurists in his *al-Intibah min Ashab al-Wujuh*, stating that "Hanafi jurists always rely on them" (Laknavi, 1998:178).

Imam Abu al-Mu'ayyad Muhammad ibn Mahmud al-Khwarazmi states in *Jami' al-Masanid*: "Whoever studies this Musnad will recognize that the author had profound

knowledge of the science of hadith and a deep understanding of chains and texts” (Xorazmi, n.d.:525). Therefore, the authors of biographical works place him in the ranks of huffaz and traditionists. Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani (773/1372–852/1449) called him a hafiz in Ta‘jil al-Manfa‘a. Al-Zahabi remembers him in Al-‘Ibar as “a much-traveled traditionist and a leading scholar in fiqh who wrote many works” (Zahabi, 1985:253), and Qasim ibn Qutlubugha in Taj al-Tarajim describes al-Harithi as “prolific in transmitting hadith” (Ibn Qutlubug'o, 1962:176).

The criticisms in biographical sources fall into two types. First, those that state a reason. An example is Ibn al-Jawzi’s citation of Abu al-Rawwas’s claim that “he was accused of fabricating hadith.” Yet al-Qurashi rejects this in al-Jawahir, saying: “Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Subazmuniy is greater and more eminent than Ibn al-Jawzi and Abu Sa‘id al-Rawwas” (Qurashi, 1993:345). Abu al-Rawwas’s biography itself cannot be located, and Ibn al-Jawzi is known for unusual and singular opinions – he even classified some narrations from the Sahihayn as fabricated, drawing rebuttals from hadith authorities. He is also unreliable in transmission: as al-Zahabi notes in Siyar A‘lam al-Nubala’, “Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzi’s statement ‘the scholars of transmission considered him weak’ is his own opinion without scholarly grounding, since not a single person has been found who called him weak” (Zahabi, 1996:26).

Second, criticism without stated reason. Examples include Ahmad al-Sulaymani’s claim that Subazmuniy attached chains to texts and texts to chains – a form of waq‘ (fabrication). Yet al-Sulaymani made the same claim about Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, alleging he fabricated hadith for the Rafidites. Al-Zahabi (in al-Mizan) and Ibn Hajar (in al-Lisan) replied: “Hafiz Ahmad ibn ‘Ali al-Sulaymani went too far. This is mere conjecture. Ibn Jarir is among the great and trustworthy imams of Islam... the words of scholars about one another must be uttered with caution, especially regarding such great imams” (Zahabi, 1963, 1:90). Al-Sulaymani’s remarks about Imam al-Harithi belong to the same category of unfounded suspicion, since he provided no concrete reason or evidence for his claim (Subazmuni, 2010:49).

On al-Zahabi’s claim about “unusual narrations not transmitted by Imam Abu Hanifa,” the editor of the work observes: “This is a musnad in which the condition of authenticity is not stipulated. Like other musnads and mu‘jams, it does not require the narrated hadiths to be authentic. Moreover, the munkar narrations in this book are very few in number, and the author cannot be censured for such a small quantity.”

All criticisms of the second type share a common content: that Subazmuniy transmitted munkar and rare narrations, without specifying the reasons for declaring him weak. In all likelihood, the later critics were merely imitating earlier ones. Hafiz Muhammad ibn Ishaq Ibn Manda – a great imam and “one of the mountains of knowledge” – transmitted this Musnad from the author and held him in high regard. Shaykh al-Tahanawi states in his *Abu Hanifa wa-Ashabuh al-Muhaddithun*: “Had Abdullah ibn Muhammad been accused or rejected, the great Hafiz Ibn Manda, the traveler in the science of hadith and the muhaddith of his age – along with Ibn ‘Uqda, al-Ja‘abi, and others – would not have transmitted from him so abundantly” (Tahonavi, 2000:202). Such testimonies represent a *ta‘dil* (vindication) that takes precedence over vague criticisms. As Shaykh al-Tahanawi notes in *Qawa‘id fi ‘Ulum al-Hadith*: “The abundance of critics does not in itself justify rejecting a transmitter,” especially when the criticisms are vague (Qosimi, 1990:407).

Abdullah Subazmuniy was thoroughly familiar with the works of earlier Hanafi traditionists. He transmitted Muhammad al-Shaybani’s *al-Athar* on the authority of what he had heard in the family of the Abu Hafs scholars (Dimashqi, 1974:332), thereby contributing to its wide diffusion in Mawarannahr.

CONCLUSION

In sum, all sources written about Abdullah Subazmuniy attest that he was among the leading scholars of his age. Even those who classified him as weak did not doubt his expertise in the science of hadith. Throughout his eighty-two-year life, he produced fruitful work in various branches of the Islamic sciences – particularly in hadith and fiqh – and left a profound mark. The criticisms directed at him were largely the product of biased approaches by scholars outside the Hanafi school, while his role in transmitting earlier Hanafi works to Mawarannahr and his contribution to the development of the Bukhara school of hadith are firmly established by the testimony of major hadith authorities such as Ibn Manda, Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, al-Zahabi (in his vindicating remarks), and Qasim ibn Qutlubugha.

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