

## ESCHATOLOGY, HISTORY, AND THE COMMON LINK: A STUDY IN METHODOLOGY

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Is the chain of transmitters (*isnād*), which forms an essential part of Islamic traditions, of any value in establishing the authenticity or provenance of a tradition? This question is highly controversial in the study of early Islam. While some scholars hold that the fabrication and falsification of *asānīd* makes it impossible to use *asānīd* as a means to establish the time and place of origin of any given tradition, other scholars believe that at least in some traditions (and especially in those they are studying) the *asānīd* can be shown to indicate the true path of transmission. In some of these latter studies it is argued that forged *asānīd* can be detected in a careful study of the *asānīd* and variants in the *mutūn* of the traditions in question.<sup>1</sup>

This article aims at discussing the methodological basis on which any study of *asānīd* should be grounded. A method of distinguishing traditions in which the *asānīd* actually indicate the lines of transmission from traditions which display forged *asānīd* shall be developed in the course of the argument. It will be argued that in the former case the *asānīd* can be used for dating traditions. This dating of a tradition on the basis of its *asānīd* will then be put to test by confronting it with a dating of the same tradition on external grounds.

This last approach is not new: In a study conducted ten years ago, Michael Cook used eschatological traditions to test some methods and general rules Joseph Schacht had developed for dating traditions with the help of their *asānīd*. Then he compared these results

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Gregor Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 134–142, 150–151, 154–158, 163; Harald Motzki, “*Quo vadis Hadīṭ*-Forschung? Eine kritische Untersuchung von G.H.A. Juynboll: ‘Nāfi’, the *mawlā* of Ibn ‘Umar, and his position in Muslim *ḥadīth* literature’,” *Der Islam* 73 (1996): 219–221; Andreas Görke, “Die frühislamische Geschichtsüberlieferung zu Hudaibiya,” *Der Islam* 74 (1997): 221; Görke, “The Historical Tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya: A Study of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr’s Account,” in *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*, edited by Harald Motzki (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 256–258.

with the results from a dating of the same traditions on the basis of their *mutūn*. The result was discouraging: In none of the three traditions he studied did the *matn*-based dating correspond with the *isnād*-based dating.<sup>2</sup> His findings shall be reconsidered in this article.

Eschatological—or rather apocalyptic—traditions seem particularly apt for testing *isnād*-analytical methods, since at least some of these traditions can be dated on other grounds with some certainty. In his article “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,”<sup>3</sup> the Byzantinist Paul Alexander made some general considerations on how to treat eschatological texts as historical sources. For our purposes three points raised in that article are relevant:

- 1) Apocalyptic traditions often contain prophecies *ex eventu*. They claim to predict events that in fact already have happened; the traditions claim to be older than they are.
- 2) Although apocalyptic traditions often claim to be older than they are, several of them can be dated with some certainty. This is easiest when the tradition in question describes a line of events of an apocalyptic future. Assuming that such a tradition is invented at a certain time and then traced back to a former authority, the forger will include some historical facts (but in the form of prophecies) to lend it more credibility. As the forger will mostly be unable to correctly predict future events, the tradition will be in agreement with historical events only in the first part of the tradition. The tradition can then be dated approximately to the time of the last event that is still in agreement with historical facts.
- 3) Once the tradition is dated, it may be possible to draw conclusions to historical facts from the first part of the tradition. As this part usually contains historical facts to make the prophecy more credible, events mentioned there have a high probability of being historical even if they are not known otherwise.

Alexander's approach was followed by a number of scholars in Islamic Studies.<sup>4</sup> Although his study was confined to Syriac and Greek apoc-

<sup>2</sup> Michael Cook, “Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions,” *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1992): 23–47, for the results: 27–38.

<sup>3</sup> Paul J. Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,” *The American Historical Review* 73 (1968): 997–1018.

<sup>4</sup> Among others: Suliman Bashear, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 1 (1991): 173–307; Michael Cook, “Eschatology and the Dating of

alyses, his considerations and conclusions are general enough to be applied to Islamic apocalyptic texts as well. One characteristic of Islamic apocalyptic texts has to be taken into consideration, however: Most of the traditions we have are rather short, comprising only a few sentences. Common forms of Islamic apocalyptic traditions would be: "The Hour (i.e. that of the Last Judgment) will not come until this or that event takes place" or "A sign of the approaching Hour is that this or that event takes place." Other traditions would deal with the characteristics of the Mahdī, the Sufyānī or other figures associated with Muslim eschatological beliefs. Longer apocalyptic traditions exist, but are less common.

In order to use an eschatological text as a historical source, the time and place of its origin have to be established. In some cases this can be done by studying the events that the text alludes to. Naturally, longer texts contain more details and therefore give more clues to time and place of their origin. As noted above, most of the Islamic apocalyptic texts only consist of a few sentences and thus often make it difficult to assign to them a precise date. Nevertheless, conclusions as to the time of origin of a tradition can be drawn in some cases, if allusions to specific events are made. Assuming that many of these texts include prophecies *ex eventu*, identifying an event enables us to at least give a date after which a tradition came into circulation. In some cases, it may also be possible to give a date before which the tradition was circulated, e.g. through a vision of the future that did not come true. This kind of dating traditions—on the basis of identifying the events alluded to—will be referred to as *matn*-based dating.

In the case of Islamic traditions there might be another means of establishing the date of a tradition—the *isnād*. What we are concerned with here primarily is the common link. Below, we will discuss different concepts of what the common link (that is a common transmitter in all variants of a tradition) represents and how traditions may be dated with its help. This kind of dating—using the evidence of the *asānīd*—will be referred to as *isnād*-based dating.<sup>5</sup> If

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Traditions," 23–47; Lawrence I. Conrad, "Portents of the Hour: Ḥadīth and History in the First Century A.H.," unpublished typescript.

<sup>5</sup> Cook in his article used the terms *external dating* and *internal dating*. As these terms might easily be confused with external and internal source criticism and therefore can be misleading, preference was given to the terms *matn*-based and *isnād*-based

this kind of dating proves to be reliable, one would no longer have to rely on known historical facts to date the tradition. Once dated, conclusions to historical facts could then be drawn from those traditions.

## I. *General considerations*

Before we turn to the traditions, some general considerations will be discussed, which have to be borne in mind when one studies early Islamic traditions.

### I.1 *The changing of traditions*

There is an important feature of traditions that cannot be emphasized enough: Traditions are not static! They tend to change in the course of transmission. The reasons for this change are manifold: The system of transmission in early Islam can be characterized as a combination of oral and written transmission, written transmission becoming more important in the course of time, but always being accompanied by oral transmission. In oral transmission, changes occur naturally and unintentionally. People may remember different parts of a tradition, forget the exact wording, forget the exact line of transmitters. Apart from these unintentional changes, other changes occur due to different motivations of tradents. A teacher may emphasize different points of the tradition at different times. One transmitter may find a certain point in a tradition important and emphasize it or reduce the tradition to it. A transmitter may adapt the tradition, use synonyms, add explanations, etc. In these two kinds of changes, the *meaning* of the tradition stays the same. A third kind of change would be the deliberate change of the meaning—or the *isnād*—to make it sound better for the audience, make it fit a special situation, etc. Finally, a tradition may be completely reworked to change the meaning and give the opposite sense, counter *ahādīth* can be invented, duplicate traditions can be produced with completely new *asānīd*. All of these changes can be shown to have happened in Muslim traditions, but not all traditions underwent the same changes.

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dating. *Isnād*-based dating in this sense also takes into consideration variants in wording between different *mutūn*, but not their contents.

While the first two kinds of changes are very helpful in the analysis of *asānīd* and *mutūn*, the second two kinds, and especially the last kind, usually complicate the analysis of a tradition.

In the case of eschatological traditions, the reworking of a tradition by later transmitters is an especially relevant issue. The more specific a tradition is in regard to what it predicts, the more reworking is necessary when the events predicted do not take place.<sup>6</sup> This makes the dating of eschatological traditions a lot more difficult.

#### EXCURSUS: INVENTION AND RECAST OF APOCALYPTIC TRADITIONS

To illustrate the process of invention and recast of traditions, a modern example shall be adduced. Shortly after the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington on September 11, 2001, emails and messages were circulated through the internet stating that Nostradamus (1503–1566) predicted the attack on the World Trade Center in his prophecies. One of the texts that were circulated reads:

In the City of God there will be a great thunder,  
two brothers torn apart by chaos,  
while the fortress endures, the great leader will succumb.  
The third big war will begin when the big city is burning.

While this was proven to be a hoax—Nostradamus never wrote this quatrain—it may serve as an example of how an event can be used to evoke an apocalyptic scenario. We may imagine the same process at work in medieval apocalypses: An event known to the addressees is taken to be a sign of the approaching end of the world; in the case of the modern prophecy above: World War III.

The phenomenon of recasting a tradition could also be observed in one of those messages. In the version circulating after the attack on the World Trade Center, the text reads:

Two steel birds will fall from the sky on the Metropolis.  
The sky will burn at forty-five degrees latitude.  
Fire approaches the great new city.  
Immediately a huge, scattered flame leaps up.  
Within months rivers flow with blood.  
The undead will roam the earth for little time.

Some of the emails included the remark that New York City lies between 40–45 degrees latitude. This text is a hoax as well, but in

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<sup>6</sup> For some examples of traditions being recast and reinterpreted see S. Bashear, "Muslim Apocalypses and the Hour: A Case-Study in Traditional Reinterpretation," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 75–99.

contrast to the first example, it is not a complete invention, but a revision of a verse Nostradamus in fact wrote. The original quatrain of Nostradamus in an English translation reads:

The sky will burn at forty-five degrees latitude,  
 Fire approaches the great new city  
 Immediately a huge, scattered flame leaps up  
 When they want to have verification from the Normans.<sup>7</sup>

Now this original quatrain seems to have been too vague and the reference to the Normans inopportune to use it as evidence for a Nostradamus prophecy of the attack on the World Trade Center. Thus the tradition had to be reworked, some parts were left out, other parts were added. Again, the process in medieval apocalypses may have been similar to the modern example: A known text, in the modern case one of Nostradamus, is reshaped in order to match it with actual events.<sup>8</sup>

The recast of traditions may in some cases make it impossible to assign a precise date to a given tradition. However, if many variants of a tradition exist, it might be possible to detect the reworking and the persons responsible for it. We therefore have to give some thoughts to the selection of our sources.

## I.2 *The Sources*

If the *asānīd* of different versions of a tradition are illustrated together in a chart, this chart will usually look somewhat like the one depicted in Figure 1: All, or almost all, versions have the lower part of the *isnād* in common, that is from the common link of the tradition back to the person S1 on whose authority the tradition is narrated. From the common link upwards, that is to his putative students and their students, the *asānīd* differ; some versions will still have the next transmitter in common, thus forming a so-called partial common link, while other transmitters will be particular to a certain version. Figure 1, of course, is an idealized illustration. We will discuss variants of this model later on.

<sup>7</sup> The French original reads: *Cinq et quarante degrés ciel bruslera/Feu approcher de la grand cité neuve/Instant grand flamme espars sautera/Quand on voudra des Normans faire preuve.* (Century VI, quatrain 97; most of Nostradamus' quatrain can be found online: <http://www.astrology-online.com/nostradamus-centuries.txt>).

<sup>8</sup> The discussion about these and other false prophecies can be found on several websites, see for example: <http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/weekly/aa091101b.htm>.

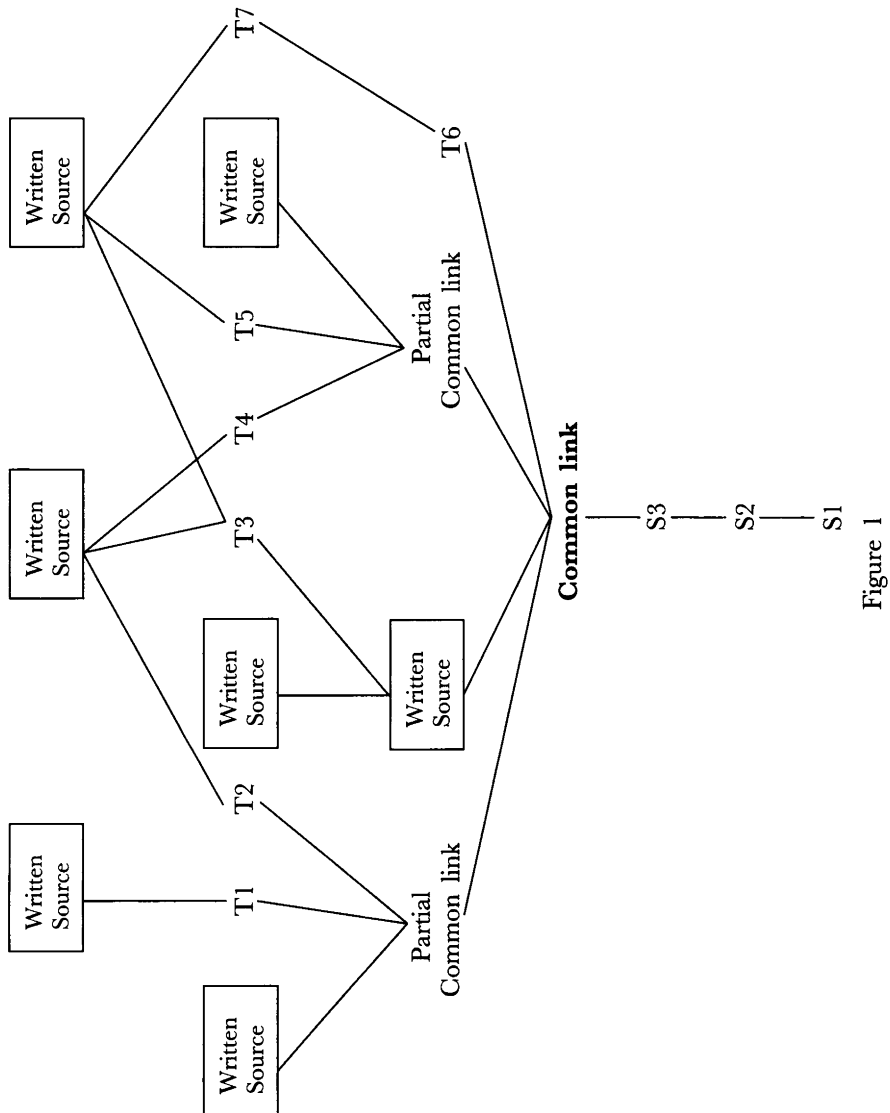


Figure 1

If we want a study using *isnād*-analytical methods to yield any relevant results, we need a large number of variants of a tradition and a large number of sources where this tradition is recorded. While the necessity of a large number of traditions was already illustrated above, the necessity of these traditions being recorded in different sources might be less obvious. Does it make a difference if, say, 30 traditions are recorded in some 20 different sources or if they are collected in a single source? It does for two reasons: On the one hand, the more independent sources we have, the more unlikely will it be that certain political motives, personal preferences etc. will have an effect on the overall picture of the traditions. An anti-Umayyad bias may have affected the selection of traditions in one source, but the more sources we have, the more likely will this bias be noted. On the other hand, a single source might be more restricted in regional terms. Although we do know that many scholars traveled a lot, they will still have different regional focuses. An author living most of his life in Baghdad will have access to a very large number of traditions transmitted by scholars from Iraq. He will also include some traditions from Syrian, Egyptian or Ḥijāzī transmitters, provided he traveled to these places or met these transmitters in Baghdad or on a *ḥajj*, but most probably the traditions from other places will take less room and will represent only a small part of the traditions in circulation there, while he may well record most of the traditions on a certain topic in circulation in Baghdad. Our author will most probably record even less of the traditions in circulation in more distant places like al-Andalus or Khurasān. Thus the traditions represented in a single source might give a rather distorted picture of what was really in circulation at that time.

In regard to the common link, this is particularly important. When we use a single source with a regional focus on Iraq, we might wrongly consider an Iraqi partial common link to be the common link of the whole tradition, just because the author failed to record many of the Syrian or Egyptian traditions. Even if he managed to record a Syrian and Egyptian *isnād*, these single strands might be considered to be later *dīves*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The term *dive* was coined by Gautier Juynboll in his article "Nāfi', the *mawla* of Ibn 'Umar, and His Position in Muslim *Ḥadīth* Literature," *Der Islam* 70 (1993): 213. It signifies an invented path of transmission that reaches downwards from a later transmitter to an older authority than the common link and deliberately avoids to mention the common link.



Another problem that we face when dealing with a single source is the fact that the same tradition might be quoted in different chapters of the work. The wording of the tradition might be slightly different, stressing different points according to the chapter. This would give the wrong impression that a tradition was frequently transmitted with a certain *isnād*, while in fact it is only one single tradition. It may also happen that a slip in the names of the *isnād* occurred. To give an example: Abū 'Ubayd in his *Kitāb al-amwāl* quotes a tradition with the *isnād* Ḥajjāj ← Ibn Abī Dhī'b ← al-Zuhrī (#85). In another chapter, he gives the same tradition with identical wording but with the *isnād* Yazīd b. Hārūn ← Ibn Abī Dhī'b ← al-Zuhrī (#433).<sup>10</sup> As the wording is identical, which is rather uncommon in versions of different transmitters, this is likely to be a single variant, the difference in the names of the transmitters being due to a mistake of Abū 'Ubayd or a later copyist of his work. Nevertheless, this mistake would suggest a common link in Ibn Abī Dhī'b, if this tradition were to be treated as two different traditions.<sup>11</sup> Such a mistake could be discovered more easily if many variants of a tradition were studied: If for instance in other sources all variants of the above tradition which are traced back through Ḥajjāj had this same wording while those traced back through Yazīd b. Hārūn had a different wording, this could indicate that Abū 'Ubayd or a later copyist made a mistake in citing this wording on the authority of Yazīd. A mistake of Abū 'Ubayd or a later copyist would also be likely if in other sources the tradition were only cited on the authority of Ḥajjāj and never on that of Yazīd. Thus a broad scope of sources is extremely important if an *isnād*-analysis is to give any valuable and reliable results.

Another point of importance is the selection of traditions. We have already noted that traditions might change in the course of transmission. Different traditions might be combined into a single one, new parts might be added, other parts dropped, *topoi* can be incorporated. This makes it difficult to establish whether the traditions used for an analysis are indeed variants of a single tradition or whether they are different traditions. For an *isnād*-analytical study, however, it is important not to mingle together different traditions.

<sup>10</sup> Görke, *Das Kitāb al-Amwāl. Entstehung und Werküberlieferung* (Ph.D. dissertation, Hamburg, 2000), 36 of the typescript.

<sup>11</sup> In this case, Abū 'Ubayd gives a second *isnād* for a similar tradition (#434), but this is irrelevant for our argument.

### I.3 *The Common Link*

There are three different concepts of what the common link represents. It is either considered to be the *collector* who first systematically spread the *ḥadīth*. In this case, the *ḥadīth* in question is older than the common link. The second concept considers the common link to be the *inventor* of the *ḥadīth* in question, in this case also providing it with an *isnād* reaching further down, possibly to the prophet. Finally, it can be considered to be the *authority* to whom a tradition is ascribed by a later figure and whose authority is large enough to make other persons also ascribe the tradition to him. In this case, the common link has nothing to do with the tradition whatsoever. Using either of these concepts of the common link, however, paves the way of interpreting the evidence in whatever direction one wants to interpret it. Thus the tradition might be *older* than the common link (using the collector concept), it might originate *with* the common link (using the inventor concept), or it might be *younger* than the common link (using the authority concept). If we accept that all this might happen, the common link would be of no use at all in establishing the date of a tradition. However, a distinction can be made if we consider what a tradition should look like in each of these cases.

In the first two cases, the common link indeed transmits the tradition to several people who themselves transmit it to several of their students and so on. What we would expect in these cases is a certain pattern when we compare the *asānīd* and the *mutūn* of the variants in question. A teacher might give slightly variant versions of the tradition at different times, different students might emphasize different points in their transmission etc. If these students then pass on this tradition, their versions will differ to some degree and these differences will also effect the versions of their students respectively. Thus, the *mutūn* of a certain tradition will differ slightly in different transmissions, and, more importantly, the variance in the *mutūn* will correspond in some way to the variance in the *asānīd*. This pattern has been observed in several studies.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the studies mentioned in footnote 1: Ulrike Mitter, "Unconditional Manumission of Slaves in Early Islamic Law," *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 35–72; Harald Motzki, "The Collection of the Qurʾān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments," *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 1–34; Motzki, "The Prophet and the Cat: On Dating Mālik's *Muwattaʾ* and Legal Traditions," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 22 (1998): 38–83; Motzki, "The Murder of Ibn

In the case of a later ascription, this pattern should not occur. In this case, the common link would be the result of a spreading of *asānīd*. This phenomenon was described by Schacht<sup>13</sup> and Cook<sup>14</sup> and basically means the following: A sheikh S1 teaches a tradition with the *isnād* S1 ← his master M ← authority A.<sup>15</sup> Another sheikh S2 hears this tradition from S1 but does not give the *isnād* S2 ← S1 ← M ← A, but instead something like S2 ← M ← A or S2 ← N [a different master] ← A. This of course might create false common links and obscure the view to the originators of the tradition. That this spreading did indeed happen can easily be demonstrated: Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād preserves two traditions warning the Arabs from the time after the year 125/742–743.<sup>16</sup> The tradition is rather long and in the two versions preserved is almost identical in wording. The *asānīd* differ, however. The first tradition is quoted on the authority of Ibn Wahb ← Ibn Lahī‘ah ← Ḥamzah b. Abī Ḥamzah ← Abī Hurayrah. The second tradition bears the *isnād* ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Thawr ← Ma‘mar ← Ṭāriq b. Mundhir ← Muḥammad b. ‘Alī ← ‘Alī.<sup>17</sup> In another tradition, which just mentions the first sentence of the tradition, a third *isnād* is given: Rishdīn ← Jarīr b. Ḥāzim ← al-Ḥasan ← Abū Hurayrah. There is not a single name all three *asānīd* have in common. Nevertheless, the traditions are so close to each other in wording that they cannot be independent from each other. The conclusion then must be that we here have a clear case of spreading. Someone took the known tradition and provided it with a new *isnād*. It is tempting to make Ibn Lahī‘ah responsible for this, as he is well known to have produced duplicate traditions.<sup>18</sup> But with only a very few variants existing, this cannot be established.

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Abī l-Ḥuqayq: On the Origin and Reliability of Some *Maghāzī*-Reports,” in *The Biography of Muḥammad*, 170–239; Ifṭikhar Zaman, “The Science of *Rijāl* as a Method in the Study of Hadiths,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 5 (1994): 1–34.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 166–171.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 107–111.

<sup>15</sup> It does not matter if S1 invented the tradition and the *isnād* or just transmits it.

<sup>16</sup> Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-fitan*, #543 and #544. The traditions are again alluded to in #1454.

<sup>17</sup> The last two names are only mentioned by ‘Abd al-Razzāq: Abū Nu‘aym, *Fitan*, #544.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Wilferd Madelung, “The Sufyānī between Tradition and History,” *Studia Islamica* 63 (1986): 31f.

This again gives us the opportunity to emphasize the importance of a large number of traditions and sources. The more sources we have, the easier it will be to detect a duplicate tradition.

A pattern similar to the one we mentioned above—showing a correspondence between the *mutūn* and *asānīd* in the variants—would imply that a forger would have to change the *matn* a little if he only changes the last name in the *isnād*. Another forger providing the tradition with an *isnād* which differs in the last two or three names, would have to make larger changes in the *matn*. Moreover, he would have to know the changes other forgers made in order not to make too large or too little changes—a highly unlikely process.

Thus the common link in this last concept will provide a different, more arbitrary pattern in which *isnād* and *matn* do not correspond well. If, on the other hand, we find a pattern in which *asānīd* and *mutūn* do correspond, we should be able to rule out that the fabrication of that tradition occurred later than the common link.

The question whether a tradition was invented or merely transmitted by a common link is more difficult to answer. Historical probabilities might be adduced, but if we argued on that basis we would not need the common link at all. The question is whether the two concepts can be separated *only* by studying the variants themselves. We might escape this problem if we say that the common link is the person who is responsible for the tradition *in the form we have it*. He may have used earlier materials, but he is the one who gave the tradition a certain form in which it was then transmitted.

Nevertheless, a difference that might occur would be in the *isnād* reaching down from the common link to the person on whose authority the tradition is reported. In the case of the common link being the collector and honest transmitter of the *ḥadīth*, we would expect him to always give the same *isnād* when transmitting the tradition. On the other hand, if the common link was the inventor of the *ḥadīth*, he might well change the *isnād* according to his audience's expectations. A forger in Egypt might well invent a tradition and say that he heard it from Mālik b. Anas, but he will have difficulties when using this *isnād* in Medina, where people might still know that Mālik never held this view. Similarly, he might want to change the *isnād* when transmitting this tradition to people coming from Medina or to people known for their expertise in Mālik's traditions. A transmitter who in fact heard a tradition from Mālik will have little rea-

son to say that he in fact heard the tradition from someone else.<sup>19</sup>

We can distinguish three idealized forms of *isnād*-bundles then, very roughly corresponding to the three concepts of the common link.

- 1) A very good correspondence between *isnād* and *matn*: Traditions transmitted with a certain chain of transmitters show the same features. This would indicate a historical transmission from the common link onwards. The single strand in the lower part could signify that either the common link indeed was very faithful or that he invented the tradition but adhered to one *isnād*. In the following, these bundles shall be called *consistent bundles*. (See Figure 2)
- 2) A correspondence between *isnād* and *matn* with some difficulties: different *asānīd* from the common link backwards or versions which do not correspond well in terms of *isnād* and *matn*. This could indicate that the common link invented the tradition and changed it according to the needs of the audience and that some people later concealed their true sources or tampered with the tradition in some way or another. These bundles will be referred to as *inconsistent bundles*. (See Figure 3)
- 3) No clear correspondence between *isnād* and *matn*, possibly not even a single common link. This could indicate a tradition that was used by many different people who supplied it with different *asānīd*. These bundles will be called *odd bundles*. (See Figure 4)

As a rule of thumb we might say that the more uniform the pattern of *isnād* and *matn* correspondence is, the more likely it is that the common link is either the collector or the inventor of the tradition. Only in traditions with some *isnād*-*matn*-correspondence can the common link be used for dating the traditions. The more arbitrarily *isnād* and *matn* are distributed among the variants, the more probable it is that several people tampered with the tradition in question and that the common link is of no use for dating the tradition.

<sup>19</sup> This is not a completely reliable criterium, though: Someone who heard a tradition from a relatively unknown person might well have had reasons to change the *isnād* and claim that he heard it from a famous transmitter, while someone inventing a tradition might always relate it with the same fictitious *isnād*. Nevertheless, we would expect that someone who invents a tradition will have less scruples to adjust it to the audience than someone who transmits a tradition he really heard.

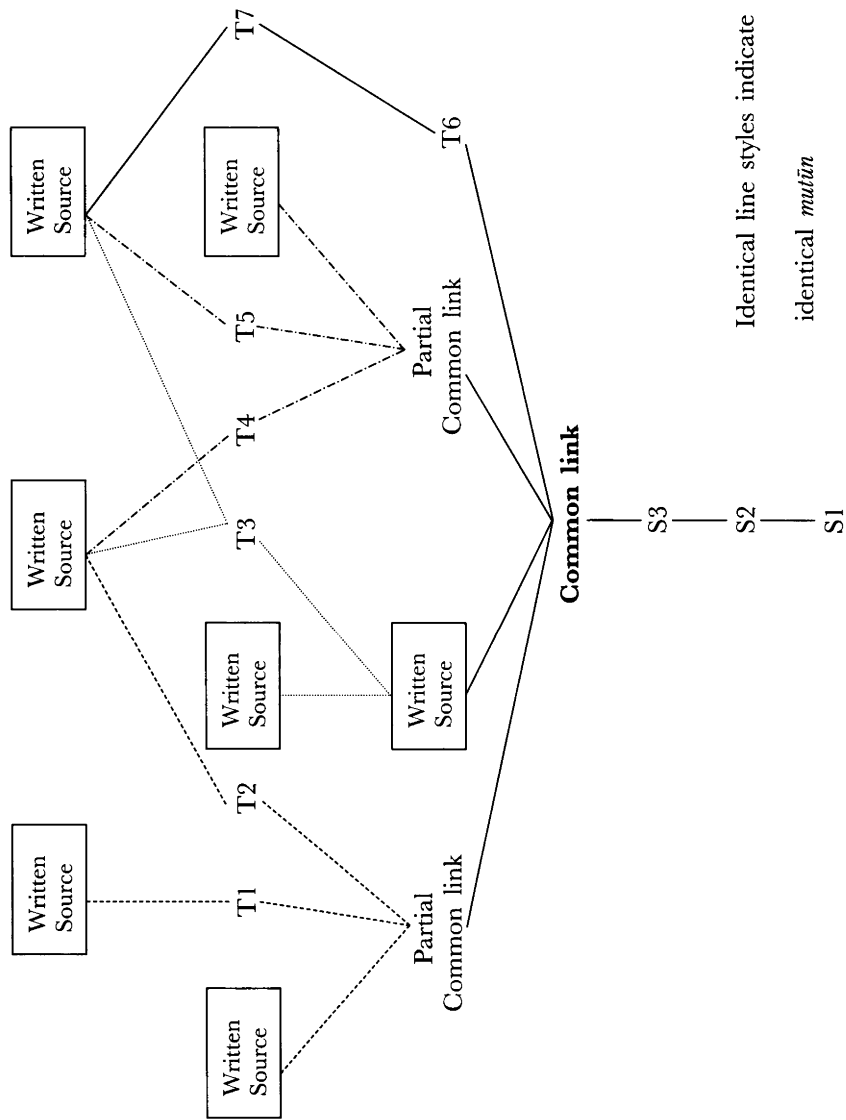


Figure 2: Consistent tradition

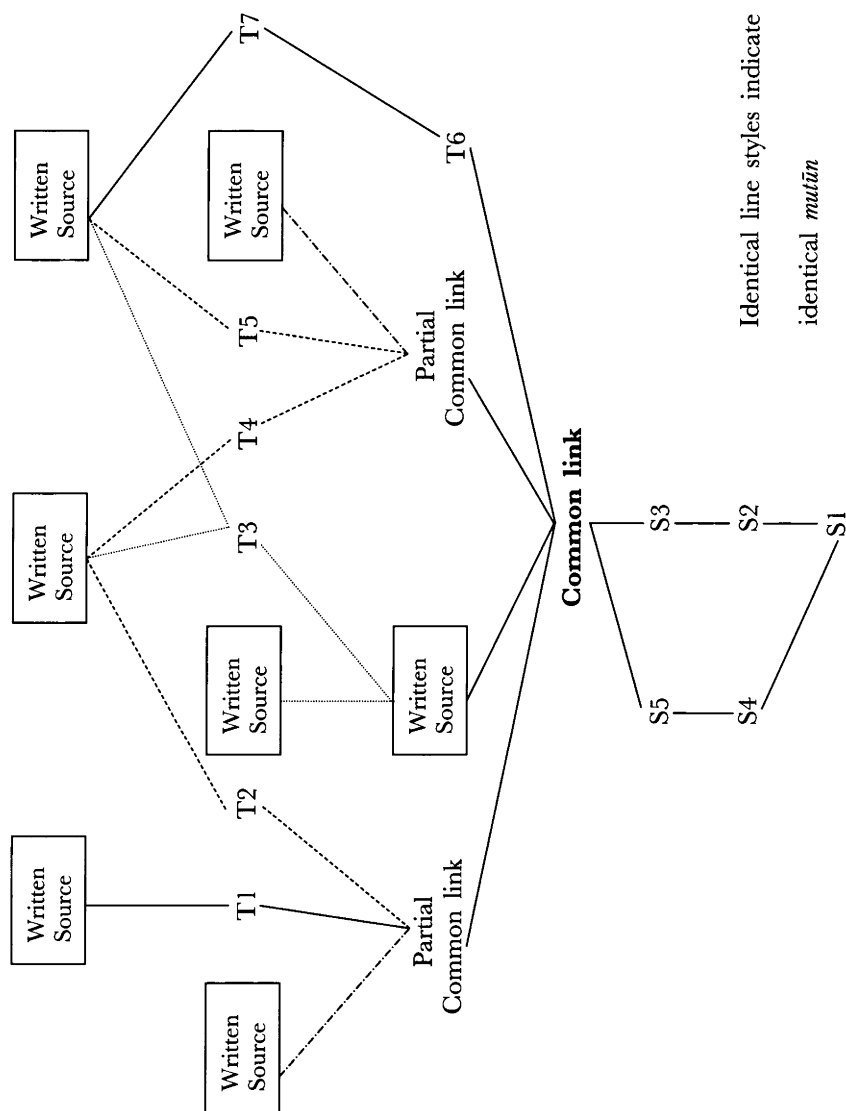


Figure 3: Inconsistent tradition

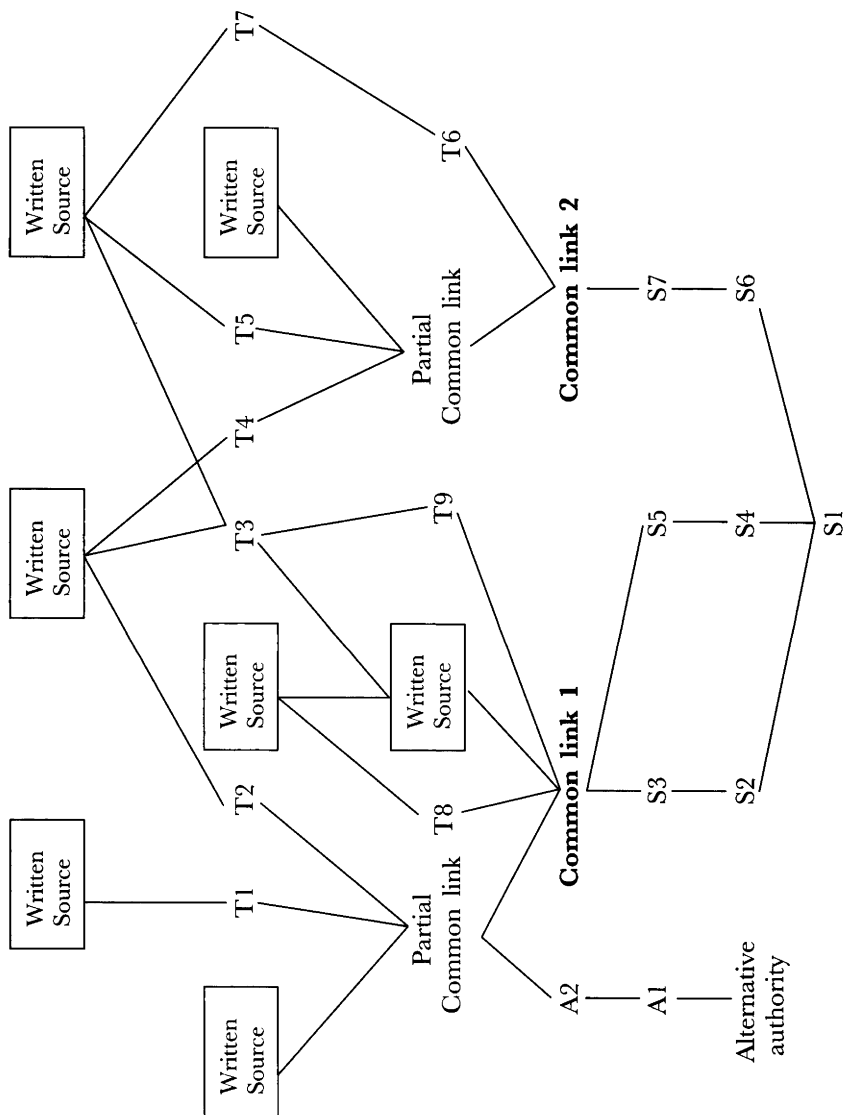


Figure 4: Odd tradition



This of course sets us back when trying to date eschatological traditions: As we want to study *invented* traditions, which can more easily be dated on the basis of their *mutūn*, we would expect more bundles of the forms 2 and 3 (*inconsistent* and *odd* bundles) and less of the form 1 (*consistent* ones). Thus, while eschatological traditions might be easier to date on the basis of their *mutūn*, they are—due to their nature—more difficult to date on the basis of their *asānīd*. This is a methodological dilemma that cannot be easily evaded. For testing the *mutūn*-based dating against the *isnād*-based dating we need tradition bundles that show at least some consistency. This reduces the number of traditions considerably that can be used to test the two methods of dating against each other. Nevertheless, there still are traditions that are consistent enough to be used for that purpose. One of them will be studied in the latter part of this paper.

#### I.4 *Mutūn-based dating of eschatological traditions*

Two difficulties arise with the *mutūn*-based dating of eschatological traditions. The first is the identification of the event or events alluded to: In many cases the traditions dealing with the portents of the hour, the Mahdī, and other related topics will be vague to some degree. In some cases this will make it difficult to identify an event with certainty. Even if an event can be identified, a second difficulty might arise: the question when the tradition alluding to that event was put into circulation. In the case of a very unlikely event or one in which many details are mentioned, we might exclude the possibility of the tradition being earlier than the event in question. But if the event alluded to is treated as a sign of the approaching hour, the tradition might well be invented a little later than the event. The traditions were obviously still considered relevant after a number of generations even if the hour did not come. Otherwise they would not have been transmitted and collected. But if a tradition was still relevant one or two generations after the event, it might well have been brought into circulation only at that time. This, of course, would depend very much on the tradition in question.

As a general rule, however, we might say that the person inventing or shaping a tradition alluding to a certain event must have lived at the time of the event or a little later. When several variants of such a tradition are preserved and show the typical pattern of *isnād* and *matn* correspondence (making it a *consistent* tradition), the figure

responsible for the tradition will be the common link. Thus, to prove the validity of the *isnād-cum-matn*-analysis, this analysis should lead us to a common link *at the time of the event in question or slightly later*. If it leads us to a common link living much later or to one living earlier than the event, we would have to discard the common link as a means of establishing the date of a tradition.

To sum up: When we attempt to seriously test the method of *isnād*-based dating with the common link against the *matn*-based dating, we need a tradition that is

- a) widely attested,
- b) attested in different sources,
- c) explicit enough to be firmly dated on the basis of its contents and that
- d) shows a certain pattern in the *asānīd* of its variants which is more or less that of a *consistent* tradition. As we deal with invented traditions, where we would not expect many *consistent* traditions, this would at least imply that there is a single common link and that in the case of some partial common links a correspondence between *isnād* and *matn* can be found.

A tradition that does not show these features does not have to be invented, forged, etc. The point is that a tradition that lacks these features cannot be securely dated on the basis of the *asānīd*. However, if we want to test the two methods of dating against each other, we have to use traditions that can be dated both on the basis of their *mutūn* and their *asānīd*.

## II. *A Reconsideration of Michael Cook's Findings*

Let us now turn to Cook's article and his findings. In his article, he discussed three apocalyptic traditions. Taking into account the above considerations, two of these traditions are highly problematic if used to evaluate the common link. These two traditions are almost exclusively attested in a single source, the *Kitāb al-ḥitan* of Nu'aym b. Ḥammād. The first of these traditions was studied in detail by Jorge Aguadé.<sup>20</sup> It is an apocalyptic tradition according to which in the

<sup>20</sup> Jorge Aguadé, "Algunos hadices sobre la ocupación de Alejandría por un grupo

last days the people of al-Andalus will invade Egypt. Aguadé argued that the tradition refers to the occupation of Alexandria by Muslims from al-Andalus, which lasted from 199/814–815 to 212/827–828.

The tradition is attested only ten times at all—a very small number if one wants to gain information on the common link. The variants of the tradition differ considerably. In fact, they differ in such a way that one might ask if this is really the same tradition. Compare e.g. traditions B and E. B: Ibn Wahb and Rishdīn ← Ibn Lahī‘ah ← Abū Qabīl ← ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr: “The people of al-Andalus will come over the sea, and the length of their boats on the sea will be fifty miles and its width will be thirteen miles, and they will land at al-A‘māq.” E: al-Walīd b. Muslim ← Layth b. Sa‘d ← ‘Amr b. al-Ḥārith ← ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb: “They will fight you at Wasīm, but God will defeat them. Then Abyssinia will come in the second year.” Even if the traditions are assumed to refer to the same event, they remain separate traditions and should not be mingled together in on *isnād* analysis.<sup>21</sup>

The *mutūn*-based dating of the tradition is problematic. If we accept the dating of the tradition in question to the year 199 or later, this would place it *later* than any of its purported transmitters. Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād quotes it several times on the authority of Rishdīn b. Sa‘d (d. 188/804) and al-Walīd b. Muslim (d. 195/811). According to the *mutūn*-based dating, both cannot have anything to do with the tradition. Thus Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād must have invented at least the seven *asānīd* he gives for this tradition—with all variants in wording—or possibly even the whole tradition. Apart from this, the tradition does not correspond well to the historical event. Alexandria is not mentioned at all, but instead Wasīm, close to Cairo, is. In the variants in which the religion of the invaders is apparent, they are infidels, not Muslims as in the historical occupation of Alexandria.<sup>22</sup> Thus the view that this tradition refers to the occupation of Alexandria can be doubted.

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de hispano-musulmanes,” *Boletín de la Asociación Española de Orientalistas* 12 (1976): 159–180.

<sup>21</sup> Cook already thought that version B should be discarded as it makes no reference to Egypt. Cook, “Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions,” 41 n. 25.

<sup>22</sup> These problems have already been discussed by Cook, “Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions,” 27–29.

The second tradition has an apocalyptic setting in which Syria will be invaded by Byzantium. The Byzantine ruler is identified in the traditions as Tiberius, son of Justinian. The tradition has been studied in detail by Cook in a separate article.<sup>23</sup>

For an *isnād*-based dating, this tradition does not do much better than the first—it is only attested very few times, almost only in the *Kitāb al-ḥitan*, there are large differences in the content, there is not one common link, but two. Of the 13 versions Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād quotes in his *Kitāb al-ḥitan*, some are in fact the same tradition quoted in different chapters and not independent traditions. The tradition F10 is identical in wording to F1, with the exception that Tubayʿ is missing in the *isnād*.<sup>24</sup> This is probably due to a mistake of Nuʿaym himself or a mistake that occurred in the transmission of the *Kitāb al-ḥitan*. Other traditions that in fact seem to be identical are F3 and F12 (with a few variants in wording), and most probably also F5 and F13 (although the variants are larger in this last case). Therefore, the number of variants of the tradition is even further reduced, making conclusions from this tradition all the more difficult.

In both cases, Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād quotes some traditions with a combined *isnād* (e.g. Rishdīn b. Saʿd and al-Walīd b. Muslim, both from Ibn Lahīʿah). In this case we cannot say whether the two versions were identical in wording or just close to each other. Thus, these combined *asānīd* make a study of variants in the *mutūn* impossible.

Another point that should be noted, is that in both traditions ʿAbd Allāh b. Lahīʿah features prominently: He represents a key figure or the common link in the first tradition, and one of two common links in the second tradition. ʿAbd Allāh b. Lahīʿah is known to have produced duplicate traditions, taking a known tradition and providing it with an *isnād* of his own. In some studies it could be shown that his traditions are later reworkings of a known tradition.<sup>25</sup> We should of course not dismiss all of the traditions transmitted on his authority outright. But traditions in which he features so prominently as

<sup>23</sup> Cook, "The Heraclian Dynasty in Muslim Eschatology," *al-Qantara* 13 (1992): 3–23.

<sup>24</sup> The numbers refer to Cook's article "The Heraclian dynasty," 4, n. 5 and 19–23. In the *Kitāb al-ḥitan* (ed. M. Shūrā), they correspond to the following traditions: F1=#1079, F3=#1228, F5=#1253, F10=#1306, F12=#1310, and F13=#1312.

<sup>25</sup> Andreas Görke, "Die frühislamische Geschichtsüberlieferung," 220f.; Görke, "The Historical Tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya," 257f.; Gregor Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie*, 81–85.

in these two examples might not be a good starting point to evaluate the general reliability of *asānīd* and common links.

To sum up, both traditions do not fulfill the points a), b), and d). In the first case the *mutūn*-based dating (point c)) is also problematic.

Thus, from a methodological point of view, we would not expect to get good results from these traditions. Their *asānīd* are simply not suited for dating a tradition.

The third tradition Cook discusses in his article was studied in detail by Wilferd Madelung.<sup>26</sup> It contains an alleged prophecy that seems to be built on the career of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr (2/623–73/692), possibly trying to identify him with the Mahdī, though neither Ibn al-Zubayr nor the Mahdī are mentioned explicitly. From the methodological point of view, it does far better than the other two traditions: It is attested in several collections, has a clear common link and three partial common links after the common link. However, mention has to be made of a comment of al-Ṭabarānī that he heard the tradition not only from ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Amr ← Ma‘mar ← Qatādah (Qatādah being the common link of the tradition), but also from ‘Ubayd Allāh ← Layth ← Mujāhid.<sup>27</sup> This might indicate that the tradition is older than Qatādah’s version of it. Qatādah in some of the variants is said to have heard the tradition from Mujāhid or from Šāliḥ ← Mujāhid. While Qatādah (60/680 to 117/735) lived a little too late to have invented this tradition, Mujāhid (21/642 to 100/718 or 104/722) could well have done so. But as only al-Ṭabarānī records the *isnād* going back to Mujāhid we might dismiss it as a later dive or a case of spreading. We would have to conclude that Qatādah is responsible for the tradition *in the form we have it*. Recalling our consideration from above, a common link spreading a tradition that alludes to events recently gone by can be explained and does not invalidate the common link as a means for the dating of traditions. In this case, it is unlikely that Qatādah made up the whole story, but there is no reason to doubt that he systematically spread it.

<sup>26</sup> Wilferd Madelung, “‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdī,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40 (1981): 291–305.

<sup>27</sup> al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muḥjam al-kabīr*, edited by Ḥ. al-Salafī (Mosul: Maktabat al-‘ulūm wa-al-ḥikam, 1404/1983), 23:390. (Cited according to the CD-Rom *al-Maktabah al-alfīyah li-al-sunnah al-nabawīyah*.)

## III. A Case Study

To put the method to a test, I chose a well-attested tradition, which in my opinion can be dated both on the basis of its *matn* and on the basis of the *asānīd* of its variants. (This latter *isnād*-based dating also takes into consideration variations in the wording of the *mutūn*, but not their contents.)

The tradition in question exists in slightly different versions and states that the name (*ism*) of the Mahdī will be the same as the Prophet's and that his father's name will be the same as the Prophet's father's, i.e. that the name of the Mahdī will be Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh. There are other traditions that only refer to the *ism* that will be the same.<sup>28</sup>

In general these traditions are reported on the authority of the Prophet himself. But as the idea of the Mahdī developed only in later times,<sup>29</sup> we might exclude the possibility of Muḥammad himself having actually said anything about the name of the Mahdī. If this is the case, the traditions will have been brought into circulation to bolster the claims to authority of someone called Muḥammad or Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh. Two persons named Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh come to mind, who were given the *laqab* al-Mahdī: Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan, *al-Nafs al-Ẓakīyah* (93/711–712 to 145/762), and Muḥammad al-Mahdī, the third 'Abbāsīd caliph (127/744–745 to 169/785; r. 158/775–169/785). Of these, the former one is much more likely to be the object of the tradition in question. Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan rebelled against the 'Abbāsīds in 145/762, he was the focus of 'Alīd hopes for the leadership. The *laqab* al-Mahdī was given to him by his father. Amongst those who claimed that he was indeed the Mahdī was al-Mughīrah b. Sa'īd (d. 119/737).<sup>30</sup> His cause is said to have been supported by many of the leading scholars. The *ḥadīth* in question could have helped to support this cause.

For the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Mahdī on the other hand, it would not make much sense to invent a tradition like this: He probably was

<sup>28</sup> See below for the references.

<sup>29</sup> Compare W. Madelung, "al-Mahdī," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954–), 5:1230–1238.

<sup>30</sup> F. Buhl, "Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. al-Ḥasan," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954–), 7:388–389.

given the title al-Mahdī only in the year 145/762. From this year we have numismatic evidence of the *laqab* al-Mahdī being used for the designated heir Muḥammad. It is not unlikely that this title was given to him only after the revolt of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan and his brother Ibrāhīm.<sup>31</sup> There are traditions that seem to indicate that the title was given to him to counter the claims of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan.<sup>32</sup> After another man of this name had just passed away, it is very unlikely that this tradition was brought into circulation in favor of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph. Most variants of the tradition also mention that the Mahdī will be from the *ahl al-bayt*, that is, from the prophet Muḥammad’s family. While Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan indeed was a direct descendant from the prophet, the ‘Abbāsīd caliph was not. We would therefore assume that this tradition was coined to support the claims of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan. In this case, the tradition must be dated to his lifetime. Most probably he was not referred to as the Mahdī as a child,<sup>33</sup> but it seems that already before 119/737 he was given this epithet, since in that year al-Mughīrah b. Sa‘īd died, who was among those who claimed that Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan was the Mahdī. Thus we may reduce the time span when this tradition was invented from approximately 110/728–729 to 145/762. The place of origin of this tradition is not as easy to determine on external grounds. Possible regions would be Medina, where the revolt of Muḥammad took place, Baṣrah, where his brother Ibrāhīm revolted at the same time, and Kūfah, where al-Mughīrah b. Sa‘īd claimed that Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh was the Mahdī and which had a strong Shī‘ī bias.

*Isnād*-based dating: Variants of this tradition can be found in several sources. There are some 30 variants of the tradition stating that both the name and the father’s name of the Mahdī will correspond to the Prophet’s name and the Prophet’s father’s name.<sup>34</sup> These variants

<sup>31</sup> See Jere L. Bacharach, “*Laqab* for a Future Caliph: The Case of the Abbasid al-Mahdī,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 113 (1993): 271–274.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-tālibūyīn*, edited by A. Ṣaqr (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-‘alamī li-al-maṭbū‘āt, 1408/1987), 212.

<sup>33</sup> Although there are traditions claiming that he was already considered to be the Mahdī at his birth. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-tālibūyīn*, 210–217.

<sup>34</sup> The tradition can at least be found in the following works (an \* behind the reference indicates that the work is cited according to the CD-ROM *al-Maktabah al-alfīyah li-al-sunnah al-nabawīyah*): Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, edited by Sh. al-ʿArnaʿūṭ (Beirut:

can be found in 20 different sources. Therefore an *isnād-cum-matn*-analysis can be attempted. As the tradition is often related *without* mention of the father's name, these variants will also be studied. They amount to another 50, increasing the total number to 80 traditions to be found in at least 28 sources.<sup>35</sup>

Mu'assasat al-risāla, 1414/1993), 15:236\*; al-Ḥakīm al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn fī al-ḥadīth* (Haydarabad: Dā'irat al-ma'ārif al-niẓāmiyah, 1334/1915–1342/1924), 4:442, 464; 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Ḥaythamī, *Mawārid al-ẓam'ān ilā zawā'id Ibn Ḥibbān*, edited by M. 'Abd al-Razzāq Ḥamzah (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmīyah, n.d.), 464\*; Abū Dā'ūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dā'ūd*, edited by M.M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 4:106; Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Kitāb al-Musannaf fī al-aḥādīth wa-al-āthār*, edited by K.Y. al-Ḥūt (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1409), 7:513\*; al-Shāshī, *al-Musnad*, edited by M. Zain Allāh (Medina: Maktabat al-'ulūm wa-al-ḥikam, 1410), 2:110\*; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-awsaṭ*, edited by 'A. al-Ḥusaynī *et al.* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 1415), 2:55\*; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr*, 10:133, 135, 19:32\*; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, edited by 'U. al-'Amrawī (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1415/1995–1419/1998), 53:414; Khaythamah b. Sulaymān, *Min ḥadīth Khaythama b. Sulaymān al-Qurashī*, edited by 'U. 'Abd al-Salām (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'arabī, 1400/1980), 192\*; al-Dānī, *al-Sunan al-wāridah fī al-fitan wa-ghawā'ilī-hā wa-al-sā'ah wa-ashrāṭī-hā*, edited by Ḍ. al-Mubārkaḥūrī (Riyadh: Dār al-'āshimah, 1416), 5:1054\*; Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-fitan*, edited by M. al-Shūrī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmīyah, 1418/1997), #1010, #1017, #1018, #1021; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Ftiqād wa-al-hadāyah*, edited by A. 'Isām al-Kātib (Beirut: Dār al-āfāq al-jadīdah, 1401), 215, 216\*; al-Jurjānī, *al-Kāmil fī ḥu'afā' al-rjāl*, edited by Y.M. Ghazawī (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1409/1988), 3:99, 4:28, 4:197\*; Abū al-Shaykh al-Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-muhaddithīn bi-ashbahān wa-al-wāridīn 'alay-hā*, edited by 'A. al-Bulūshī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-risālah, 1412/1992), 3:95\*; al-Qazwīnī, *al-Tadwīn fī akhbār Qazwīn*, edited by 'A. al-'Uṭaridī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmīyah, 1987), 1:431\*; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād* (Cairo, Baghdad: Maktabat al-khanjī a.o., 1349/1931), 1:370, 5:391; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Muwaddih awhām al-jam' wa-al-tafriq*, edited by 'A. Amīn Qal'ajī (Beirut: Dār al-ma'rifa, 1407), 2:71\*; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-'Ilal al-mutanāhiyah fī al-aḥādīth al-wāhiyah*, edited Kh. al-Mays (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmīyah, 1403), 2:856\*; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh al-'allāmah*, edited by 'A. and H. al-Zayn (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-lubnāniyah, 1967–68), 1:557, 1:573.

<sup>35</sup> Traditions not mentioning the father's name can be found in the following sources (an \* behind the reference again indicates that the source is cited according to the CD-ROM *al-Maktabah al-alfiyah li-al-sunnah an-nabawīyah*): Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 13:284\*; 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Ḥaythamī, *Mawārid al-ẓam'ān*, 464\*; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, edited by A.M. Shākir *et al.* (Khulḥā: Muḥammad Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī, 1382/1962–1398/1978), 4:505; Abū Dā'ūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan*, 4:106; al-Shāshī, *al-Musnad*, 2:110, 111\*; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-awsaṭ*, 7:54, 8:178\*; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-saghīr*, edited by M.Sh. Amrīr (Beirut, Amman: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1405/1985), 2:289\*; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr*, 10:131, 134, 135, 136, 137\*; Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (Cairo, 1313), 1:376, 377, 430, 448; Abū Bakr al-Ismā'īlī, *Mu'jam al-shuyūkh*, edited by Z.M. Maṣṣūr (Medina: Maktabat al-'ulūm wa-al-ḥikam, 1410), 2:512, 513\*; al-Dānī, *al-Sunan al-wāridah*, 5:1041, 1042, 1046, 1047, 1048, 1050, 1051, 1052\*; Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, #1018, #1020; Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, edited by M.A. al-Khānjī (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, 1387/1967), 5:75; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, edited by Sh. al-Arnā'ūt (Beirut:



Since this is obviously an invented tradition, we should not expect a perfect pattern of correspondence between *isnād* and *matn*. Different transmitters may have attempted to change the *isnād*. If our assumption is correct that the tradition was coined in favor of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan, some transmitters may have tried to make this connection even more obvious while others may have tried to counter it. However, we hope to be able to detect these versions in a careful analysis.

An *isnād*-analysis alone (i.e. without regarding variants in the *mutūn*) has three key figures standing out: ‘Āṣim b. Abī al-Najjūd (also called ‘Āṣim b. Bahdalah) who seems to be the common link, Fiṭr b. Khalīfah, one of his transmitters, who also relates the tradition on the authority of several other persons, and ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Mūsā, who relates the tradition several times on the authority of Fiṭr and of Zā’idah. The *asānīd* are illustrated in Figure 5. Of the 30 traditions also mentioning the correspondence of the father’s name, 22 are traced back through ‘Āṣim b. Bahdalah ← Zirr b. Ḥubaysh ← ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd. All other paths of transmission are considerably less common: Three times the tradition is traced back through Mu‘āwiyah b. Qurrah ← Qurrah, two times through Maymūn ← Abū Ṭufayl, and each one time through Fiṭr ← Zirr, Fiṭr ← Abū Ishāq ← Zirr and Fiṭr ← Ḥabīb ← Abū Ṭufayl ← ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

To get a clearer picture of this tradition, we should take into account the versions which just state that the name of the Mahdī will be the same as the Prophet’s, not mentioning the name of the father. Of these versions—50 all together—43 have the *isnād* ‘Āṣim ← Zirr ← ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd. Two of the versions are traced back through Mu‘āwiyah b. Qurrah ← Qurrah, four through Yūsuf b. Ḥawshab ← Abū Bakr al-A‘war ← ‘Amr b. Mūsā ← Zirr, and one through Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī with a defective *isnād*. Judging from the *asānīd*, this tradition can clearly be traced back to ‘Āṣim b. Abī al-Najjūd. No less than 16 persons claim to have heard this tradition from him. The variant, which also mentions the correspondence of the father’s name, is traced back to ‘Āṣim by 12 of his students.

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Mu‘assasat al-risālah, 1402/1982–1405/1985), 11:472; al-Jurjānī, *al-Kāmil fī dhū‘afā’ al-rijāl*, 2:86, 5:147, 7:168\*; al-Wāsitī, *Ta’rikh Wāsiṭ*, edited by K. ‘Awād (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1406), 105\*; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Ilal al-mutanāhiyah*, 2:857\*; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta’rikh al-‘allāmah*, 1:557; al-Rāmahurmuzī, *al-Muḥaddith al-fāsil bayna al-rāwī wa-al-wā‘i*, edited by M. ‘Ajāj al-Khaṭīb (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1404/1984), 329, 330.



This variant is mostly transmitted via Fiṭr. Almost half of the traditions are related on his authority. Fiṭr and Zā'idah are the only persons on whose authority *only* versions including the father's name are reported, and Fiṭr is the only one who does not always claim to have heard this tradition from 'Āṣim but mentions three alternative sources. Other people hearing this tradition from 'Āṣim are sometimes said to having related variants including the father's name while in other places they are said to have related it without the father's name. Sometimes the differences in wording are mentioned when a combined *isnād* is given.

Two scenarios seem possible: It is obvious that 'Āṣim is a key figure in the transmission of this tradition; possibly he even invented it. It cannot be established, however, whether he related the tradition only mentioning the *ism* or whether he also related the tradition including the *ism abī-hi*. As 12 transmitters from him include the *ism abī-hi*, it might well be that this version indeed goes back to him. On the other hand, there are four transmitters who do not include this part and most of the transmitters including it are also reported to have related the tradition without this phrase. In any case did Fiṭr obviously emphasize the correspondence of the father's name. The other versions sometimes mentioning the *ism abī-hi* and sometimes not could either be influenced by the version of Fiṭr, or be later reworkings omitting the *ism abī-hi*. The versions going back directly to Zirr b. Ḥubaysh without mentioning 'Āṣim or to other authorities are too few in number to draw far reaching conclusions. Again, we have Ibn Lahī'ah in one of the other versions that might indicate that we have another incidence of a duplicate tradition from him. All of the versions that mention 'Amr b. Murrah in the *isnād* are related by Yūsuf b. Ḥawshab who may considered to be responsible for this variant. The versions going back to Qurrah are only related by Dā'ūd b. al-Muḥabbar. Both Yūsuf b. Ḥawshab and Dā'ūd b. al-Muḥabbar lived after 'Āṣim and most probably reworked either his version or the one spread by Fiṭr and Zā'idah.

A careful *isnād-cum-matn*-analysis shows that the case is a bit more complicated than it first seemed. There are a couple of differences in the variants, e.g. some traditions begin with the sentence "If there were only one day (or one night) left, a leader will come . . .," others have the phrase "The Hour will not come until a man will rule . . .," or "The world will not vanish until a man will rule. . . ." Although they are different in wording, they all convey the same

meaning. In some variants additional phrases are included, stating e.g. that the Mahdī will rule justly. Now, if we assume a historical transmission after the common link (that is, the *asānīd* indicate the true paths of transmission), we would expect the variants to correspond with the *isnād*. For example, we would assume that the variants traced back through Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah are close to each other in wording, but might be different from the versions traced back through Fiṭr.

But this is only true for a couple of the transmitters. The versions traced back through Zā’idah, Fiṭr, ‘Uthmān b. Shabramah and ‘Umar b. ‘Ubayd in general are homogenous. On the other hand, there are rather large variants in the versions of Abū Bakr b. ‘Ayyāsh or Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah. In most of the cases we have too few variants to make any secure statements. Coming back to the general considerations we made in the beginning, we would have to conclude that some tampering with the tradition did take place. Some of the *asānīd* do not seem to indicate the true path of transmission. The *isnād-cum-matn*-analysis does not provide us with a very clear pattern. The *isnād*-bundle is not completely consistent. However, it seems still to be consistent enough to allow the following conclusions: Fiṭr and Zā’idah obviously spread the tradition including the *ism abī-hi* and this tradition most probably already goes back to ‘Āṣim.

Now let us compare the results obtained from the *mutūn*-based dating to those obtained from the *isnād*-based dating. We dated the tradition on the basis of its *matn* to the lifetime of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan, that is between 93/711–712 and 145/762. Most probably he was not referred to as the Mahdī as a child, but he was claimed to be the Mahdī before 119/737, so we might reduce the time span to between 110/728–729 and 145/762. On the basis of the *asānīd* we came to the conclusion that most probably ‘Āṣim is responsible for the tradition and that Fiṭr in any case promoted it. ‘Āṣim died in the year 127/744–745, this date fitting perfectly with the *matn*-based dating. Fiṭr is said to have been inclined towards the Shī‘ah, he died in 155/772 or 157/773–774.<sup>36</sup> It is likely that the tradition became very popular during the revolt of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh in 145/762, so we even have a perfect external reason for the prominence of Fiṭr in the *asānīd*. All key figures in the

<sup>36</sup> On Fiṭr b. Khalīfah see Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, 7:30–33.

*isnād*-bundle (‘Āṣim, Zā’idah, Fiṭr b. Khalīfah, ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Mūsā, Abū Nu‘aym) are Kūfan. Fiṭr b. Khalīfah and ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Mūsā were inclined towards the Shī‘ah.<sup>37</sup>

Both methods of dating go perfectly together in this case. In a tradition Juynboll studied, also on the basis of a large number of sources and variants, the results were equally encouraging: the *isnād*-based dating corresponded perfectly with the *matn*-based dating.<sup>38</sup> The reasons why Cook came to other results in his study have been made clear.

We can draw conclusions from the above study that ascertain historical facts. These may not be overwhelming, but they may help to get a clearer picture of the circumstances surrounding the revolt of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh, the Pure Soul: Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh was indeed promoted to be the Mahdī rather early in his career. ‘Āṣim b. Abī al-Najjūd was most probably among those who supported his claim. So was Fiṭr b. Khalīfah, who most probably spread this tradition during the revolt.

#### IV. Conclusions

- 1) Using the common link as a means for dating traditions is a complex task. Sometimes it might appear to be rather straightforward, but in many cases it is not. Several points have to be taken into consideration in regard to the choice of the sources, changes in the tradition in the course of transmission, topoi, and forgeries.
- 2) It is possible to distinguish *consistent* traditions from *inconsistent* ones. In *consistent* traditions, variants in the *asānīd* correspond to variants in the respective *mutūn*. In these traditions, the *asānīd* will mostly indicate the true paths of transmission. In *inconsistent* traditions, on the other hand, the *asānīd* do not indicate the true paths of transmission.
- 3) There are traditions—mostly of the *consistent* type—in which the common link can be used as a means for dating, while in other traditions this is not possible. In many cases it will be possible only with a very careful and detailed study of the variants of a

<sup>37</sup> Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, 7:31, 9:554.

<sup>38</sup> G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition. Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of early Hadīth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), 207–213.

tradition in which false ascriptions, duplicate traditions etc. can be detected (on the basis of an *isnād-cum-matn*-analysis).

- 4) The fact, that in *inconsistent* traditions the *asānīd* do not indicate the true paths of transmission, does not mean that these traditions have to be late or have to be forgeries. The only acceptable conclusion is that the *asānīd* are not reliable in this case.
- 5) The existence of traditions in which the *asānīd* are not reliable does *not* mean, however, that *asānīd* cannot be trusted at all. Some patterns, namely those of *consistent* traditions, can only be explained by assuming that the transmission indeed took place along the paths indicated by the *asānīd*. The pattern of an *isnād*-bundle and the variants in the *matn* indicate whether an *isnād* is reliable or not.
- 6) Eschatological traditions are a good (and in fact most probably the only) way, to test the methods of *isnād*-based dating and *matn*-based dating against each other. However, two things have to be borne in mind. On the one hand, eschatological traditions have very likely undergone a process of redaction, reshaping, and adaptation—which may make the *matn*-based dating difficult. On the other hand, those eschatological traditions that can be dated on the basis of their *mutūn* are invented traditions. As such they are less likely to form the pattern of a *consistent* tradition, which causes difficulties for the *isnād*-based dating. This means while eschatological traditions can be dated (though with some difficulty) on the basis of their *mutūn*, they are—in comparison to other traditions—rather unsuitable for dating on the basis of their *asānīd*.
- 7) This method of distinguishing *consistent* traditions from *inconsistent* ones excludes several traditions from a study of their provenance on the basis of their *asānīd*. On the other hand, it provides a powerful means for dating *consistent* traditions on that basis. Since this method proved to be successful with eschatological traditions (which tend to be problematic due to their nature), it can be assumed that it will produce much better results when applied to less problematic (i.e. juristic or historical) traditions.