

DATING MUSLIM TRADITIONS: A SURVEY

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*Introduction*¹

Throughout the centuries Muslim scholars have devoted themselves to *Ḥadīth* study for various reasons.² Legal theorists, for example, sought in *Ḥadīth* texts a source of law. Others found in them moral and religious inspiration. Still others saw in the *Ḥadīth* an important source for the history of early Islam. The interests of scholars in the West have been less varied. Their interest in Muslim traditions has been almost exclusively historical. They seek knowledge from the *Ḥadīth* principally to find out what really happened (“*wie es eigentlich gewesen*”).³ This is true not only in the case of traditions purporting to recapitulate historical events. It is true for *ḥadīths* touching on legal, exegetical and theological matters as well. In short, the aim of occidental scholars has concentrated on *ḥadīths* as sources for the reconstruction of Islamic history: the history of events, the history of jurisprudence, of religious ideas and institutions, and exegesis of the Qurʾān, etc.

For the history of early Islam the *Ḥadīth* is certainly a source of prime importance, if only for the reason that there are not many other sources available. A prerequisite of historical reconstruction is source criticism, one of the methodological achievements of modern historical studies.

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² The term *Ḥadīth* as I used it in this article means the sort of traditions found in the pre-canonical collections such as Mālik’s *Muwattaʾ*. It is not limited to traditions of the Prophet.

³ A famous expression of the German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886).

Source criticism sets out to evaluate the sources available by checking the authenticity, originality and accuracy of the source's informational content.⁴ Two examples may illustrate its importance. Consider a document which, although it purports to be a Genoese title-deed of the ninth century of the common era (C.E.), can be proven to have been composed at Rome in the eleventh century of the same era and is, therefore, a fabrication. Hence, the reliability of its information on Genoa of the ninth century is uncertain. The document can be used, however, as source for aims and practices of forging documents at Rome in the eleventh century. Or consider a document which is transmitted by writing over a longer period of time. Obviously, it can undergo any number of changes. That is, passages can be omitted, added or distorted, intentionally or not. Such changes must be taken into account and documented (if possible) if we wish to extract from the document its original intention. This is the task of source criticism.

One aim of source criticism is the dating of documents. When trying to determine the degree of reliability of a source the first questions a historian usually asks are: How far away in time and space is the source from the event of which it informs us? Are the date and place of origin which the source assigns to itself correct? Dating a source is, therefore, the first step in determining what historical use can be made of it. The methods which can be used to date a source depend on the character of the source in question. Consequently, dating methods are many and diverse. In fact, each historical discipline developed its own methods. Scholars working in the field of early Islam likewise developed methods adapted to their discipline. Now whether the different methods they are using in dating *ḥadīths* are reliable is a matter of dispute. But it is a dispute in which the participants are few, given that the number of scholars who engage in the critical study of dating methods is small. All the same, it is a dispute of the very first importance for every scholar who works in the area of early Islam.

In order to review the existing methods used in the studies concerned with *Ḥadīth* I have classified them into four groups: 1) methods which use the *matn*, 2) dating on the basis of the collections where traditions appear, 3) dating on the basis of the *isnād*, and 4) methods using

⁴ Cf. J.G. Droysen, *Historik, Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte*, ed. R. Hübner, Darmstadt, 1972, 98-99.

matn and *isnād*.⁵ In each group, the approaches are not always the same and can be further classified. Additionally, it must be said that scholars often use combinations of different methods. For each method, I shall present one or more representatives and discuss their approaches. The main questions which I shall try to answer are: How does the method in question function? On what premises it is based? Are method and premises reliable? What results does the method produce?

I. *Dating on the Basis of the Matn*

A. *First Steps in Dating: Ignaz Goldziher*

One of the most famous examples of the use of dating by means of the *matn* of a *ḥadīth* is Ignaz Goldziher's article "Ueber die Entwicklung des Ḥadīth", published in 1890 in the second volume of his *Muhammedanische Studien*.⁶ In this article – the first fundamental study on *Ḥadīth* written by a Western scholar – Goldziher mentions that there is something called *isnād* but does not mention it further.⁷ His statements on the origins of *ḥadīths* are solely based on their *matns* and other criteria. Two types of dating can be distinguished in Goldziher's article: first, a general dating, i.e., a dating of the *Ḥadīth* as a whole; second, a dating of a particular *ḥadīth* or tradition.

The principle behind Goldziher's general dating of the *Ḥadīth* is well-known: Most of the material available in the canonical collections is a result of the religious, historical and social development of Islam in the first two centuries, the reflection of the efforts which emerged in the Islamic community during their more mature stages of development.⁸ On the basis of this principle of general dating of the *Ḥadīth*, Goldziher denies that the bulk of traditions concerning the Prophet and also most reports on the Companions might possess any worth as historical sources for the time about which they purport to inform us. This does not mean that they cannot be used as sources for the time when they actu-

⁵ A fifth category would be "methods using other criteria". It is left for another article.

⁶ I. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, Halle, Max Niemeyer, 1889-90, II, 1-274. English translation, *Muslim Studies*, trans. C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1971, II, 1 ff.

⁷ Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, 6 (I quote the English translation according to the pagination of the German original given in the margins).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

ally originated which is defined by Goldziher as the Umayyad and the first century of the Abbasid caliphate.

Goldziher did not formulate his general dating of the *Ḥadīth* as a universal statement. He did not say: “All *ḥadīths* are the result of later developments”. He formulates it as a partial generalisation, i.e., “the vast stock of *ḥadīths*”. This means that some authentic *ḥadīths* go back to the first half of the first Islamic century, although about these Goldziher expresses no concern. This division between a major component of non-authentic and a minor part of possibly authentic traditions leaves us with an epistemological problem. If we have to do with a tradition which is not clearly a late fabrication – which is most frequently the case – then, into which category must we place it? If Goldziher’s general dating is correct, then, for statistical reasons, we have to conclude, indeed, it is safer to assume that the tradition is late, or rather, not authentic; for the probability of coming across an early and possibly authentic *ḥadīth* is not large.

But on what arguments does Goldziher base his general dating of the *Ḥadīth*? On what grounds does he rest his judgement on its authenticity? His conclusions are based merely on a limited sample of traditions he collected. The following represent the indications or reasons which may have motivated their invention or fabrication:

1) Political quarrels and religious disputes within the nascent Islamic community. Goldziher, like a number of others, assumes that the more secular regime of the Umayyad dynasty had driven “more pious Muslims” to create a religious world of their own and to project it back to the Prophet and the first four caliphs. The rulers reacted to this development by having their political principles justified by opportunistic scholars in the same way. Namely, they ordered them to forge *ḥadīths* and ascribe them to earlier authorities. According to Goldziher, a large number of traditions said to go back to the Prophet or the Companions arose precisely in this way during the second half of the first century A.H.⁹

2) Other *ḥadīths* came into being when the Abbasids took over the caliphate from the Umayyads in the course of the second Islamic century. The new religious policy of the rulers gave a strong impulse to the development of Islamic jurisprudence. This impulse, at the same time, prompted the study and production of *ḥadīths*, since under Abbasid

⁹ *Ibid.*, 73-83.

rule subservience to the heads of state led some scholars (“court theologians”) to forge traditions in favour of whatever the regime currently in place wished to carry through.¹⁰

3) During the second half of the second century A.H. many traditions emerged from the dispute between the old style jurists, the *ahl al-ra’y*, and scholars who advanced arguments on the basis of traditions, the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*. According to Goldziher, the latter wished to base the law as much as possible on the example of the Prophet and his Companions and in cases where they could not find a tradition, they simply invented one. The scholars of the ancient schools answered the challenge to their doctrines by looking for traditions which supported their point of view and even invented *ḥadīths* whenever they thought it was appropriate.¹¹

4) Many *ḥadīths* have their origin in or became distorted during the many political and religious struggles within the Muslim community or else they derive from groups or circles dissatisfied with or opposed to the ruling family. To give expression to their claims, the different parties created *ḥadīths* for or against rebellion, for or against the dynastic principle of rule and for or against the claim of particular clans of the Prophet’s tribe to the caliphate. In fact, rivalry between tribes, towns or scholarly circles must never be underestimated as source of fabricated traditions.¹²

Goldziher’s set of causes and motives for the invention and fabrication of *ḥadīths* during the Umayyad and Abbasid period is derived from a wide range of sources. However, the choice of the source material and the use to which Goldziher puts it display two major points of weakness: 1) Goldziher’s source material consists mostly of traditions *about* transmitters and *ḥadīths* and only rarely of the traditions themselves.¹³ When Goldziher falls back on the traditions themselves, he relies on *ḥadīths*, which are rarely considered reliable by Muslim scholars themselves. Traditions from the collections of al-Buḥārī and Muslim, appear but rarely amongst his pieces of evidence. 2) Goldziher seldom questions the historical reliability of the reports which he is using, although they often have an anecdotal character.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53-73.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 73-83.

¹² *Ibid.*, 88-130.

¹³ In the light of my typology of dating methods, these cases belong to the fifth category “information derived from other sources”. See note 5.

To form some idea of Goldziher's mode of reasoning an example is helpful. From a late compilation of *alḥbār* he quotes the following anecdote: A scholar at the court of the Caliph al-Mahdī (158-169 A.H./775-785 C.E.) added a word to a *ḥadīṭ* in order to make pigeon racing permitted, a sport of which the caliph was fond. However, to the "orthodox scholars" pigeon racing was repugnant. This prompts Goldziher to conclude: "the tale nevertheless shows what a court theologian was capable of doing in matters of the tradition. Theologians, who wished to reconcile theory with the practices of life, *had to have recourse to* such subterfuges, and this consideration became one of the chief factors in the history of the growth of the *Ḥadīth*".¹⁴ Still, does not Goldziher owe the reader proof that this distorted *ḥadīṭ* found its way into one of the authoritative compilations of *ḥadīṭs* and/or was taken seriously by other scholars?

What this example shows is how, on the one hand, Goldziher is able to move from *singular cases* – where the historical character of a narration is by no means certain – to a conclusion about the entire corpus of *Ḥadīṭ*. On the other, it illustrates how he can move from the *possibility* that something could have happened to conclude that it actually did happen. That is, he can deduce a fact from a mere possibility. Even if the story about al-Mahdī's court theologian was true and if there were some other reliable cases of forgery, it takes some degree of audacity to conclude that *many or most ḥadīṭs* are forgeries. I do not wish to deny that Goldziher succeeded in his study on the *Ḥadīṭ* to present a number of texts which possibly or probably reflect reactions on later religious, political or juridical developments. I only question whether it is methodologically correct to conclude on the basis of a limited number of reports about invented or falsified *ḥadīṭs* and a few traditions which can hardly derive from the time from which they purport to emanate, that the vast majority of the *ḥadīṭs* have been fabricated at a later time and came into being as a result of the developments mentioned above. Goldziher's dating may be true for a number of individual traditions. That this dating holds true for the majority of the *ḥadīṭs*, he has not demonstrated.

Apart from general dating, Goldziher sometimes tries to pin down the time of origin of a particular tradition or some of its elements. In these cases, he does not mention explicitly which criteria he uses to

¹⁴ Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, 70 (emphasis mine).

distinguish between an earlier and a later tradition. Some of his examples will reveal his methodological principles. In fact, four follow.

- 1) Anachronisms indicate that a text originates from a time later than purported.¹⁵
- 2) Traditions of which the content clearly displays a secondary stage in the development of an issue are younger than those with a less developed content.¹⁶
- 3) When the Prophet or early Muslims appear in a tradition in an unfavourable light, the tradition can be accepted as authentic and early.¹⁷
- 4) Reproaches among opponents against each other have probably a historical kernel.¹⁸

The first principle is certainly a safe one. The second principle takes for granted that we know what the development was. However, knowledge of that kind is, for the most part, based on the traditions themselves. So such an argument seems suspiciously circular in its reasoning. One adopts Goldziher's premises three and four, however, at one's own peril. Their validity depends on a supply of background information about the persons who circulated the traditions in question for they may have had a bias. But information about such persons is for the most part lacking. Even if principles three and four may be of some use in particular cases, they cannot be considered as general rules.

In sum, Goldziher's methods of dating particular traditions on the basis of their *matns* are very rudimentary. His conclusions concerning the origin of a tradition seem often to derive from intuition and appear quite arbitrary. Therefore, the validity of his general dating of *Ḥadīṭ* based on the dating of particular traditions seems as limited as that of the rules of thumb he employs.

B. *Joseph Schacht's Dating with the Matn*

Another famous advocate of dating *ḥadīṭs* on the basis of their *matns* is Schacht. As in the case of Goldziher, we can distinguish between his dating of the *Ḥadīṭ* in general and his dating of individual *ḥadīṭs*. But unlike Goldziher's, Schacht's general dating is not based only on the

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, 23-27, 138-40.

¹⁶ E.g., *ibid.*, 25-26.

¹⁷ E.g., *ibid.*, 29-30.

¹⁸ E.g., *ibid.*, 35.

matns but results from a combination of different methodological approaches:

1) The hypothetical reconstruction of the development of the juridical theory during the second Islamic century based on a study of al-Šāfi‘ī’s (d. 204 A.H./820 C.E.) theoretical treatises. 2) The method of dating traditions on the basis of the collections in which they first appear. 3) A comparison of *matns* of individual traditions. 4) A comparison of their *isnāds*.¹⁹

This order of methods shows that Schacht dates on the basis of the *matn* only after other methods have been used. Even so, one must uncover the premises on which Schacht works when he is dating by using the *matn*. This is even more urgent because his method and premises have been adopted by many scholars after him. The most important of them are:

1) A tradition must first be dated by placing its content (the problem and its solution) into the legal development as he had reconstructed it.²⁰ 2) Traditions which have the form of short legal maxims are earlier than narratives.²¹ 3) Anonymous maxims are earlier than those ascribed to a particular authority.²² 4) Terse statements are earlier than detailed ones. 5) Texts which contain the problem implicitly are earlier than those which expound it explicitly.²³

The first rule shows that Schacht’s dating on the basis of the contents of traditions is dependent on his assumptions regarding the general development of Islamic legal thinking and his view of the particular juridical problem in question. These assumptions derive from a study of the material using different methodological approaches of which the analysis of the *matns* is one among others. Arguing in this manner gives the appearance of circular reasoning. Furthermore, the other four premises or methodological rules are secondary generalisations. They result from a study of legal traditions in which other premises and methodological approaches played a primary role. To give an example: The second premise is not plausible as such, because legal maxims can also be formulated on the basis of reports on legal cases and

¹⁹ J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 176-79.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 180, 188.

²² *Ibid.*, 180-89.

²³ J. Schacht, “Modernism and Traditionalism in a History of Islamic Law” in *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1 (1965), 393.

their solutions and thus be secondary.²⁴ This premise is dependent on other premises of Schacht and cannot claim an independent and universal validity. It can be only used as working hypothesis. For it may prove false on the basis of legal traditions which Schacht has not studied and/or when some of his other premises prove to be false.²⁵

C. *Form Analysis and Dating: Marston Speight*

In the seventies of the century just past a method which was originally developed in Biblical studies entered into Islamic studies: form analysis. It was applied to Islamic traditions by Marston Speight. In his article, "The Will of Sa'd b. a. Waqqās: The Growth of a Tradition", he attempts to reconstruct the chronological development of a Prophetic *ḥadīth* by comparing its *matn* variants.²⁶ Speight proceeds from the assumption that all textual variants have been part of an oral tradition before they "became frozen in a written compilation".²⁷ His method consists of the following steps. Firstly, he compiled a corpus of nineteen traditions which he considered to be variants related by their content. In step two, he arranged the texts according to their complexity. As a third step, he analysed each text with respect to: its degree of development; the internal cohesion of its elements; indications of style and vocabulary since these may suggest an earlier or later stage of development of the text in question. In the fourth and final step, Speight classifies the texts from the standpoint of related content. On the basis of all these steps, a chronology of the nineteen traditions is established.

In his analysis of the texts, Speight starts from several premises which he seems to consider as self-evident, at least, he does not question them: 1) Concise texts are older than more detailed and descriptive ones.²⁸

²⁴ Some examples in H. Motzki, *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz. Ihre Entwicklung in Mekka bis zur Mitte des 2./3. Jahrhunderts* in series *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* L, 2, Stuttgart, Steiner Verlag, 1991, 115-20; English translation, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence. Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*, trans. M.H. Katz, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2002, 126-131 and in idem, "The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq: on the Origin and Reliability of some *Maghāzī*-Reports" in H. Motzki (ed.), *The Biography of Muḥammad: the Issue of the Sources*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2000, 188 ff., 201 ff.

²⁵ See below pp. 214-215, 220-223. For a more detailed critique of Schacht's approach cf. Motzki, *Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*; idem, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*, passim.

²⁶ R. Marston Speight, "The Will of Sa'd b. a. Waqqās: The Growth of a Tradition" in *Der Islam*, 50 (1973), 249-267.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

2) Reported speech is earlier than direct speech.²⁹ Additionally, Speight distinguishes a vertical and horizontal development of traditions. Vertical means the internal development of a group of texts which are contextually related; horizontal denotes the development from elementary texts which consists of only a few elements to more complex traditions.³⁰

Speight's analysis leads to a "rough chronological pattern" which consists of three stages: 1) The oldest text (which a hypothetical more original version preceded); 2) A group of three texts which he dates somewhat later but which belong to the early Umayyad period; 3) The remaining fifteen texts which are later than those mentioned developed during the (later) Umayyad period. In a relative chronology, based exclusively on the *matns* of the traditions, one would not expect absolute dates like early and later Umayyad period. Speight bases them, firstly, on the date of death of Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, the central figure of the traditions, who died in 55 A.H./675 C.E. and, secondly, on the observation that in some variants other names appear. According to him, this could only have happened after the death of Sa'd; these versions must thus be later.³¹

Speight's dating of traditions on the basis of pure *matn* analysis is not convincing for the following reasons. First, it is questionable whether all the texts of his sample really belong to the same tradition.³² Secondly, the general validity of the premises on which his form analysis is based is doubtful. The first premise, which is borrowed from Schacht, is used by Speight as if it is a rule generally valid in the study of Muslim traditions, a conclusion which can be challenged as I have just argued when discussing Schacht's method. The second premise cannot claim general validity either. The same story can be reported by different transmitters not only in different wordings but also with different emphasis. It is not less plausible to assume that reports which were originally vivid and colourful, using direct speech, became more sober in the course of time and changed into reported speech. The weakness of the premises undermine Speight's relative chronology.

Thirdly, Speight's absolute dating which is based on the difference of names is not convincing either. According to him, the central figure

²⁹ *Ibid.*, and *passim*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 251-52, 265.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 266-267.

³² D.S. Powers already pointed to this in his article "The Will of Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ: A Reassessment", in *Studia Islamica*, 58 (1983), 33-53, esp. 41.

of the tradition, Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, is called in two variants Sa'd b. 'Afrā'. He concludes from it that there has been another primitive "sick visit story" originally connected to the name Ibn 'Afrā' which became later confused with the similar story of Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ.³³ Because such a confusion can only be thought of after the death of the latter, Speight dates those variants in which the name Ibn 'Afrā' appears into the early Umayyad period.³⁴ This reasoning is erroneous. The name (Sa'd) ibn 'Afrā' does not belong to the "sick visit story" but to the story of *muhāğırūn* dying in Mecca, which is in some variants combined with the former. In the latter story the central figure is Sa'd b. Ḥawla, not Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ as Speight rightly states. He did not realise, however, that Sa'd b. 'Afrā' is only an erroneous transmission of the name Sa'd b. Ḥawla which may be due to bad handwriting. The difference of names tells us nothing about the date of the versions in question. The mistake in the names can have been made by a transmitter or copyist at a much later period than Umayyad times. Indeed, the editor of Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad* in which both variants are found may be responsible for it.

Criticism of the methods used by Goldziher, Schacht and Speight for dating of traditions on the basis of the *matns* ought not lead us to the conclusion that *matns* are worthless for purposes of dating. The criticism conducted here merely shows that the premises and methods used by these scholars are unsafe. There is much to be learned from the "*formgeschichtliche Methode*". In this sense, Speight's approach is a step in the right direction. In my experience, it is seldom possible to find sufficient indications for the dating of traditions in the *matns* alone.³⁵ All the same, *matn* analysis can and, sometimes, must contribute to the dating of traditions. But it does this best when used in combination with other methods of dating as we will shortly see.

II. *Dating on the Basis of the Occurrence of Traditions in Collections*

Again, Joseph Schacht was the first to use this method of dating in a systematic fashion. He describes it as follows: "The best way of proving that a tradition did not exist at a certain time is to show that it

³³ Speight, "The Will of Sa'd b. a. Waqqāṣ: The Growth of a Tradition", 257-58, 266.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 266-67.

³⁵ For my view on John Wansbrough's approach that is also based only on the texts see H. Motzki, "The Origins of Muslim Exegesis. A Debate" in *Der Islam* (forthcoming).

was not used as a legal argument in a discussion which would have made reference to it imperative, if it had existed".³⁶ This *e silentio* argument has two weak points, one theoretical, the other, practical. On the theoretical side, the fact that a tradition was not used by someone may have several reasons; non-existence is only one of them. The simplest explanation may be that this person did not (yet) know the *ḥadīth* in question. This, of course, is not the same as the tradition not having existed at all. The person may also have had reasons, ones not known to us, which prevented him from citing the tradition. On the practical side, the weak point in Schacht's reasoning is that in most cases we do not know whether or not the sources actually reflect a juridical dispute. Whether collections of legal traditions are compiled as complete arsenals of legal ammunition to be used in disputes or whether they contain a personal choice of the compiler is not a matter which we can know with complete certainty.

G.H.A. Juynboll has employed the same method in his article "The *man kadhaba* Tradition and the Prohibition of Lamenting the Death", published in his book *Muslim Tradition*.³⁷ In his treatment of the *man kadhaba* tradition, he applies the method to a tradition which is not obviously legal in character. His dating of it will be discussed in the following section. Juynboll examines first "in what early collections available in printed editions" the *ḥadīth* in question "is *not* found and those in which it *is* found". He proceeds in two steps. First, he investigates the collections compiled in the Ḥijāz and Egypt, next, the Iraqī ones.

The result of his investigation of the collections compiled in the Ḥijāz and Egypt is that: "The *man kadhaba* tradition does not occur in Ḥijāzī or in Egyptian collections from before the 180s/800s".³⁸ Here he is speaking of the *Muwaṭṭa'* of Mālik (d. 179 A.H./796 C.E.) and the *Ġāmi'* of Ibn Wahb (d. 197 A.H./812-13 C.E.). This *ḥadīth* is found, however, in the works of al-Šāfi'ī (d. 204 A.H./820 C.E.) and in al-Ḥumaydī's (d. 219 A.H./834 C.E.) *Musnad*, both Ḥijāzī scholars. This leads Juynboll to the conclusion that the tradition in question must have come into circulation in the Ḥijāz between Mālik's *Muwaṭṭa'* and the books of al-Šāfi'ī and al-Ḥumaydī. He thinks those transmitters mentioned in the *isnād* of the tradition who died in the 180s or 190s

³⁶ Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 140.

³⁷ G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadīth*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, 96-133.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

are responsible for it. The *isnāds* by which they trace the tradition back to the Prophet are correspondingly fabricated.³⁹

The investigation of the Iraqi *Ḥadīṭ* compilations produced the following results: The *man kadāba* tradition is not found in collections which originate before al-Ṭayālīsī's (d. 203 A.H./818-19 C.E.) *Musnad*, as, e.g., the *Ḡāmi'* of al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb (d. second half of the second century, perhaps 170 A.H./787 C.E.). This leads Juynboll to conclude that: "We are [. . .] justified in determining, with the non-occurrence of the complete dictum in this collection in mind, a *terminus post quem* for its emergence in Iraq".⁴⁰ The *ḥadīṭ* in question must then have come into circulation in Iraq between the date of death of al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb and that of al-Ṭayālīsī. "Responsible for the dictum are probably the various pupils – or people using their name – of the key figures or common links in the *man kadhaba isnāds*, such as Shu'ba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160 A.H./777 C.E.), active in Baṣra and Kūfa, Abū 'Awāna al-Waḍḍāḥ b. 'Abd Allāh (d. 176 A.H./790 C.E.), active in Wāsiṭ and Baṣra, and 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Awfā (d. 174 A.H./792 C.E.), active in Egypt, although the majority of his masters and many of his pupils were Iraqi".⁴¹

Compared to al-Ṭayālīsī's *Musnad* in which only a handful of variants are found, the collections of the third century contain many more versions with different *isnāds*. Juynboll seems to think that these *isnāds* originated only after al-Ṭayālīsī, although he does not state this explicitly. The most extensive list of variants of the *man kadāba* tradition is contained in Ibn al-Ḡawzī's (d. 597 A.H./1200-01 C.E.) *Kitāb al-mawḍū'āt* which has thirty-one versions more than the collections of the third century. This leads Juynboll to the conclusion that those thirty-one variants are fabrications which emerged "from the fourth century onward".⁴²

On the basis of his investigation of Ḥijāzī, Egyptian and Iraqi collections of traditions, Juynboll finally concludes that "every piece of evidence [. . .] points to Iraqi sunnite traditionist circles flourishing in the second half of the second century as the breeding ground of the *man kadhaba* saying".⁴³ The *isnāds* which reach back to the Prophet must be considered as fabrications of the transmitters living in this period, the same holds true for the *isnāds* appearing only in later collections.⁴⁴

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 112-14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 132-33.

Additionally, he postulates a general rule concerning *matns* and *isnāds*: “The more elaborate or composite a tradition, the later it came into circulation. This holds also true for *isnāds*”.⁴⁵

This is a very short sketch of Juynboll’s detailed study. His method is characterised by the use of the argument *e silentio*. Schacht had justified its use by arguing that the traditions were used as arguments in the disputes of jurists and we can therefore expect that traditions which are suited to support the position of a jurist or a school of jurisprudence are quoted if they existed. The weaknesses of this assumption have already been mentioned.⁴⁶ Because there is no legal discussion discernible, Juynboll defends the use of the argument by silence with the following claim: “Muslim collectors used to put *all* the material they had gathered from their predecessors into their collections which have thus to be considered as *complete* records of the material available in a certain region at a certain time”. Therefore, he reasons, “the absence of certain material in certain collections may be considered as relevant fact with significant implications for the chronology of that material or its provenance”.⁴⁷

This premise seems to be doubtful in view of the fact that during the second and third centuries A.H. *Ḥadīṭ*, for the most part, were not collected by gathering the manuscripts of collections made by predecessors, but by hearing it in the classes and recording it. Additionally, it is to assume that the collection of a teacher of *Ḥadīṭ* contained his personal choice of traditions, not necessarily all he knew, and that the collection grew in the course of time. That means that not all transmitters of a scholar necessarily received identical corpora of texts. Apart from the general objection against Juynboll’s premise, his concrete dating of the *ḥadīṭ* in question is not convincing. In fact, there are a number of arguments to be made against it.

First, Juynboll has discovered that the *man kaḍaba ḥadīṭ* was known to the Ḥiǧāzī collectors al-Šāfi‘ī and al-Ḥumaydī. He ascribes the spread of the *ḥadīṭ* to their informants. All these informants are, according to the *isnāds*, Medinese or Meccan scholars who mention, in their turn, Ḥiǧāzī scholars as their own informants.⁴⁸ In addition, the Ḥiǧāzī informants of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁶ See p. 214-215.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁸ This is also true in the case of al-Ḥumaydī’s informant Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna who must be regarded as a Meccan scholar, not as Kūfī. He moved to Mecca already in

al-Šāfi‘ī and al-Ḥumaydī are older than the Iraqi scholars who invented the tradition according to Juynboll. The latter are the pupils of Šu‘ba and Abū ‘Awāna. Among them one finds al-Ṭayālīsī, the earliest collector with whom Juynboll finds the *ḥadīth*. The existence of earlier Ḥiǧāzī informants in the Ḥiǧāzī collections contradicts his general conclusion “that every piece of evidence [. . .] points to Iraqi sunnite traditionist circles [. . .] as the breeding ground of the *man kadhaba* saying”.⁴⁹

Second, it is remarkable that Juynboll does not hold the common links of al-Ṭayālīsī’s variants responsible for the *ḥadīth*, e.g., Šu‘ba (d. 160 A.H./776 C.E.). The common links suggest a dating of the tradition in the first half of the second century, not in the second half. Obviously, Juynboll prefers here the *e silentio* argument (the tradition is not found with al-Rabī‘ b. Ḥabīb) to the common link phenomenon. To my mind his preference is highly questionable.⁵⁰

Third, Juynboll has overlooked the fact that several versions of the *man kadhaba* tradition are contained in Ma‘mar b. Rāšid’s *Ġāmi‘*.⁵¹ Ma‘mar was born and grew up in Bašra. However, he left the city as a young student around the year 120 A.H./738 C.E. to study in the Ḥiǧāz. He finally settled in Šan‘ā’, where he died in 153 A.H./770 C.E. Ma‘mar knows already three different versions of the *ḥadīth*. The *matns* of two of them are short, one has only the *man kadhaba* dictum. The second adds another well-known saying of the Prophet. The third version is a longer story which ends with the *man kadhaba* saying. These three versions show that short versions of a tradition can exist simultaneously beside a long version. This contradicts Juynboll’s rule that “the more elaborate or composite a tradition, the later it came into circulation”.⁵² It seems more likely in the case of Ma‘mar’s variants that the short versions containing only the saying are the abridged ones, than that the longer version was created secondarily by adding an invented history to the

123 A.H./741 C.E., perhaps even in 120/738 when he was sixteen or thirteen years old (see Ibn Sa‘d, Muḥammad, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. I. ‘Abbās, Beirut, Dār Šādir, 1957-1960, V, 497-498), not, as Juynboll claims (according to Ibn Ḥaǧar, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahqīb al-tahqīb* (Beirut, Dār Šādir, 1968 [repr. of the edition Ḥaydarābād: 1325-1327 A.H.] IV, 122) in 163 AH. The latter date seems to be a printing error.

⁴⁹ See above note 43.

⁵⁰ Only in his recent article “Shu‘ba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776) and his Position among the Traditionists of Bašra”, in *Muséon*, 111 (1998), 187-226, esp. 193-196 Juynboll identifies Šu‘ba as the originator of the *man kadhaba* saying.

⁵¹ ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Šan‘ānī, *al-Mušannaḥ*, Beirut, al-Maǧlis al-‘ilmī, 1391/1972, XI, no. 20493-95. Ma‘mar’s *Ġāmi‘* transmitted by his pupil ‘Abd al-Razzāq is part of the edition of the latter’s *Mušannaḥ*.

⁵² See above note 45.

saying of the Prophet. In short, it is improbable that Ma‘mar invented the different *matns* with their defective *isnāds*.

All this leads to the conclusion that the *man kaḍaba* tradition in long and short versions circulated already in the first half or rather in the first third of the second century, not only in Iraq – which may indeed have been its place of origin – but also in the Ḥiğāz and Yemen.⁵³ This example illustrates how dangerous it is to date with the argument *e silentio*, when only a few sources are available as is the case for the second century after the Hijra. A single source overlooked or edited afterwards can destroy the whole argument. The method can and even should be used to establish a *terminus post quem* for a tradition, but we should *not* conclude from it that it *could not* be earlier and that the lists of informants given in the *isnāds* are inevitably fabricated.

III. Dating on the Basis of the Isnād

Among the third group of methods, two wholly different approaches can be distinguished: A) Establishing the date of a particular *ḥadīṭ* or complex of *ḥadīṭs* with the same content on the basis of its or their *isnād* variants; B) Establishing the origin of traditions which according to their *isnāds*, derive from the same informant of a collector (reconstruction of sources).

A. Isnād Analysis of a Single Tradition

1. Schacht on Isnād Analysis

When the topic of *isnād* analysis is mentioned, the name of Joseph Schacht immediately comes to mind. Although he was neither the first nor the only one to recognise the potentialities of the *isnād* for dating purposes,⁵⁴ he is to be credited with popularising the method. He describes it in the chapter of his book, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, entitled “The Evidence of *Isnāds*”. Schacht proposes five rules to be applied when one tries to establish the date of a tradition on the basis of the *isnād*:⁵⁵

⁵³ See also M. Muranyi, “‘Man ḥalafa ‘alā minbarī āṭīman . . .’ Bemerkungen zu einem frühen Traditionsgut” in *Die Welt des Orients*, 18 (1987), 92-131.

⁵⁴ Alois Sprenger did it already in the nineteenth century; see his *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad*, Berlin, Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1861-65, III, 235-36 and passim.

⁵⁵ Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 163-75.

1) “The most perfect and complete *isnāds* are the latest”.⁵⁶ 2) If there are *isnāds* of the *ḥadīṭ* which stop at a later level of transmission, e.g., at the Successors’ level, in addition to *isnāds* which reach back to a higher authority, the latter *isnāds* are secondary. This is the result of what he calls “backwards growth of *isnāds*”.⁵⁷ 3) *Isnād* variants which appear in later sources with “additional authorities or transmitters” are fabrications. Schacht called this the “spread of *isnāds*”.⁵⁸ 4) “The existence of a significant common link, N.N., in all or most *isnāds* of a given tradition would be a strong indication in favour of its having originated in the time of N.N.”⁵⁹ 5) *Isnād* variants that by-pass the common link are later.⁶⁰

Schacht considers rules one through five as general in character. But are they as general as he supposes? His observation that the *isnāds* of traditions contained in later sources are in general more complete is undoubtedly correct. This fact was also known to Muslim *Ḥadīṭ* scholars. They also knew that defective *isnāds* were sometimes improved. Yet none of this need lead us to the conclusion that all or most early traditions must have a defective *isnād* nor should it induce us to believe that early *ḥadīṭs* with unbroken *isnāds* cannot exist.

The “backwards growth of *isnāds*” is a phenomenon known to every *Ḥadīṭ* scholar. The Muslim scholars called it *rafʿ*, literally, “raising higher” in the chain of transmission. However, the fact that there are cases in which, e.g., a Companion tradition is “raised up” to a Prophetic one by adding the Prophet to the *isnād* does not justify the conclusion that all Prophetic *ḥadīṭs* of which variants are known which stop at the Companion’s or the Successor’s level are necessarily secondary. If we rid ourselves of Schacht’s theory that the Muslim traditions generally came into being only by fabrication and developed from Successor to Companion and finally to Prophetic *ḥadīṭs*, we become capable of imagining that a certain legal opinion can have been expressed by the Prophet and also held by a Companion or a Successor. It cannot be excluded *a priori* that there are Prophetic *ḥadīṭs* which are earlier than similar Companion or Successor traditions.

Schacht considers the *isnād* the “most arbitrary part of the traditions”.⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 161, 171.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 164-169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

He does not only assume that all *isnāds* have a fictitious part (i.e., the last part which contains the persons of the first century).⁶² He also thinks that the remaining part of the *isnād* strands (containing the transmitters of the second and third century A.H.) “were often put together very carelessly”.⁶³ This is the reason for his sceptic attitude towards *isnād* variants. He thinks that *isnāds* displaying different transmitters on the same level of generation are “uncertain and arbitrary”.⁶⁴ The examples he quotes in his book show that he cannot imagine that a tradition of the first third of the second century or earlier could really have been transmitted by two or more different persons. Schacht is convinced that most *isnāds* of a tradition originated by “creation of additional authorities or transmitters”⁶⁵ or by fabrication of complete *isnāds* (spread of *isnāds*).⁶⁶ But these views, too, are generalisations made on the basis of a few cases. What’s more, they are assertions not proven facts. I shall come back to the theory of spread of *isnāds* when discussing attempts to apply it.

Schacht claims that “family *isnāds*”, i.e., *isnāds* in which transmitters are related to each other (e.g., father – son – grandson, or uncle/aunt – nephew, or patron – client) are, in general, inauthentic. Rather, they are later fabrications which merely simulate authenticity. This, he concludes from his study of the sources. He gives some examples of family *isnāds* which he considers to be fabricated. These examples show that his reservations against family relations in the *isnāds* concern only what he calls “the fictitious part” of *isnāds*, i.e., the part with the earliest transmitters and the authority to which it goes back.⁶⁷ It is not clear, however, on what basis he arrives at his negative judgement with respect to concrete examples. Possibly, it is based on his general dating and the relative chronology of the legal problem in question, as he postulates it, plus the five rules of *matn* analysis mentioned above. Yet even if every one of his examples were examples of *isnād* fabrication – which is far from certain – it is not justified to generalise them and to brand every family *isnād* fictitious. It seems natural for traditions to be transmitted to family members. Moreover, if there has been real transmission at all, such cases must have been frequent.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 171, 175.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 166-169.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

Schacht's name is particularly connected with the phenomenon he called "common link", a peculiarity of the *isnāds* which was known already to the classical Muslim *Ḥadīth* scholars as Schacht rightly pointed out.⁶⁸ But according to Schacht, the common link is the junction between the fictitious and the real part of the *isnāds*. The fictitious part which mostly has the form of a single strand is the part which reaches from the common link to an earlier authority, e.g., a Companion or the Prophet.⁶⁹ The real part consists of the several strands which reach from the common link to the authors of the collections in which the *ḥadīth* in question is found. In this part we have to do with real transmission which can be used for dating purposes. The common link is then, according to Schacht, the first who brought the *ḥadīth* into circulation. Therefore, it must originate from the time of the common link at the earliest.⁷⁰ Schacht states about the value of the common link for dating purposes: "The existence of common transmitters enables us to assign a firm date to many traditions and to the doctrines represented by them".⁷¹

However, Schacht obscures the clarity of what the common link phenomenon is all about by assuming that a tradition cannot be brought into circulation by the common link himself but "by a person who used his name".⁷² He expounds his reservation against dating with the common link with examples in which the common link belongs to the generation commonly called the *tābi'ūn* (Successors).⁷³ The *isnāds* of a tradition which allegedly go back to the same Successor were fabricated, according to Schacht, a generation later and the tradition is falsely ascribed to him.⁷⁴ In these cases the common link can only give "a *terminus a quo*". The traditions which allegedly go back to Nāfi' and which were possibly available in form of a written source around the middle of the second century are such cases.⁷⁵ All transmitters who used that source referred directly to Nāfi' who became, thereby, a common link, without the transmitters having had contact with him. However, Schacht's

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁶⁹ But can "acquire additional branches by the creation of improvements which would take their place beside the original chain of transmitters, or by the process which we have described as spread of *isnāds*". *Ibid.*, 171.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 171-172.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 171.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷⁴ G.H.A. Juynboll labels them "seeming common links".

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 176-179.

conclusions about Nāfi's traditions are, for the most part, mere allegations or statements based on doubtful arguments.⁷⁶

In spite of these limitations, Schacht considers the common link phenomenon as a suitable basis for dating traditions.⁷⁷ Schacht already detected that sometimes *isnāds* bypasses the common link.⁷⁸ He considers such *isnāds* as fabrications because he thinks that the common link brought the tradition into circulation. Whether this conclusion is acceptable or not depends on the question whether Schacht's interpretation of the common link phenomenon is acceptable or not.

2. Juynboll's Method of *Isnād* Analysis

Schacht himself did not apply the method of dating on the basis of common links very often in his book *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* nor in later publications. It is the merit of Joseph van Ess and G.H.A. Juynboll to have put the method into practice and to have developed it further. In the following pages I focus on Juynboll's application of the method. In his book *Muslim Tradition*, Juynboll gave a detailed description of the premises on which the method is based and how it functions.⁷⁹ He illustrated for the first time in more detail the phenomenon that common links are sometimes by-passed by *isnāds* – a peculiarity which Schacht had only mentioned in passing – and gave an explanation of it. In *Muslim Tradition*, however, Juynboll was still reserved and cautious with respect to the benefits of its use. He stated: “[...] it is mostly impossible to prove with incontrovertible certainty that *isnāds* are not invented in their entirety. Thus the common link, if there is one, is often only a useful tool from which to distil an approximate chronology and possible provenance of the *ḥadīth*”.⁸⁰

In his article “Some *Isnād*-Analytical Methods Illustrated on the Basis of Several Women-Demeaning Sayings from *Ḥadīth* Literature”, published six years later, he attaches much more value to the common

⁷⁶ On the issue of Nāfi's traditions see Motzki, “*Quo vadis Ḥadīth*-Forschung? Eine kritische Untersuchung von G.H.A. Juynboll: ‘Nāfi' the *Mawlā* of Ibn ‘Umar, and his Position in Muslim *Ḥadīth* Literature,’” in *Der Islam*, 73 (1996), 40-80, 193-231 (English translation forthcoming).

⁷⁷ These limitations concern above all the period of the Successors.

⁷⁸ Juynboll calls them “dives”.

⁷⁹ Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 206-17.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

link for dating purposes.⁸¹ Obviously, in the time between the book and the article he had gained extensive experience with this method. In what follows I shall focus on his method as set forth in this article.

Juynboll agrees with Schacht on the interpretation of the common link and of the part of the *isnād* which goes back from the common link to earlier authorities. The common link, according to Juynboll, is the originator of the tradition, or put it otherwise, the tradition “is his own, or (if somebody else’s) he was the first to put it into so many words”; “the single strand from the cl [i.e., the common link] down to the prophet [. . .] is a path invented by the cl [. . .]”.⁸² He further states that (real) common links only appear from the level of the Successors onwards.⁸³ Juynboll seems to consider these statements as methodological rules, not as statements about historical facts. This is obvious from his view that the content of traditions may be older than the date arrived at on the basis of the common link. Since this cannot be proven, it is, according to him, not possible to go back in dating before the common link.⁸⁴ However, Juynboll obscures his methodological interpretation of the common link by statements which follow those of Schacht. For example, he claims that the common link must be considered the originator of the tradition.⁸⁵ So far, there is little difference between Juynboll and Schacht.

Much of Juynboll’s refinement of the common link method concerns the part of the *isnāds* which Schacht called “the real part of the *isnāds*”, i.e., the transmitters between the common link and the compilers of the later *Hadīth* collections. According to Juynboll, this part is much less real than it looks. There is, on the one hand, a difference between strands which run from the common link through “partial common links” or “knots” to the collectors, and, on the other hand, “single strands” who do not cross others. The former alone can be considered historical, the latter must be suspected of having been fabricated.⁸⁶ The single strands must be considered unhistorical as long as new sources do not

⁸¹ G.H.A. Juynboll, “Some *Isnād*-Analytical Methods Illustrated on the Basis of Several Women-Demeaning Sayings from *Hadīth* Literature” in *Al-Qanṭara*, 10 (1989), 343-84.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 353.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 381. Juynboll writes: “although the breeding ground of this type of saying may be older than the proposed date, this is in any case not borne out by the tradition material discussed here”. *Cf.* 370.

⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, 359 (“more often than not they were just religious dicta which they ascribed to older authorities and very often all the way back to the prophet”) and 369.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 354.

reveal that the transmitters through whom the single strand goes to the common link, have indeed passed the tradition to more people, not only one, and thus become (historical) partial common links.⁸⁷

With this distinction Juynboll responds to the objections which Michael Cook had raised against dating with the common link in his book *Early Muslim Dogma*.⁸⁸ Of Cook's several objections, I mention here only one: the possibility that *isnād* variants came into being by the process, which Schacht has called "spread of *isnāds*". Cook emphasises more sharply than Schacht that spread of *isnād* can occur on every level of the transmission process. In doing so, he describes some hypothetical possibilities of how a tradition could have been transmitted from persons other than the common link without the *isnāds* showing that.⁸⁹

Juynboll also studies the phenomenon of *isnāds* sometimes by-passing the common link in more depth than Schacht. He thinks that these *isnāds*, which he calls "dives", are fabrications for which the authors of the *Ḥadīṭ* compilations or their informants are responsible.⁹⁰ This view is based on two sorts of arguments. Firstly, the dating method on the basis of the collections in which a tradition first appears. The arguments are as follows: The collector Ibn Ḥanbal is responsible for these single strands, "because they are only found in his *Musnad*";⁹¹ or: "every non-occurrence of an Ibn 'Uyayna strand in al-Ḥumaydī's collection automatically throws doubt on that strand";⁹² or: this single strand "is most probably the handiwork of Ibn Ḥanbal, because the tradition is not found in 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf*".⁹³ Secondly, Juynboll thinks that his view is corroborated by an *isnād-cum-matn* analysis.⁹⁴

In order to date the origin of the dives, Juynboll formulated the rule: "The deeper the 'dive' under the common link, the more recent is the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁸⁸ M. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

⁸⁹ Cook's view is discussed in more detail below in the present article.

⁹⁰ Juynboll, "Some *Isnād*-Analytical Methods", 366, 375-77.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 366.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 356, note 19.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 376-78.

⁹⁴ Juynboll writes: "on the basis of countless analyses of *isnād* bundles accompanied by detailed comparisons of the *matns* of common link-supported strands with those of 'diving strands', I have come to recognise that the latter almost invariably shows up a more sophisticated wording and embellishments and short comments, lacking in what I call the proto-version brought into circulation by the common link". *Ibid.*, 367. For the methodological approach of the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis see section IV below and Motzki, "*Quo vadis Ḥadīṭ*-Forschung?".

date of origin of that particular strand”.⁹⁵ Analogous to Schacht’s model of the development of Muslim traditions, Juynboll postulates that “diving strands” that end in an early Successor have to be considered as the oldest (albeit “of much more recent origin than those strands that end in the common link”), “diving strands” ending in a Companion have to be considered as “of again more recent origin”, and those “ending up in the prophet of the most recent origin”.⁹⁶

Juynboll’s studies have improved the method of dating traditions by means of the *isnād* considerably, especially as far as the study of the common link phenomenon is concerned. This does not mean, however, that question marks cannot be put after some of his premises, methodological rules and conclusions. Consider, for example, the following three items.

1) The assumptions that the common link is the originator of the tradition and that “the single strand from the common link down to the prophet” is “a path invented by the common link” are problematic generalisations. Juynboll admits that the common link can have the tradition from a contemporary and that its content may even be older, but he categorically excludes the possibility that the person named by the common link as his source really is his informant. He states: “If he [i.e., the common link] did hear it from somebody else, his *isnād* down to the prophet does not contain a clue as to his source.”⁹⁷ This is not plausible. The argument that we cannot know for sure on the basis of *isnād* analysis whether the common link really heard the tradition from someone else or not, does not justify the definite exclusion of the possibility that he did. It is of course possible that a common link received it from someone else and named his informant when transmitting it as is the normal case in *Ḥadīth* transmission. *A priori* we cannot rule this out and there are means to prove it in some cases. A closer look at the examples Juynboll uses to illustrate his assumption that the name of the common link’s informant is *generally* unhistorical makes clear that it is groundless.

Juynboll analyses a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet in which the Baṣran Sulaymān b. Tarḥān al-Taymī (d. 143 A.H./760-61 C.E.) is the common link. He concludes that Sulaymān must be the originator of the *ḥadīth*. As informant of Sulaymān the Baṣran Abū ‘Uṭmān (‘Abd al-Raḥmān b.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 369-70.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 359.

Mull) al-Nahdī (d. ca. 100 A.H./718-19 C.E.) is given in the *isnād*. Juynboll considers this claim “highly dubious”,⁹⁸ because this Abū ‘Uṭmān “seems to belong to a generation of early Successors who can rightly be called very peculiar”.⁹⁹ Among the peculiarities are: ripe old age, *topoi* in their biographies, settlement in Baṣra or Kūfa and that they are often monopolised by one particular common link. Surely, these peculiarities as such do not preclude the possibility of Sulaymān having received the tradition from Abū ‘Uṭmān. In another saying of the Prophet, analysed by Juynboll in his article, he identifies the Basran Abū Raḡā’ al-‘Utāridī (d. 107 A.H./725-26 C.E. or 109/727-28) as “undeniable common link” and, by virtue of it, as originator the *ḥadīth*. Juynboll dates this tradition between the eighties and the year 107 or 109 A.H., which is the *terminus post quem*.¹⁰⁰ This Abū Raḡā’, however, displays the same “peculiarities” as Abū ‘Uṭmān. I wonder why Juynboll rejects the latter as a possible informant of Sulaymān and perhaps originator of the tradition because of these peculiarities, but accepts the former as originator of the *ḥadīth* in spite of these peculiarities.

Juynboll’s conclusions concerning the tradition of Abū Raḡā’ show other inconsistencies as well. In the *isnād* bundle, some of the variants name the older Companion ‘Imrān b. Ḥusayn as informant of the common link Abū Raḡā’, other *isnād* variants have instead the younger Companion ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās. Both groups of *isnāds* are characterised by partial common links, which speaks, according to Juynboll, in favour of the historicity of the transmission. The conclusion should be, then, that Abū Raḡā’ has named both Companions as his source. To some of his pupils he must have mentioned ‘Imrān, to others Ibn ‘Abbās and to a third group both. Juynboll concludes, however, that the strands which go *via* Ibn ‘Abbās “hail from later times” and means the time of the authors of the large compilations which emerged in the course of the third century.¹⁰¹ This conclusion contradicts, on the one hand, his premise that the common link is not only the originator of the text of the tradition but also of the single strand which refers to earlier authorities, on the other hand, it contradicts his view that partial common link transmissions are historical.

I propose two alternative interpretations, one of the common link phenomenon and another of his single strand. The early common links

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 360.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 370.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 364-365 (since Ibn ‘Abbās died later than ‘Imrān).

(the generation of the Companions excluded) were the first major collectors and professional disseminators of knowledge in general, and of traditions about individuals of the first Islamic century in particular. This does not exclude the possibility that some traditions were revised, combined or even invented by the common links.

The single strand of the common link reproduces first of all the name of the informant from whom the common link received or alleged to have the tradition, then the way by which the informant claimed to have received it or the way by which the common link thought that his informant has got it. Juynboll rejects the single strand as fictitious, with the argument that if it were a real transmission path, we must expect to find not only this one but many others. Such an expectation is however not plausible if we assume that a common link is a major teaching collector. In this case, his single strand reflects only the path he has mentioned. The single strand does not signify that this has been the only channel through which the tradition was spread. Other channels of transmission may have existed but remained unknown because they were not quoted by one of the major collectors and professional disseminators of traditions, or perhaps found the way only into collections we do not know (yet).¹⁰² This explanation of the common link phenomenon seems more in harmony with our knowledge concerning the transmission processes during the first three Islamic centuries than that of Juynboll and Schacht. Whether it is a workable hypothesis has to be tested.

2) Another problem is Juynboll's division between historical and unhistorical common links. It says that only those transmission lines can be considered historical which contain partial common links between the common link and the authors of the collections. In these cases Juynboll speaks of a "real common link" which has to be distinguished from a "seeming common link". "Spidery bundles", i.e., transmissions which consists mostly of single strands between the common link and the collections, must be considered unhistorical. He expresses this thesis in the form of a general rule which he calls "a major adage": "the more transmission lines there are, coming together in a certain transmitter [...] the more that moment of transmission [...] has a claim to historicity".¹⁰³

¹⁰² See also Motzki, "*Quo vadis Hadīt-Forschung?*".

¹⁰³ Juynboll, "Some *Isnād*-Analytical Methods", 352.

This general rule is plausible. It is not, however, very practical, as his own examples prove. When we look at Juynboll's diagrams illustrating his *isnād* analysis, it is striking that in many cases partial common links appear almost exclusively on the level of those transmitters who directly refer to the common link. They show up more rarely in the later generations of transmitters. Most transmission lines between these partial common links and the collections are single strands.¹⁰⁴ If one takes seriously Juynboll's general rule, then most of the traditions dealt with in his article must be considered unhistorical. Obviously, Juynboll's conditions for traditions to be accepted as historical make too great a demand on the scanty sources available to be useful in practice.

What an *isnād* bundle of a tradition shows are its transmission lines which we find in the compilations of a few (seldom more than a dozen) later collectors. Each of these compilers reproduce one or more transmission lines by which he has or claims to have received the tradition. If one assumes that there has been transmission of traditions at all, and that (at least) a part of the transmission lines between the compilations and the common link are real ones (an assumption with which Juynboll agrees), then, they can only represent a tiny part of the many transmission lines which must have actually existed. Therefore it cannot be expected that the part reflects the structure of the whole. Partial common links or "knots" in the transmission lines are ideal cases which our sources by chance can reveal. The demand that only those transmission lines which are completely filled with partial common links must be accepted as historical would leave us with only a few historical traditions.¹⁰⁵

3) The last point I would like to discuss is Juynboll's claim that the "diving single strands" are fabricated by the authors of the *Ḥadīṭ* collections or their informants. This claim is based mainly on *e silentio* arguments of which examples have been given above. In a more general form the argument goes as follows: *Isnāds* which contain the names of early collectors of whom *Ḥadīṭ* compilations are available (e.g., Mālik or 'Abd al-Razzāq) or names of individuals (e.g., Ibn 'Uyayna or Šu'ba) which are richly documented in the collections of their pupils (e.g.,

¹⁰⁴ See *ibid.*, 349, 351, 363, 365, 368. Diagram 7 (p. 373) displays a "spider" with Dāwūd b. Qays as "knot". In spite of it, Juynboll considers him an "unmistakable" c[ommon] l[ink]. *Ibid.*, 372.

¹⁰⁵ For a more detailed presentation of my arguments see Motzki, "*Quo vadis Ḥadīṭ-Forschung?*".

al-Ḥumaydī or al-Ṭayālīsī) but which are only found in later *Ḥadīth* collections (e.g., those of Ibn Ḥanbal or Muslim) are fabrications. For if these *isnāds* were authentic ones, we could expect to find them in the earlier compilations already. This argument is based on the assumption that the earlier compilations contain completely or exhaustively the transmitted material of the persons in question. For the second and third century, at least, this assumption appears unlikely.

Firstly, the material which teachers passed on to their pupils during lectures and seminars was, for practical reasons, surely only a selection of what they had learned or possessed themselves. Secondly, it seems likely that the content of the lectures was not always the same in the course of decades, so that not all the students of a teacher learned the same subjects from him. Thirdly, it is doubtful whether all early collections which were compiled by a scholar and transmitted by his pupils were transmitted completely and accurately. We must reckon with processes of edition, selection and rearrangement.¹⁰⁶

3. Michael Cook's Critique of Dating by Employing the Common Link

The most detailed and subtle critique of the dating method which makes use of the common link phenomenon has been put forward by Michael Cook. He has articulated his general reservations first in the chapter "The dating of traditions" of his book *Early Muslim Dogma*, a critique of Joseph van Ess' study *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie*. Later, he tried to prove the unreliability of the method with some examples.¹⁰⁷ Cook's reservation about dating with the common link derives from two sorts of arguments: first, general considerations concerning the value of knowledge in early Islamic civilisation and concerning the motives of forgery, secondly, concrete ideas about how *isnād* fabrication had happened or possibly could have happened. Cook's general considerations are based on the following assumptions:

1) "In a traditionist culture [...] the relevant value is not originality but authority: sharp practice consists in falsely *ascribing* my view to a

¹⁰⁶ As regards Juynboll's additional argument based on the *matns* of the dives, one can wonder whether this is not a rash generalisation. Besides, it starts from the assumption that generally shorter *matns* are earlier, which is far from certain. A comparative study of the *matns* of common links and of diving transmissions would be most welcome.

¹⁰⁷ In his article "Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions" in *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies*, 1 (1992), 23-47.

greater authority than myself".¹⁰⁸ 2) Transmission lines have to be as short as possible in order to be considered elegant. 3) "Isolated traditions", i.e., traditions which have been only transmitted with one or a few varying *isnāds*,¹⁰⁹ are not accepted as proof. These three "values" result in a sort of compulsion of "the system" that makes forgeries acceptable and plausible.¹¹⁰

Is the argument implied here convincing? Let us begin with the first assumption. I wonder whether the Muslim educational system during the first and second century after the Hijra is adequately characterised by the label "traditionist culture" in which "the relevant value is not originality but authority".¹¹¹ This is a black and white picture. Was the educational system in early Islam really so one-sided or is it more fairly described as a system in which both values, originality and authority, played a role? Just the first Islamic centuries were characterised by a conflict between both values, a conflict in which authority eventually triumphed, but victory was not yet won at the end of the second century.

According to Cook, the first assumption explains the phenomenon of what Schacht has called "backwards growth of *isnāds*", i.e., "the process whereby [...] *isnāds* are 'raised' from oneself to one's teacher to his teacher and ultimately to the Prophet".¹¹² Cook illustrates the phenomenon with an anecdote which reports that 'Amr b. Dīnār ascribed a saying to Ibn 'Abbās, but when a colleague spoke to 'Amr about it, the latter admitted that he had received the saying from an informant without explicit mention that it was a saying of the Companion. This prompts Cook to formulate the rule: "Where one *isnād* reaches only to A and a second goes back through him to his teacher, then given the values of the system we are entitled to suspect that the higher *isnād* is secondary, rather than the other way round".¹¹³

Is it legitimate to draw such a general rule from the anecdote? If we generalise the report about 'Amr, it says that it could happen that a scholar ascribed a saying of his informant or teacher to an earlier

¹⁰⁸ Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 107-108.

¹⁰⁹ See for a more precise definition G.H.A. Juynboll under the entry "Khabar al-wāḥid", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, ed. B. Lewis et al., Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1960-, IV, 896. Henceforth abbrev. *EF*².

¹¹⁰ Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 111.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

authority whom the informant had not mentioned. What does this prove? First, the anecdote does not say that it was the opinion of the scholar himself, which he ascribed to an earlier authority, as Cook supposes, calling it a “sharp practice”. Secondly, if the anecdote has a historical value at all and did not result from rivalry between different centres of scholarship, then the anecdote merely proves that such cases of dishonesty or inaccuracy happened. No one would deny that. Yet Cook’s conclusion reaches further; he suggests that it was “a system”, i.e., early Muslim scholars generally behaved in this manner. Based on one anecdote (or even a few more), is such a conclusion warranted?

The second method of forgery which Cook considers to be a consequence of the system of values and exerting pressure on the scholars is “spread of *isnāds*”, i.e., – as Schacht has put it – “the creation of additional authorities or transmitters for the same doctrine or tradition”.¹¹⁴ This sort of forgery is more tricky than others because instances of it are more difficult to detect. Moreover, according to Cook, it has serious consequences for the dating on the basis of common links.

Cook distinguishes between three types of “spread of *isnāds*”. The first type is one where a transmitter ascribes a tradition which he has only received from a contemporary or a fellow student to the latter’s teacher thereby suppressing his real informant in the *isnād*. By this trick, the latter’s teacher becomes a common link which in fact he is not. This does not fit precisely the definition which Schacht gave of “spread of *isnāds*”, namely, “creation of additional authorities or transmitters”. In these cases transmitters or authorities are omitted from the *isnād*. Cook imagines that in the same manner even two levels of informants could be jumped over and an even earlier virtual common link could be created. That such things really happened, Cook demonstrates by anecdotes with doubtful historical reliability, such as that about Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna who is reported to have suppressed in an *isnād* two transmitters.¹¹⁵ This anecdote is aimed at portraying Ibn ‘Uyayna as a bad transmitter, whereas other anecdotes say just the contrary, namely that he tried to hear personally from an old scholar whose traditions he received from someone else.

Next to “striving for higher authority”, Cook mentions in this context his second “basic value of the system”, namely elegance. Again, he illustrates this with anecdotes to the effect that shorter *isnāds* were

¹¹⁴ Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 166.

¹¹⁵ Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 111.

preferred to longer ones.¹¹⁶ However, several of these anecdotes only report that there had been scholars who tried to hear a tradition which they had heard from a colleague (in one case a much younger scholar), from the source himself.¹¹⁷ It is not mentioned in the anecdotes that they did so in order to have a more elegant *isnād*. It seems somewhat doubtful that in the first half of the second century after the Hijra the elegance of *isnāds* was already an issue. The motive behind the behaviour of those scholars was the desire to transmit from an old and famous scholar themselves instead through a younger colleague because it provided more scholarly prestige. A similar but less anecdotal report is transmitted for example from Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Maṣmūdī, the transmitter of the most current version of Mālik's *Muwattaʿ*. It is reported that Yaḥyā had studied Mālik's *Muwattaʿ* in al-Andalus with his teacher Ziyād b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, but then travelled to Medina in order to hear the same text from Mālik himself.¹¹⁸ Did he make the voyage from al-Andalus to Arabia only in order to have a more elegant *isnād*? Besides, the anecdotes quoted by Cook prove not only dishonesty but also the contrary, namely that there were also scholars who did *not* suppress their informant in order to be able to relate from an older authority.

Cook's second variant of "spread of *isnāds*" is the hypothetical case that a transmitter not only conceals his direct informant but also replaces the latter's teacher by his own teacher. In this way the transmitter creates a virtual common link two generation before himself, because his fictitious informant (his real teacher) and the teacher of his real informant appear as pupils of the same early authority. This would be a true "spread of *isnāds*", according to Schacht's definition, since in this case a fictitious transmitter is added. Cook gives no evidence for this hypothetical case, not even an anecdote.

Speculation over possible kinds of forgery can be carried on until it finds its natural end in the assumption that whole *isnāds* can be fabricated and added arbitrarily to traditions. Cook gives no documentation for this third type of "spread of *isnāds*", which has been mentioned already by Schacht.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 202-203, note 7.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Zurqānī, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *Šarḥ ʿalā Muwattaʿ al-imām Mālik*, Beirut, 1990, I, 19.

¹¹⁹ There are, of course, anecdotes which report such cases; see for example Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, 160.

Touching on the last two types of forgery, Cook mentions his third value of “traditionist culture”: “the objection which used to be made to ‘isolated’ traditions”. Supposedly, this compelled Muslim scholars to forge *isnāds*.¹²⁰ But as in the case of the other two “values of the system”, the assumption that this value played an important role as a driving force in *isnād* forgery is too vague and undifferentiated. Was the objection to “isolated traditions” already an issue in the first century and during the most part of the second century? It seems doubtful that this motive applies to the *isnāds* of this period. In addition, one wonders whether the reservation against *al-ḥabar al-wāḥid* (isolated tradition) affected all sorts of traditions equally or only one genre, namely, legal *Ḥadīth*.

Cook himself wonders whether “spread of *isnāds*” was “a process operative on a historically significant scale” and admits “that the evidence does not lend itself to a conclusive answer”.¹²¹ He thinks, however, “that some store must be set by the fact that the process [of the “spread of *isnāds*”] as outlined is thoroughly in accordance with the character and the values of the system”.¹²² In view of the reservations which can be brought forward against Cook’s “values” – the gist of these reservations being that Cook’s ideas are, historically speaking, too vague, undifferentiated and provable only by anecdotes – the whole theory that there existed a compulsion to forgery by reason of those values is unconvincing. Besides, it is doubtful, first, that “spread of *isnāds*” was really practised “on a significant scale”, second, that all *isnāds*, no matter the genre of the tradition, are affected equally, thirdly, that “spread of *isnāds*” was practised at all times to the same extent, and, finally, that the assumption of forgery on a huge scale applies also to the traditions contained in the collections of the critical *Ḥadīth* scholars.

Based on his conviction, that forgery was stimulated by certain cultural values, Cook concludes that scholars who are using *ḥadīths* today have only two methodological choices: if they deny that “spread of *isnāds*” happened on a significant scale, they must also accept *mutawāṭir* traditions¹²³ as historically reliable; if they admit, on the contrary, that Muslim scholars forged *isnāds* in huge dimensions, they must give up the idea that it is possible to date traditions on the basis of the *isnāds*, in general, and the common link phenomenon, in particular.

¹²⁰ Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 110.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ See for them p. 38.

However, in view of the reservations against his arguments, these are not the only positions which can be chosen. Neither Schacht nor Cook have convincingly shown that “spread of *isnāds*” was really practised on a significant scale. They have only shown that there were several possible ways how *isnāds* could be forged and that Muslim scholars could have had different motives to do so. Apart from possibilities, Schacht and Cook produced only scarce evidence that *isnād* forgery really happened.

On the basis of mere possibilities and a few instances of the real forgery, it makes no sense to abstain completely from using the *isnāds* for dating purposes. The historians of the European Middle Ages would not abstain from using diplomas as historical sources because there were cases of forgery which are not easy to detect. The intention of the *isnād* system was to assure the reliability of the transmission process. The basic value linked with it was that I have to name the informant from whom I had received the information. Doing otherwise intentionally was forgery and dishonesty. Certainly, this must have been clear to anybody familiar with that system and the whole scholarly community as a whole must have watched to ensure that its norm was not violated. This does not exclude that forgery could happen. But it seems unlikely that it happened at a huge scale in scholarly circles, not to speak of the circles of *muḥaddīṭūn*.¹²⁴ If the scholarly *isnād* system was only or mainly used to feign reliability, then the whole system of validating traditions by *isnāds* would have become absurd. Al-Šāfi‘ī’s insistence on traditions with reliable *isnāds* would have been pointless and hypocritical if he had been convinced that most traditions available in his time were equipped with fabricated *isnāds*. Was the whole system of Muslim *Ḥadīth* criticism only a manoeuvre of deception? Who had to be deceived? Other Muslim scholars? They must have been aware of the pointlessness and vanity of all the efforts to maintain high standards of transmission, if forgery of *isnāds* was part and parcel of the daily scholarly practice.¹²⁵

It seems, therefore, more appropriate to keep the premise that, generally speaking, the *isnād* system served the expectations of the traditionist. Otherwise, we would expect that they would have quickly abandoned it. Until we have proof to the contrary, we must, therefore, presume

¹²⁴ Their use of *isnāds* must not be equated with that of popular storytellers.

¹²⁵ See also my “The Prophet and the Cat: on Dating Mālik’s *Muwatta’* and Legal Traditions” in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 22 (1998), 32, note 44.

that *isnāds* are, in principle, reliable, except, perhaps, around the time when the system came into being. Still and all, we have to be on our guard against possible cases of error, well meant improvement or forgery in the *isnāds*. The question of the possible motives for improvement and forgery, an issue which occupied Cook in his chapter, “The dating of traditions”, may help in this connection, as may the study of the relationship between *isnāds* and *matns* of a particular tradition, a method to be dealt with in the next chapter.

Before we leave the issue of the type of *isnād* analysis which is focused on a single tradition, Cook’s attempt to check the reliability of Schacht’s dating methods will be reviewed. In his brilliantly argued article “Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions”,¹²⁶ he examines traditions which “can be dated on external grounds”, i.e., independently of the *isnāds*.¹²⁷ Such an external dating seems to be possible in case of traditions which predict certain historical events, though not quite correctly. This reservation is important, for a tradition which predicts what really happened could have been created *post eventum* and is thus not suitable for an external dating. Cook rightly assumes that half-true predictions must originate from a time before the predicted event had actually happened.¹²⁸ However, a crucial point for dating on external grounds is that there should be no doubt that the prediction in question really intended a particular historical event.

Among the three examples Cook presents in his article, only two are datable with some certainty on external grounds: the tradition about “the reign of Tiberius, son of Justinian” (which is to be dated between 93 A.H./711 C.E. and 119 A.H./737 C.E.) and the tradition about “Ibn al-Zubayr and the Mahdī” (datable into the time of the Second Civil War, i.e., 64-73 A.H./683-692 C.E.).¹²⁹ These two traditions are preserved in several variants with different *isnāds* and thus permit an *isnād* analysis. Cook examines whether the dating based on an *isnād* analysis, following the principles defined by Schacht, is corroborated by the external dating of the two traditions. His conclusion is that “in

¹²⁶ Cook, “Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions”, 23-47.

¹²⁷ This method belongs, actually, to my fifth category of dating methods which is not discussed in this article (see note 5). Cook’s article is, nevertheless included here because of its importance for *isnād* analysis.

¹²⁸ Cook, “Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions”, 25.

¹²⁹ In the case of the “tradition on the Andalusian invasion of Egypt”, Cook admits “the possibility that the apparent relationship between prophecy and event is fortuitous”. *Ibid.*, 29.

none of the [. . .] cases examined does the obvious external dating match the obvious Schachtian dating”.¹³⁰ Among Schacht’s criteria of dating the following proved to be unreliable: first, the general dating “that fabrication of legal traditions began only around the year 100 A.H./718 C.E.”; secondly, the rule “that the better the *isnād* in terms of the classical norms of *Hadīth* criticism, the later the real date of the tradition”;¹³¹ thirdly, the claim that traditions going back to the Prophet are the most recent ones; and, finally, the common link method. Cook summarises the result of his study in the sentence: “There is nothing in my findings that could serve to encourage recruitment to the Schachtian school” of dating traditions.¹³² This discovery, based on two concrete examples, is not surprising in view of the theoretical weaknesses of Schacht’s dating methods which I discussed above.¹³³ Based on a much broader textual basis and by using other methods of analysis, I came to a similar conclusion in my study *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*.¹³⁴

However, I am convinced that some of the criteria proposed by Schacht for the dating of traditions remain valuable, under the condition that they are freed of their Schachtian interpretation and that they are removed from their connections with his other principles of dating. The common link method is one of the principles which deserves more confidence than Cook is prepared to give it. In his amiable manner of discussion, Cook writes: “I am sympathetic to critics of this papers who urge that the existence of common links must mean something; but just what it means, I do not pretend to know”.¹³⁵

In view of the results which the examination of Schacht’s dating methods have produced, Cook’s reservation is understandable. Schacht considered the common link as the originator or fabricator of the tradition in question and denied emphatically that he had transmitted it from the preceding generation and even less from the individual he named as his informant. Cook, on the other hand, came to the conclusion that in the two cases which are datable on external grounds,

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³³ See pp. 7-9, 11-12, 16-20.

¹³⁴ Except for the common link phenomenon. See note 24. Cook’s and my own negative judgement on Schacht’s dating method affects his method as a whole, the interplay of individual premises and rules on which his instances of dating are based, and the interpretation which Schacht gave to certain phenomena occurring in the field of *Hadīth*.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 46, note 74.

the common links cannot be the originators of the traditions in question, because these traditions must be earlier.

But Cook's conclusion that "the common link method performs poorly" has to do with the fact that he slavishly follows Schacht's idea of what the common link represents.¹³⁶ When discussing Schacht's and Juynboll's interpretation of the common link phenomenon, I have already suggested that an alternative interpretation is possible and that there are reasons in many cases not to consider the common links as the originators or rather fabricators of the traditions in question but as the first major collectors and professional disseminators of traditions.¹³⁷ One reason is my conviction (which I share with Schacht) that the transmission lines which fan out from the common link onwards until they reach the later collections are, for the most part, the real paths of transmission (Schacht's "real part" of the *isnād* structure). This is not meant to exclude occasional instances of improvement or fabrications of *isnāds*.¹³⁸

If most of the transmitters of the *isnād* strands which fan out from the common link onwards are real transmitters, it is implausible to deny *a priori* and categorically that the common link could be a real transmitter as well. Why must the common link always be a fabricator? Why could he not have received the tradition (at least the gist of it) from the person he gives as his informant? I have discussed the arguments brought forward by those who regard the common link as the fabricator elsewhere in some detail.¹³⁹ So in the present context I shall reject this interpretation of the common link without additional argument. That the common links which appear from the generation of the successors onwards should be considered mostly as major collectors is not meant to exclude that, occasionally, they can have invented a tradition, changed – intentionally or by mistake – the *matn* or *isnād* of a tradition which they had received, or can have not given the right names of their informants.

If one applies this conception of the common link to the two eschatological traditions which Cook served to refute the common link method, it becomes obvious that the external dating fits very well the position of the common link in the *isnād* bundles. In the case of the tradition con-

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³⁷ This definition concerns only common links from the generation of the Successors onwards, not those on the level of the Companions. The latter must not be mixed up with the former. See below p. 38.

¹³⁸ For the reason why only occasional see above pp. 31-32.

¹³⁹ See Motzki, "Quo vadis *Hadīth*-Forschung?".

cerning “Ibn Zubayr and the Mahdī”, the *isnād* bundle suggests Abū al-Ḥalīl as source of the common link Qatāda (117 A.H./735-6 C.E.).¹⁴⁰

The tradition about “The reign of Tiberius” is more complicated because it represents the rare case of a tradition with two independent common links who are contemporaries but lived in different countries. In addition, each common link has different informants, a fact which is also somewhat rare. In such a case it is difficult to decide what happened. In order to explain how the different informants and *isnāds* of each common link came into being, one could imagine that the common link received the tradition from more than one informant, possibly with different *matns* and *isnāds*, and transmitted them at times as individual traditions with their original *matn*, at other times in the form of a combined tradition, that is with one *matn* but varying *isnāds*. The fact that a similar tradition appears both in Syria and Egypt without showing a common source in the *isnāds* can, perhaps, be explained as diffusion. The turn of the first century was certainly a period which was susceptible to eschatological predictions which must have been circulating widely and quickly as often happens at turns of centuries. There could have been slightly different versions spread by different people. The several names which appear as informants of the common links can reflect this situation; they must not necessarily be fictitious. The informants of the common links are the generation in which the tradition must have its origin according to the external dating. If we consider the common links not as originators/fabricators but as collectors of the traditions the dating based on the common link fits perfectly the external dating.¹⁴¹

The thesis that the common link phenomenon can best be explained by the collection and the systematic or institutionalised, as it were, spreading of traditions in circles of scholars, takes the fact into account, already realised by Schacht, that most of the common links we find in *Ḥadīth* literature belong to the first three generations active during the second century, i.e., the time between roughly 100 and 175 A.H.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ He is Ṣāliḥ b. Abī Maryam al-Ḍubāʿī, his date of death is unknown. Cf. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Tahdīb*, IV, 402-403.

¹⁴¹ For the issue of dating eschatological traditions by the common link see the recent article of A. Görke, “Eschatology, History, and the Common Link: A Study in Methodology” in H. Berg (ed.), *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2003, 179-208.

¹⁴² Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 174-175.

This is exactly the time in which the first substantial collections of traditions were compiled and their material transmitted more systematically in institutionalised scholarly circles. It became the basic material of the more substantial collections compiled at the end of the second and during the third century A.H.¹⁴³

When transmitting their material to their pupils, the first major collectors mostly confined themselves – probably for practical reasons – to give the name of only one informant, even if they had heard the content from more than one. This assumption explains the fact that the part of the *isnāds* which reaches from the common link back to earlier authorities has mostly the form of a single strand. The rarer cases in which two or more names are mentioned as informants of the common link show that occasionally scholars found it suitable to indicate that they had received the information from different people. This procedure was particularly called for when the collector combined different reports to a single new one. In such cases the common link transmitter could give the names of all his informants in the *isnād* (collective *isnād*) or mention sometimes one of the informants, sometimes another one. This explanation of the relation between the common link and his informant(s) is not meant to exclude the possibility that difference in the names of the informant of the common link can also be caused by carelessness or intentional change on the part of the common link or a later transmitter.

The idea that most common links from the *tābiʿūn* generation onwards were collectors, not fabricators, has consequences for the dating of their traditions. Then, the time of the common link's activity as a scholar is, in many cases, not the *terminus post quem* his traditions have existed (as Schacht and Juynboll claimed), but the *terminus ante quem*. We are entitled to assume that the common link received the tradition – at least the gist of it – from the individual(s) he gives as his informant(s) as long

¹⁴³ The generation of the earlier *tābiʿūn* (fl. in the last third of the first century A.H. must – at least partially – be added to this category of common links, even if they appear more rarely. The common links of this generation, such as ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr and Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab, can be integrated in the conception of collectors in assuming that they were the first minor collectors of traditions which were active at a time in which the system of institutionalised scholarship was only just starting. Actually, it was the generation of the teachers of the first major collectors, such as Ibn Šihāb al-Zuhri. The scholars from among the early *tābiʿūn* appear more rarely as common links because their teaching circles were yet small, and because only a few of their pupils became famous scholars themselves and collected and spread traditions systematically.

indications are lacking to the contrary.¹⁴⁴ The informant of the common link is crucial to the dating of the tradition, not the common link himself. The informant's date of death – or, more exactly, the time in which the common link had contact with him – is the *terminus post quem*. Epistemologically, the shift of the *terminus post quem* from the common link to his informant(s) is accompanied, by a decrease in certainty.

We can be sure that the tradition existed at the time of the common link (if he is a real one) because two or more people transmitted it from the common link, but the *isnād* does not give us a clue to decide whether the common link really had the tradition from the person he gives as his informant. This loss of certainty is compensated to a certain degree. It is compensated first by the legitimate premise that in most cases the collector will have given the real informant. For there is no reason to assume that most collectors invented them. Some collectors may have had reasons to hide their real informant in some cases or may have boasted occasionally with a spectacular authority. But these cases must be considered the exceptions, not the rule. Secondly, a systematic investigation of a common link's practice of giving his informants can help to judge the reliability of a common link.¹⁴⁵

The conception of the common link as systematic collector does not explain common links which belong to the generation of the *ṣaḥāba* or the case of the Prophet himself being the common link. These cases require other explanations. Since this issue has not yet been sufficiently studied, I confine myself to a few remarks. We should differentiate between traditions in which only one Companion appears as common link and *mutawāṭir* traditions in which the Prophet is the common link from which several companions are alleged to have transmitted. In the first case, we cannot exclude *a priori* that such traditions are the relics of a real transmission process. Circles of pupils developed probably already around some Companions. Out of these circles grew the first

¹⁴⁴ Such indications can be detected for example by studying systematically the traditions of the common link in question and by examining his practice of giving informants. For examples of such investigations see Motzki, *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*; idem, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*; idem, "Der Fiqh des-Zuhrī: die Quellenproblematik" in *Der Islam*, 68 (1991), 1-44; English transl., "The Jurisprudence of Ibn Šihāb az-Zuhrī. A Source-critical Study" (Nijmegen, 2001, http://webdoc.uhn.kun.nl/mono/m/motzki_h/juriofibs.pdf), 55 pp.

¹⁴⁵ There are only very few investigations of this kind until now. For the common link Ibn Ğurayğ, see Motzki, *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz* passim and esp. 209-212; idem, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 234-238.

scholarly circles of the early *tābiʿūn* generation in the great administrative and intellectual centres of the early Islamic world.¹⁴⁶ Besides, we must reckon with family or tribal traditions which focus on a Companion and may be very early.¹⁴⁷ Such traditions could even have been preserved for some time independently of the scholarly circles and could have been covered by the systematic collection of traditions only at a later date.¹⁴⁸ How traditions developed in which the Prophet appears as a common link, I do not know. I assume that there is no general solution of this problem; different possibilities must be accounted for. In any case, the issue deserves further study.

B. *Source Reconstruction on the Basis of Isnāds*

Our knowledge of the first two centuries of Islam is based on sources dating mostly not earlier than the third century. These sources pretend to be collections of pieces of information which are much earlier and which were transmitted by several generations of scholars. Yet from later sources we also know that there were already earlier collections compiled during the second or even the first century, of which only the titles and the names of their putative authors are preserved. For the historian of early Islam, who has to rely on the later sources because they are almost the only ones available, the question arises whether these sources really contain earlier material and, if so, how early it is. This question can hardly be answered by analysing the content of the texts. The *isnāds*, on the contrary, can be of much help. Many sources provide chains of transmitters for every piece of information or give, at least, the name of the person of whom the information is said to derive. If these chains of transmitters are not entirely fictitious, they can tell us something about the history of the texts before they became taken down in the later collections.

The possible usefulness of the *isnāds* for the “reconstruction of earlier sources” – this expression which will be clarified below – was realised by Western scholars already in the nineteenth century. Thanks to their

¹⁴⁶ Cf. H. Motzki, “Die Entstehung des Rechts” in A. Noth/J. Paul (eds.), *Der islamische Orient. Grundzüge seiner Geschichte*, Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 1998, 167 ff.

¹⁴⁷ I have reconstructed such Companion traditions in “The Prophet and the Cat” and “The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq”. For another example see D.S. Powers, “On Bequests in Early Islam”.

¹⁴⁸ An example of an early tradition emerging only in later collections is the Surraq *ḥadīṭ*. Cf. H. Motzki, “Der Prophet und die Schuldner. Eine *ḥadīṭ*-Untersuchung auf dem Prüfstand” in *Der Islam*, 77 (2000), 1-83.

experience in Biblical studies, early scholars working in the field of Islamic history like Julius Wellhausen, not only had a keen sense for “source reconstruction” but they also had right at their disposal most suitable sources for such a reconstruction, namely, al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310 A.H./923 C.E.) monumental *Taʾrīḥ al-rusūl wa l-mulūk* and al-Balādhurī’s (d. 279 A.H./892 C.E.) *Futūḥ al-buldān*. In these works every report is equipped with an *isnād*. By investigating the *isnāds* of a compilation and looking for common transmitters in its transmission lines, material of earlier compilers was detected, such as Ibn Ishāq (d. 150 A.H./767 C.E.), Abū Miḥnaf (d. 157 A.H./775 C.E.), Sayf b. ʿUmar (d. 180 A.H./796 C.E.), al-Wāqidi (d. 207 A.H./823 C.E.) and al-Madāʿinī (d. 228 A.H./843 C.E.).¹⁴⁹ Most scholars of early Islamic history accepted the method in principle, although some details of its application remained controversial.¹⁵⁰ It was also used in other fields of Islamic studies, such as *tafsīr*, *Hadīth* in the stricter sense, and *adab*.¹⁵¹ An investigation into the sources of al-Ṭabarī’s voluminous commentary of the Qurʾān, for example, detected quite a number of substantial earlier collections on which his *Tafsīr* is based. Among them are such early ones like that of Ibn Abī Naǧīḥ (d. 131 A.H./748-9 C.E.), Ibn Ǧurayǧ (d. 150 A.H./767 C.E.), Maʿmar b. Rāšid (d. 153 A.H./770 C.E.), Abū Ǧaʿfar al-Rāzī (d. ca. 160 A.H./777 C.E.), Asbāṭ b. Naṣr al-Hamdānī (fl. first half of the second A.H./eight century C.E.), Ibn Ishāq (d. 150 A.H./767 C.E.) and Sufyān al-Ṭawrī (d. 161 A.H./778 C.E.).¹⁵² Among the

¹⁴⁹ See J. Wellhausen, “Prolegomena zur ältesten Geschichte des Islams” in his *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, Berlin, 1844-1899, VI, 1-60.

¹⁵⁰ See, e.g., A. Noth, “Der Charakter der ersten großen Sammlungen von Nachrichten zur frühen Kalifenzeit” in *Der Islam*, 47 (1971), 168-199; U. Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf. Ein Beitrag zur Historiographie der Umayyadischen Zeit*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1971; G. Rotter, “Zur Überlieferung einiger historischer Werke Madāʿinīs in Ṭabarīs Annalen” in *Oriens*, 23-24 (1974), 103-133; Kh. Athamina, “The sources of al-Balādhurī’s *Ansāb al-ashraf*”, in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 5 (1984), 237-262; J.A. Bellamy, “Sources of Ibn abī l-Dunyā’s *Kitāb Maqāt al-Amīr al-Muʾminīn*” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 104 (1984), 3-19; S. Leder, *Das Korpus al-Haiṭam ibn ʿAdī (st. 207/822). Herkunft, Überlieferung, Gestalt früher Texte der Aḥbār Literatur*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1991; S. Günther, *Quellenuntersuchungen zu den “Maqātil at-Ṭālibiyyīn” des Abū l-Faraǧ al-Iṣfahānī (gest. 356/967)*, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 1991.

¹⁵¹ For the field of *adab* see L. Zolondek, “The sources of the *Kitāb al-Aghām*” in *Arabica*, 8 (1961), 294-308; F. Fleischhammer, “Hinweise auf schriftliche Quellen im *Kitāb al-Aǧām*” in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, 28 (1979), 53-62; W. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-farīd des Andalusiers Ibn ʿAbdrabbih (246/860-328/940): ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte* in series *Islamkundliche Untersuchungen* 70, Berlin, K. Schwarz, 1983.

¹⁵² Cf. H. Horst, “Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar at-Ṭabarīs” in *Zeitschrift*

collections of *Hadīṭ* in the stricter sense, only al-Buḥārī's (d. 256 A.H./870 C.E.) *al-Ġāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī's (d. 211 A.H./826 C.E.) *Muṣannaf* have been systematically investigated with the method until now.¹⁵³

Although the use of the *isnāds* for the "reconstruction of earlier sources" is in principle accepted, there is much disagreement about it in detail. First, how is it to be used? Second, what does "reconstruction of a source" mean? Third, how far back in time does the method leads us? I shall review these topics, which are connected with each other, focusing on the field of *Hadīṭ* in the stricter sense.

According to Fuat Sezgin the method works as follows: First, all *isnāds* given in a compilation, such as al-Buḥārī's *Ġāmi'*, are arranged according to their youngest transmitters (the informants of al-Buḥārī). Second, the *isnāds* of those among the youngest transmitters who are frequently mentioned by the compiler (al-Buḥārī) must be further checked for whether in their transmission lines they have names in common. If they do not, they must be regarded themselves as authors of sources which the compiler has used. If they do, the last common name of their *isnāds* which contains the same transmitters, must be considered the author of an earlier source (while the other common names indicate only transmitters).¹⁵⁴

Sezgin gives the following *isnād* as example which occurs frequently in al-Buḥārī's *Ġāmi'*: 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad [al-Musnadī] (d. 220 A.H./843 C.E.) – 'Abd al-Razzāq [al-Ṣan'ānī] (d. 211 A.H./826 C.E.) – Ma'amar [b. Rāšid] (d. 153 A.H./770 C.E.) – Hammām [b. Munabbih] (d. 130 A.H./747 C.E.) – Abū Hurayra (d. 58 A.H./678 C.E. or 59/679).¹⁵⁵ One would expect that, according to his rule, Sezgin singles Abū Hurayra out as the author of the source, because Abū Hurayra is the last name which all those *isnāds* have in common. Surprisingly, Sezgin does not. He maintains that all individuals in the *isnād* are authors, except Abū

der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 103 (1953), 290-307. The list of compilations given above is my own based on Horst's findings. Horst himself assumes that there were even earlier ones, such as the *Tafsīrs* of Muḡāhid (d. 102 A.H./720-1 C.E. or 103/721-2), 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥa (d. 120 A.H./738 C.E. or 143/760) and al-Suddī (d. 127 A.H./744-5 C.E.).

¹⁵³ Cf. F. Sezgin, *Buḥārī'nin kaynakları hakkında araştırmalar*, Istanbul, 1956; Motzki, *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*; idem, "The *Muṣannaf* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī as a Source of Authentic *aḥādīth* of the First Century A.H". in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 50 (1991), 1-21.

¹⁵⁴ F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1967, I, 82.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

Hurayra.¹⁵⁶ This inconsistency may be caused, on the one hand, by Sezgin's idea that the names occurring in an *isnād* indicate "authors and authorised transmitters of books"¹⁵⁷ and, on the other hand, by his conviction that Abū Hurayra, although he possessed written notes, cannot be the author of a book of almost one hundred and forty *ḥadīths* from the Prophet.¹⁵⁸

Be that as it may, Sezgin thinks that the early source from which al-Buḥārī draws, is a collection of Hammām b. Munabbih which is known from later bio-bibliographical literature as "the *ṣaḥīfa* of Hammām" and which is also preserved as an independent booklet transmitted through 'Abd al-Razzāq and Ma'mar.¹⁵⁹ In what form had al-Buḥārī the collection of Hammām at his disposal? In his original form transmitted through Ma'mar, 'Abd al-Razzāq and al-Musnadī, or more or less scattered and rearranged in the own books of the three transmitters? However, this question – which Sezgin does not dare to answer – is only marginal for him because he is convinced that al-Buḥārī's traditions with the *isnād* mentioned above, derive from Hammām's *ṣaḥīfa* anyway.¹⁶⁰ He assumes that they were transmitted carefully, irrespective of whether they were combined with other traditions to make larger collections or not.

According to Sezgin, the reliability of the transmission process is guaranteed mainly by the fact that it happened by writing down the texts and additional authorisation of them by the author or transmitter from whom they were received or by using written sources without authorisation. The respective type of transmission, Sezgin thinks, is reflected in the transmission formulas used.¹⁶¹ This method which Sezgin proposed for the reconstruction of earlier sources on the basis of later ones – not only in the field of *Ḥadīth* in the proper sense, but for Arabic literature of the first Islamic centuries in general – provoked a lively debate among Western scholars. The criticism was chiefly directed at three of Sezgin's assumptions.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 70. Also *ibid.*, 77 the author writes that "the *isnāds* (denote) written texts [. . .]" and "the formulas in the chains of transmission [. . .] actually refer to written sources".

¹⁵⁸ According to M. Hamidullah, the *ṣaḥīfa* is, on the contrary, a collection of Abū Hurayra which he dictated to Hammām. Cf. M. Hamidullah, *Saḥīfa Hammām ibn Munabbih*, Luton, U.K., Apex, 1979, 60.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 88-97.

¹⁶⁰ Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, I, 81.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

First, this criticism challenged Sezgin's idea that the transmission process happened generally on the basis of written texts and that the names given in the *isnāds* are authors or transmitters of written texts. This, in turn, lead to an extensive discussion about the question of what role the oral and written transmissions have played during the first Islamic centuries.¹⁶² The outcome of this fruitful discussion was that Sezgin's interpretation of the transmission process as one of passing only books on, is too undifferentiated. The transmission must rather be understood in terms of a living teaching system in which both oral and written forms of passing information on were instrumental. The part which both forms played could vary with respect to time, region, scholar and subject, and must not be generalised, not even for the transmission of *Hadīṭ* in the stricter sense.

Secondly, the discussion of Sezgin's method also made clear that he over-estimated the reliability of transmission and, for that matter, the possibility of reconstructing lost sources on the basis of later compilations. It is dangerous to conclude on the basis of the *isnāds* alone that traditions of which the *isnāds* contain a putative author of a book (dealing with the same subject as the traditions in question) reproduce parts of that book in their original form. We would be on safer ground in assuming only that the texts go back to an earlier compiler, not to a particular compilation of his.¹⁶³ Sezgin's claim, for example, that al-Buḥārī's

¹⁶² Cf., for example, G. Stauth, *Die Überlieferung des Korankommentars Muḡāhid b. Ḡabrs. Zur Frage der Rekonstruktion der in den Sammelwerken des 3. Jh. d. H. benutzten frühislamischen Quellenwerke*, Ph.D. thesis, Giessen, 1969; S.M. al-Samuk, *Die historischen Überlieferungen nach Ibn Ishāq. Eine synoptische Untersuchung*, Ph.D. thesis, Frankfurt am Main, 1978; R. Sellheim, "Abū 'Alī al-Qāfī. Zum Problem mündlicher und schriftlicher Überlieferung am Beispiel von Sprichwörter-sammlungen" in *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Vorderen Orients. Festschrift für Bertold Spuler*, ed. H.R. Roemer/A. Noth, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1981, 362-374; idem, "Muhammads erstes Offenbarungserlebnis. Zum Problem mündlicher und schriftlicher Überlieferung im 1./7. und 2./8. Jahrhundert" in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 10 (1987), 1-16; W. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kūṭāb al-'Iqd al-fa'īd des Andalusiers Ibn 'Abdrabbih (246/860-328/940)*; G. Schoeler, "Die Frage der schriftlichen oder mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im frühen Islam" in *Der Islam*, 62 (1985), 201-230; idem, "Weiteres zur Frage der schriftlichen und mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im Islam" in *Der Islam*, 66 (1989), 38-67; idem, "Mündliche Thora und Ḥadīṭ: Überlieferung, Schreibverbot, Redaktion" in *Der Islam*, 66 (1989), 213-251 (English translation in H. Motzki (ed.), *Hadith: Origins and Developments*, in series *The Formation of the Classical Islamic World* 28, Aldershot, Ashgate/Variorum, 2004); idem, "Schreiben und Veröffentlichen. Zur Verwendung und Funktion der Schrift in den ersten islamischen Jahrhunderten" in *Der Islam*, 69 (1992), 1-43; Motzki, *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*, 87-95; idem, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 95-104.

¹⁶³ Cf. H. Motzki, "The Author and his Work in Islamic Literature of the First Centuries. The Case of 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Musannaf*", in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 28 (2003), 171-201.

traditions with the above mentioned *isnād* going back via Hammām b. Munabbih to Abū Hurayra reproduce the traditions such as they were contained in Hammām's *ṣaḥīfa* can only be considered as one of several possibilities.¹⁶⁴ Even if one could prove that in this particular case, the same cannot be supposed for other cases of *Hadīth* transmission as well and still less for the transmission of other sorts of knowledge.¹⁶⁵

Thirdly, Sezgin's idea that the transmission formulae in the *isnāds* reflect faithfully the types of transmission such as they have been defined in the classical handbooks of *Hadīth* is doubtful, too, in its general claim. It has been shown that it is not generally true, at least, for the second century A.H. This is just the period in which most of the early compilations originated.¹⁶⁶

Yet the shortcomings of Sezgin's application of the method does not justify the conclusion that the *isnāds* are useless for the reconstruction of earlier sources. We must only be aware that "reconstruction" does not necessarily lead to books and their original texts, and we must look for additional indications in a compilation and its traditions which might help to substantiate the conclusions which can be drawn from the names contained in the *isnāds*.

In my study *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*, I used the *isnāds* found in 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* to recover earlier "sources", namely, material going back to Ma'mar b. Rāšid, Ibn Ğurayġ, Sufyān al-Tawrī and Ibn 'Uyayna, who are a generation older than 'Abd al-Razzāq. Although, at least, three of the four scholars are mentioned in later sources as authors of books of the same genre as 'Abd al-Razzāq's, the conclusion that the latter derived his material from those books (as Sezgin would conclude) cannot be substantiated because the books seem to be lost. A safer conclusion would be that 'Abd al-Razzāq received the texts in the lectures of the four scholars, a conclusion which is corroborated by biographical traditions. The idea suggests itself that their supposed compilations may have formed for a large part the basis of their lectures and that 'Abd al-Razzāq wrote the lectures down, but how he did it – word-for-word or in taking notes – we cannot ascertain without an investigation of the texts itself and their comparison with

¹⁶⁴ Another possibility is that they underwent changes in the course of the transmission process.

¹⁶⁵ A concise summary of the problems which must be taken into account when trying to reconstruct earlier sources is given in S. Leder, *Das Korpus al-Haiṭam ibn 'Adī* (st. 207/822), 3-14.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Motzki, *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*, 92-95; idem, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 101-104.

transmissions preserved from the same scholars by other transmitters than ‘Abd al-Razzāq.

In order to corroborate the dating of the texts and to show that ‘Abd al-Razzāq did not ascribe his traditions arbitrarily to his informants, invented *isnāds* or equipped invented traditions with well-known *isnāds*, it is worth the effort to study the *isnāds* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq in detail trying to find indications of forgery or the opposite. There are different approaches that can be applied for this end.

1) The *isnāds* of the alleged major “sources” can be analysed in order to draw up what I called individual profiles. The items of such a profile could be: the number of major informants; the quantity of traditions ascribed to them; the number of minor informants and the quantities of their traditions; the number of rarely mentioned informants and the quantity of traditions allegedly going back to them; the amount of traditions giving the personal opinion of the respective scholar; the amount of anonymously transmitted texts etc.¹⁶⁷ A comparison of the profiles of the different sources enables us to draw conclusions as to whether the assumption is probable that the compiler forged his sources. In the case of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf*, the result was negative.¹⁶⁸

2) Peculiarities of the collector’s (in our case ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s) references to his informants can be used as indications of reliability; such as: expression of ignorance or doubt as to who the informant or what his precise wording was; indirect transmission from a major (direct) informant; explanations of or critical comments on the traditions of the informant; or giving variants of the same tradition known from the same or another source. In the case of ‘Abd al-Razzāq, such peculiarities could be found, and it seems not reasonable to assume that he inserted them sporadically in his *isnāds* with the intent to deceive his colleagues and pupils and to mask the fact that his ascription of traditions to certain sources is arbitrary.

This same procedure can be applied to a collector’s major sources (in our case to Ibn Ğurayġ, Ma‘mar, al-Tawrī and Ibn ‘Uyayna). The profiles of their major sources and their references to their sources in general can provide us not only with indications as to the reliability or unreliability of the earlier collectors (such as Ibn Ğurayġ, Ma‘mar, al-

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 56-58; idem, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 58-61; also idem, “The *Muṣannaf* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq”, 2-5.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Ṭawrī and Ibn ‘Uyayna) but also with additional arguments to decide the question of whether the later collector’s transmission (such as ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s) can be considered reliable or not.

I tested this hypothesis in detail with the material transmitted by ‘Abd al-Razzāq from Ibn Ḡurayḡ and I found that the individual profile of his transmission and that of his major sources can be brought out very clearly by looking at the differences among the traditions which are ascribed to different sources. Significant differences could be found concerning the type of tradition (transmission of the teacher’s personal opinion or of a tradition on his authority); types of transmission (preference for family *isnāds*, major informants, local authorities etc.); the preference for a certain type of authority (Successors, Companions, the Prophet); the quality of the *isnāds*; the terminology of transmission (i.e., what formulas are used); and the genre of the tradition (statement or dialogue).¹⁶⁹ In our case, the findings corroborated the conclusions which could be drawn on the basis of an analysis which focused only on the names of the transmitters in the *isnāds*.

In this way, it was possible to reconstruct on the basis of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf* not only the material going back to Ibn Ḡurayḡ, a source to be dated into the second quarter of the second century, but also the material of two earlier sources, ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. 115 A.H./733 C.E.) and ‘Amr b. Dīnār (d. 126 A.H./744 C.E.). Material of a source, such as ‘Aṭā’, means the content of his teaching such as his pupil, in our case Ibn Ḡurayḡ, has reproduced it.

The question of whether the pupil’s reproduction was good or not so good, can be tentatively answered on the basis of formal peculiarities of his transmission, like those described above. A definite judgement on the quality of a pupil’s transmission, however, can only be given if the transmissions of the same material by other pupils are available and are compared with it. I showed this for the case of ‘Amr b. Dīnār of whom not only Ibn Ḡurayḡ’s transmission is available but also that of Ibn ‘Uyayna,¹⁷⁰ and in more detail for al-Zuhrī.¹⁷¹ The reconstruction of al-Zuhrī’s (d. 124 A.H./742 C.E.) teaching, based on

¹⁶⁹ For more details see my *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz* and *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*, passim, and the summary in “The *Muṣannaf* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq”, 2-12.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Motzki, *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*, 161-167; idem, *The Origins*, 177-185.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Motzki, “Der Fiqh des-Zuhrī”; idem, “The Jurisprudence of Ibn Šihāb az-Zuhrī”.

two independent later collections, Mālik's *Muwatta'* and 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf*, shows particularly well both the possibilities of the *isnād* analysis described above and the need to complete them by a thorough comparative study of the *matns*. Only the combination of both methods leads to convincing results. Unfortunately, however, we must often be content with conclusions drawn from the *isnāds* because substantial variant transmissions are not available.

IV. *Dating with Isnād and Matn*

The conclusion drawn at the end of the preceding section that the investigation of the *isnāds* needs to be completed by the analysis of the *matns* applies not only to source reconstruction. It also applies to the dating of single traditions. This insight is visible already in an article by Jan Hendrik Kramers, published in 1953, and Joseph van Ess' book *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie*, published in 1975, benefited much from this approach.¹⁷² The method of the two studies has not been appreciated very much until recently. Kramers' article passed unnoticed and the effect of van Ess' contribution was cut short by Cook's criticism of its method.¹⁷³ The recent revival of this method seems to be due to both the insight that a combined approach can lead to more reliable results than the investigation of *isnāds* or *matns* alone, and to an uneasiness with the actual development of *isnād* analysis which tended to become a too artificial interpretation of *isnād* bundles.

The combined method can be called *isnād-cum-matn* or *matn-cum-isnād* analysis, depending on the starting point of the investigation or the intensity with which the two items are used for conclusions. Among the several possible approaches, the one which starts from the assumption that there must be a correlation between *isnād* variants and *matn* variants of a tradition, if they were part of a real transmission process, seems to be the most rewarding. The scholars who adopt this assumption are convinced that such a correlation is unlikely to be the result of systematic forgery because the phenomenon of correlation is so widespread that almost every *muḥaddith* must have participated in forgery. The fact that there is often a correlation between the different branches

¹⁷² Jan Hendrik Kramers, "Une tradition à tendance manichéenne (La 'mangeuse de verdure'" in *Acta Orientalia*, 21 (1950-1953), 10-22.

¹⁷³ See above pp. 27-31.

and strands of the *isnād* bundle belonging to a tradition, on the one hand, and, on the other, the different variants of its *matn* allows checking of the *isnād* analysis by the *matns* or vice versa. The method is best illustrated in two studies which both appeared in 1996: In Gregor Schoeler's book *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds* the origin and transmission process of two *sīra* traditions are traced; and in my study "Quo vadis *Hadīth*-Forschung?" a tradition ascribed to Nāfi' is investigated.¹⁷⁴

The *isnād-cum-matn* analysis as it is applied in the two studies proceeds in five steps: 1) All the variants of a tradition which can be found are compiled. 2) A bundle of all *isnād* variants are composed in form of a diagram in order to document the transmission process as it is reflected by the transmission lines and to detect partial common links and a common link.¹⁷⁵ In accordance with the interpretation proposed, when discussing the common link phenomenon in the preceding section, the common link is, provisionally, assumed to be the collector and professional disseminator.¹⁷⁶ 3) Whether the common link can be considered really as the collector or professional disseminator has to be checked by a *matn* analysis. It consists in compiling the texts belonging to the different transmission lines in order to make possible a synoptic comparison of one to the other. 4) Groups of *matn* variants and groups of *isnād* variants are to be compared to check whether there is a correlation or not. 5) If a correlation exists, then conclusions can be drawn regarding the original *matn* transmitted by the common link and the one responsible for whatever changes have occurred in the course of the transmission after the common link.

In this way reliability of the date established on the basis of the *isnād* analysis, or the relative chronology established on the basis of the *matn* analysis can be confirmed or disproved. The soundness of the conclusions grows with the number and diversity of variants available. With

¹⁷⁴ The three traditions studied in these publications had been investigated already before by G.H.A. Juynboll in his articles "Nāfi', the *Mawlā* of Ibn 'Umar, and his Position in Muslim *Hadīth* Literature" in *Der Islam*, 70 (1993), 207-244, and "Early Islamic Society as Reflected in its Use of *Isnāds*" in *Le Muséon*, 107 (1994), 151-194, esp. 160-166, 179-184, both articles focusing on the *isnād* analysis.

¹⁷⁵ This is not meant to exclude the possibility that some transmission lines or parts of it are fictitious.

¹⁷⁶ Schoeler speaks of him as the one "[der] die betreffende Tradition schulmässig verbreitet hat"; G. Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds* in series *Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients*, *Neue Folge* 14, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1996, 24.

this method the risk becomes considerably reduced that a common link which is the result of *isnād* forgery remains undetected.¹⁷⁷ I leave the description of the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis with that. Several recent studies tested this method with encouraging results.¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

At the end of this overview of methods which modern scholars in the West used or are still using in order to date Muslim traditions, the following conclusions can be drawn: The different methods have been considerably improved since the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, some methods seem to be more reliable than others. Dating particular traditions on the basis of the *matn* alone seems to be most inaccurate. A dating which argues by silence that a tradition has not existed before the time of the compilation in which it appears first, is uncertain and tends to be too late. A dating based solely on an investigation of the *isnāds* of a particular tradition and on the common link phenomenon are less sound than those who check the results of the *isnād* analysis by the thorough study of *matn* variants. This does not mean that the *isnād-cum-matn* method does not raise problems. It does, and efforts must be made to solve them in the future. Two questions remain, nevertheless: Can this or any other method provide, first, reliable datings in all circumstances and, second, datings which will be generally accepted? Two factors stand in the way of it. First of all, the scarcity of our sources, and, secondly, the fact that all dating methods must rely on assumptions derived from other sources. The first factor

¹⁷⁷ See also Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds*, 24, 26.

¹⁷⁸ I. Zaman, "The Science of *Rijāl* as a Method in the Study of Hadiths" in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 5 (1994) 1-34 where the author is not really concerned with dating *hadīths* but also takes the correlation between *isnāds* and *matns* as a starting point; A. Görke, "The Historical Tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya. A Study of 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr's Account" in H. Motzki (ed), *The Biography of Muhammad: the Issue of the Sources*, 240-275; idem, "Eschatology, History, and the Common Link"; Motzki, "*Quo vadis Hadīth-Forschung?*"; idem, "The Prophet and the Cat"; idem, "The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq"; idem, "The Collection of the Qurʾān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments" in *Der Islam*, 78 (2001), 1-34; idem, "The Origins of Muslim Exegesis"; U. Mitter, *Das frühislamische Patronat. Eine Untersuchung zur Rolle von fremden Elementen bei der Entwicklung des islamischen Rechts*, Ph.D. thesis, Nijmegen, 1999; R. Peters, "Murder in Khaybar: Some Thoughts on the Origins of the *Qasāma* Procedure in Islamic Law" in *Islamic Law and Society*, 9,2 (2002), 132-167.

needs no further comment, the second does. Dating traditions is not possible without having recourse to assumptions. They can be partly derived from general human experience, but partly more concrete assumptions are needed: for instance, on the dimensions of fabrication and falsification in the field of *Hadīth*; on the ways how knowledge was transmitted in the first two centuries of Islam; on the nature of the common links and single strands etc. In addition, all these assumptions must take into consideration that there may have been variation in time and place. The concrete assumptions mentioned can be based on different source material (e.g., reports on fabrications or on the ways how traditions were transmitted by different persons), but these assumptions will always be generalisations based on a limited number of particular facts. Depending on which facts we generalise, the views on the cultural history of early Islam can be very different. Therefore, whether the dating of a tradition is considered reliable or not, depends not only on the dating methods applied, but also on our preconceptions of early Islam which we have formed.