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The Term *nasama* in Ḥadīth with a Focus on Material about Predestination and the Unborn*

By THOMAS EICH (University of Hamburg)

Abstract

This article analyzes the use of the term *nasama* in ḥadīth material with a major focus on two ḥadīths related on the authority of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar and Anas b. Mālik. Both ḥadīths describe predestination during an angel’s visit to the *nasama* (‘Abd Allāh) or the unborn (Anas) respectively. The article argues that the exact meaning of *nasama* was ambiguous in this context since it was also used in ḥadīth material expressing the idea of the creation of souls before all time. This idea became contested. In the ḥadīth’s transmission history *nasama* was eventually disambiguated as referring to a creation *in* time. I argue that the two ḥadīths should be analyzed together as contributions to the same theological debate developing further the same sort of source material. In this sense they can be differentiated from other ḥadīth material describing predestination and the unborn.

Keywords: Predestination, angel, ḥadīth, ensoulment, Islam

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1. Introduction

This article analyzes the use of the term *nasama* in ḥadīth material, using the method of *isnād-cum-matn* analysis (ICMA). *Nasama* can mean “human being” as well as “soul”.¹ The standard literature on Islamic conceptions of the soul and ensoulment has largely ignored *nasama* and focused on two other terms, *nafs* and *rūḥ*.² After a quick overview of ICMA, I will first give a sketch of possible meanings of *nasama* in ḥadīth with a focus on one specific field, the idea of the creation of all souls before time. As I will show, first, the ḥadīth material containing the term *nasama* underwent noticeable redaction changes when the concept of the pre-existence of souls was increasingly contested especially during the 9th century

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¹ Lane (1893), 8:3032 has “soul or man” and gives *nafs* as a synonym.

² See e.g. Homerin (2006), Macdonald (1931), Rahman (1980), 112, van Ess (1997), vol. 4 index of roots.

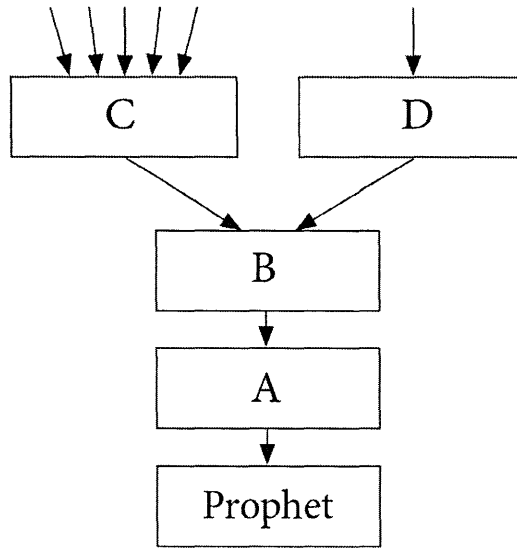
CE. Eventually, the link between *nasama* and the creation story was cut. Second, against this background I will carry out an ICMA of a ḥadīth related on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar describing a process of predestination during an angel’s visit to the *nasama*. I will argue that the redaction processes of this ḥadīth match with the general picture of developments concerning the term *nasama*. It was considered necessary in the transmission process well into the 9th century to reiterate that *nasama* referred to a bodily being created *in* time and not before it. In the third section I present an ICMA of a similar ḥadīth related on the authority of Anas b. Mālik. Finally, I will point out a likely connection between the two ḥadīths. In conclusion I will argue that within the ḥadīth material describing predestination together with an angel’s visit to the unborn, two groups can be distinguished: the material analyzed here (on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar and Anas b. Mālik) and other material transmitted on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd and Ḥudhayfa b. Asīd, which I hope to analyze in a future publication.

2. *Isnād-cum-matn* analysis

Ḥadīths consist of two parts, a *matn*, the text of what the prophet Muḥammad (or one of his Companions) is remembered to have said, and an *isnād*, the chain of transmitters who are said to have related this text to each other over the generations. In academia there has been debate about possible ways to date a specific phrasing of a saying to a certain period with certainty. Proposals were either to focus on the wording of the *matn*, or to mainly analyze the structure of the *isnād*. Critical objections were raised against both approaches, especially that general rules were derived from single phenomena or anecdotes.³ Over the last decades the approach to analyze both, *isnād* and *matn*, together has gained ground. It has to be pointed out right away that *isnād-cum-matn* analysis (ICMA) is not a method that can be fruitfully applied to every ḥadīth. It rests on the observation that both parts of a ḥadīth, *isnād* and *matn*, often show repetitious patterns. In the case of the *matn* this is often immediately obvious to the reader’s eye since *matns* of different transmission lines can be identical in their entirety or in certain parts, or they can show variations of a phrase or a theme such as the exchange of a term or the grammatical tenses etc. The repetitious patterns in *isnāds* are often not immediately visible to the same extent and need to be visualized. Here the terminology of common link (CL) and partial common link (PCL) is crucial. The *isnād* could state that a person said that he or she had heard the prophet say something. That person A related this to B, and B in turn related this to two people, C and D. C might have related this to 5 different people, whereas D only related it to one person. The overall pattern of the *isnāds* would be that all lines converge in the person B, who would be the CL. Since some of those lines converge in C before

³ Motzki (2005), esp. 206-247; Görke (2003), esp. 196-199.

moving to B, this C would be termed a partial common link (PCL). Only one line goes through D and it does not get a specific label.⁴ (see illustration)



Illustration

In order to achieve results as reliable as possible, factors need to be reduced which could distort the repetitious patterns. For example, if one would rely only on ḥadīths from a collection with a focus on Iraq, there would be a great likelihood that the *isnāds* would show Iraqi transmissions in a disproportionate ratio.⁵ Therefore, in a first step it is necessary to gather material from a wide stretch of sources in order to reduce the likelihood and impact of confounding variables. For these reasons ICMA only produces good results in cases where a) the repetitious patterns can be established, which are b) derived from a considerable variety of collections. Once the repetitious patterns of *isnād* and *matn* are established, the question can be addressed if there is a form of correlation between the two. Three scenarios are possible: 1) clear, 2) not so clear, and 3) no correspondence between the patterns. Only in the first two instances can ICMA be used for dating purposes,⁶ because a correlation between the CL/PCL and the *matn* is apparent. The question is how to interpret this finding, i.e. the question is what the CL actually did. Three scenarios are possible: he collected already existing material and put it

⁴ Since *isnāds* usually depict this process in reverse chronological order (“I heard from C who was told by B, who was told by A how he heard the prophet say...”) the visualization uses arrows in the according direction.

⁵ Görke (2003), 186.

⁶ Görke (2003), 191.

into wider circulation (then the material might be older than the CL); he invented the material (then the tradition would have to be dated to his lifetime); or, finally, later generations attributed the *matn* to him (which would put the dating later).⁷ All of these phenomena can be encountered and I refrain from assuming one of the three scenarios as a general rule.⁸

An additional problem for the interpretation of the correlation between patterns is the available information on transmitters. Usually this is drawn from biographical dictionaries. However, this biographical material has to be assessed carefully. For example, it might be entirely based on *isnāds*, i.e. the entry merely states that X transmitted from Y and Z to A and B, information matching 100% with the *isnāds* one wants to analyze. In such a case the independence of the biographical entry is highly questionable and it is difficult to use it for an assessment of the *isnād*.⁹

This entire exercise aims at possible conclusions about the original *matn* as the CL transmitted it “and the one responsible for whatever changes have occurred in the course of the transmission after the common link.”¹⁰ This way a diachronic, contextualized analysis of the ḥadīth material in question becomes possible.

3. *nasama* in the ḥadīth material and beyond

As mentioned above, *nasama* can mean “soul” or “human being”. In contrast to the other two common Arabic terms for “soul”, *rūḥ* and *nafs* (the latter also meaning “person”), *nasama* is not quranic. Like *rūḥ* and *nafs*¹¹, *nasama* can be found in Talmudic material (*n^eshāmā*). It can be used in the sense of “breath of life” which is blown into the human being.¹² In a second context *n^eshāmā* is used to express the pre-existence of souls, for example in the Bavli Talmud Ḥagiga 12b.¹³ In the apocryphal “Third book of Enoch”, probably dating to the 5th century CE,

⁷ Görke (2003), 188.

⁸ For example, Motzki (2005) argues for the first scenario of the CL being a collector while Pavlovitch (2016), 27ff raises important questions on this point.

⁹ See Pavlovitch (2016), 40-42.

¹⁰ Motzki (2005), 251. ICMA does not aim at reconstructing the *matn* as the prophet would have said it. Rather “authentic *matn*” in ICMA means “as the CL transmitted it”. See Motzki / Görke (2014).

¹¹ See Homerin (2006) on these two terms.

¹² Genesis 2:7, 7:22 and Job 33:4. The same usage is attested in Ibn Qutayba (1981), 11 on the creation of Adam (“and he blew in his face the breath of life” (*wa nafakha fi wajhihi nasamat al-ḥayāt*)) (see in general O’Shaughnessy (1953), 25-28, Macdonald (1931), 309; on the relation between this passage and the Pentateuch see Vollandt (2015), 98ff). Although these usages of the term are of course related to each other (i.e. *nasama* in the sense of “animate being” is derived from *nasama* meaning “breath of life”) this latter usage is not present in the ḥadīth to the same extent and I do not follow up on it.

¹³ See Ivry (2007). I thank Doru Doroftei for translating the Bavli passage to me.

the idea of pre-existing souls is expressed in chapter 43. Here, the *n^eshāmā* has a bodily form while still being distinct from the human body. It is pictured as being winged.¹⁴ As I will show, this concept of a pre-existence of souls, which are imagined in some sort of bodily form, can be identified in earlier layers of ḥadīth material referring to *nasama*.¹⁵

I identified five semantic fields in ḥadīth where *nasama* occurs. In the first field *nasama* refers to a slave in the legal context of freeing the slave.¹⁶ In the second field an attack of Muḥammad and some of his companions on another group is mentioned. During the fight some combattants also killed the enemy's children. When Muḥammad heard this, he forbade such acts and stated: "Every *nasama* is born in the state of *fiṭra*".¹⁷ *Fiṭra* is often translated as "original disposition" or "innate nature" inherent to every human being at birth.¹⁸ In this ḥadīth material *nasama* means "human being". In the third field *nasama* refers to the soul which is imagined as a winged material entity (a bird) in a clear body-soul dualism.¹⁹ Of course, this latter usage is strongly reminiscent of the above-mentioned Talmudic imagination. In sum, *nasama* can mean a slave, a human being in general, or a soul in the shape of a bird.

I will now analyze in more depth two further semantic fields: instances where *nasama* is used in connection with Adam and cases where the term occurs in the context of the debate about coitus interruptus. The Adam-material is ḥadīth material related to Q 7:172, which reads in the Arberry translation:

"And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?'"

¹⁴ Odenberg (1928), 174-180, esp. 174f and 180. I am deeply indebted to Doru Doroftei for sharing this reference with me. See also Emmel (1918), 15 on Plato imagining the soul as being winged and the material gathered and referenced in van Ess (1997), IV: 523 and Homerin (1985), 168, 174.

¹⁵ I want to point out that during the research process for this article, I first analyzed the ḥadīth material using *nasama*. Only after this process had come to a conclusion did I start wondering about possible parallels in usage in biblical material. In other words: the Talmudic conception did not guide my analysis of the material. In the presentation here, I reverse this order for the sake of clarity.

¹⁶ A typical example is: "A man bought from his *zakāt* a *nasama* and then set her free. Then she died and left an inheritance." (Ibn Abī Shayba (1989), 2:434) The same use is attested for *nafs* (see Homerin 2006).

¹⁷ See for example Naysābūrī (1990), 2:134. The first two transmitters of this ḥadīth material are always al-Ḥasan b. Yasār → al-Aswad b. Sarīf.

¹⁸ See Hoover (2016) with extensive references.

¹⁹ E.g. "The *nasama* of the believer is a bird sitting on the tree of paradise until God brings it back to his body (*jasad*) on the day when he resurrects him." (Mālik (2003), 2:221, where it is also indicated that the recension of Abū Muṣ'ab al-Zuhrī has *nafs* instead of *nasama*.)

Several variants of ḥadīth material relating to this verse exist, where the term *nasama* is used, for example:

“When God created Adam he ran his hand over his [Adam’s] back (*zühr*). And out of his back fell each *nasama*, of which he is the creator of [Adam’s] progeny until the day of resurrection. And he put on the forehead of each human (*insān*) of those a flash (*wabīṣ*) of light. Then he presented them to Adam, who then said: Oh Lord, who are those? He said: Those are your progeny. He saw one man among them and the flash on his forehead astonished him and he said: Oh Lord, who is this? He said: This is a man from the last of communities from your progeny, he is called David (...).”²⁰

There are largely two variants of this story, one making a connection to the idea of a pre-existing covenant for every individual human being²¹ and one relating it to a person named David, probably a messianic figure.²² The first does not necessarily use the term *nasama* while the David-variant always does. It is related on the authority of Abū Hurayra (see table 1).²³ The CL is Hishām b. Saʿd (d. ca. 160 / 776f).²⁴ The transmission of PCL Ibn Wahb has ʿAtāʾ b. Yasār after Abū Hurayra (dotted line). As can be seen, the story uses the term *nasama* at the beginning and proceeds with *insān* in the second sentence, which clearly implies the existence of a body.²⁵ This might be understood as an attempt to disambiguate the *nasama* of the first sentence as “human being” including his or her bodily existence – possibly in the form of a miniscule template.²⁶ Beside this scenario of a semantic overlap between the two terms, the terminological change from *nasama* to *insān* can also be interpreted as a sign that the two terms referred to different things. Parts of the later Muslim theological discussion opted for the latter and understood *nasama* to refer to “souls” here.²⁷

²⁰ Tirmidhī (1996), 5:159.

²¹ On this material see Gramlich (1983) and van Ess (1975).

²² In talmudic material the messiah is sometimes named [Ben] Davīd. See bYev 62a “Rabbi Assi said: The son of David will not come until all souls (*neshamot*) from the treasure chamber will be born.” I thank Doru Doroftei for pointing out and translating this passage to me.

²³ Tirmidhī (1996), 5:159; Naysabūrī (1990), 2:354, 640; Fākihī (1998), 328f; Ibn Wahb (1999), 21ff; Firyābī (1997), 1:35, 37; Ibn Mandah (2002), 23; Ibn Saʿd (2001), 1:11f.; Mawṣilī (1989), 11:263, 12:8. The collectors are italicized in the table.

²⁴ Dhahabī (2001), 7:345f.

²⁵ The material via Ibn Wahb – arguably representing the earlier transmission layer (see the death dates of the PCLs) – has *wajh kull rajul* (“the face of each man”) instead of *insān*.

²⁶ For example, Gramlich (1983), 210ff translates *Mikrowesen* (“micro beings”).

²⁷ Dimashqī (1997), 1:303-308. For other material concerning souls and the creation of Adam see Kister (1993), 156.

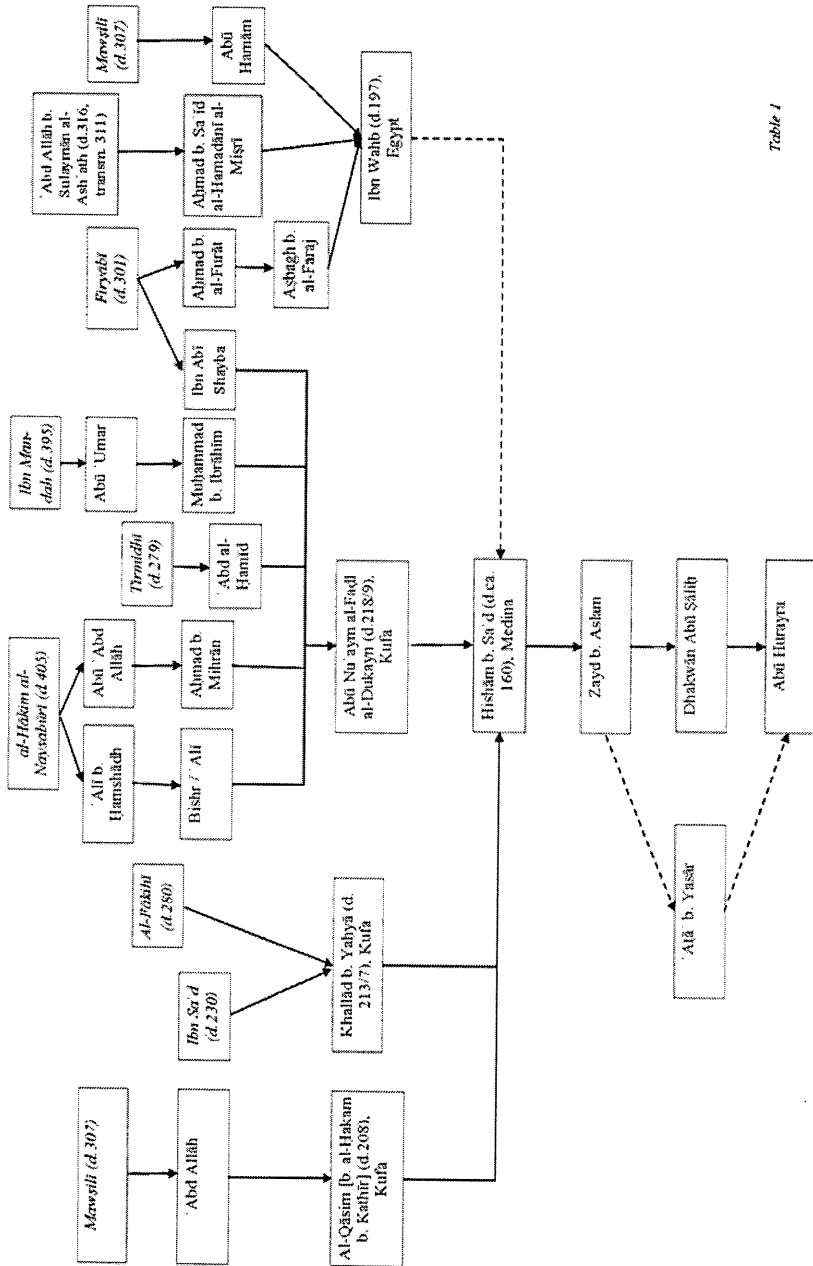


Table 1

This link between *nasama* and Adam is also evident in other ḥadīth material via Mālik b. al-Ḥuwayrath speaking about the emergence of new human life:

“When God wants to create the *nasama*, the man cohabits the woman, his semen (*māʾuhu*) wanders in every vein (*ʿirq*) and nerve (*ʿaṣab*) of hers. When the 7th day comes, God makes present to it every (inherited) disposition (*ʿirq*)²⁸ between it and Adam (*baynahu wa bayna Ādam*).” Then [the prophet] read [from the Qurʾan]: In whatever form he pleases to model you. (Q 82:8)²⁹

This ḥadīth is preserved only rarely which makes a full ICMA futile, but several observations can still be made (see table 2). This specific *matn* is attached to a single strand *isnād* preserved by Ṭabarānī. About the first three transmitters very limited information exists which basically seems to be extracted from the *isnād*-material.³⁰ Beside this single strand, several transmission lines fan out from Abū Bakr b. Abī l-Aswad (d. 223 / 837, Baṣra, *nazīl* Baghdad).³¹

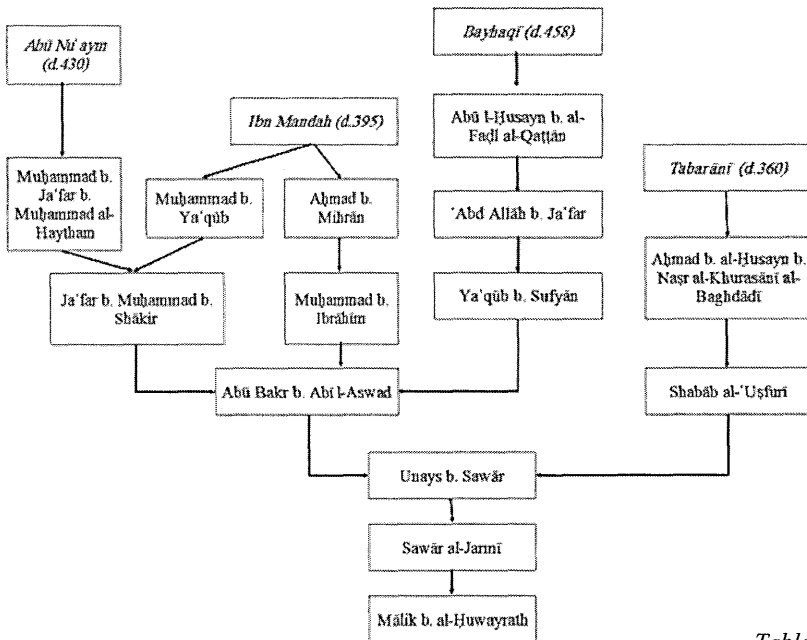


Table 2

²⁸ Lane (1893), 5:2018f.

²⁹ Ṭabarānī (1985), 1:82; idem (n.d.), 2:170.

³⁰ Bukhārī (1986-1987), II:43 (Unays), IV:167 (Sawār), V:301 (Mālik).

³¹ Dhahabī (2001), 10:649f.

This structure rules out the possibility to date the ḥadīth with any certainty before Abū Bakr. The variant in this second transmission via Abū Bakr reads as follows:

“When God wants to create a human being (‘*abd*), the man cohabits the woman. His semen wanders in every vein and nerve of hers. When the 7th day comes, God gathers it / him and makes present to it / him every (inherited) disposition except for Adam (*dūna Ādam*) in whatever form he pleases to model him.”³²

Note, first, that here ‘*abd* is used instead of *nasama*.³³ Second, in this variant there is explicitly no link to Adam. Rather, the point is now that Adam did not have any inherited traits because he was not created from parents. Given the problematic structure of the *isnād*, is a relative dating of the two variants possible? Based on two stylistic observations, I suggest that the variant preserved by Ṭabarānī reflects an earlier stage than the material via Abū Bakr. First, compared to the Ṭabarānī-variant, the Abū Bakr-cluster invariably has after the 7th day an additional “God gathers”, which smoothes the narrative flow considerably (now, the semen is gathered before God makes the disposition present to it). Also, in the Abū Bakr-cluster, the Qur’anic reference at the end is stylistically integrated into the ḥadīth, again enhancing considerably the stylistic flow of the *matn* compared to the Ṭabarānī-variant.³⁴ Therefore I conclude the Ṭabarānī-variant to reflect an earlier wording of the *matn* and consequently posit that *nasama* was substituted by ‘*abd* and that the earlier link to Adam was deliberately cut in a later textual development.

The link of *nasama* to Adam and the subsequent cutting of that connection can also be sensed in some material discussing whether *coitus interruptus* (‘*azl*) should be permitted.³⁵ ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211 / 827) preserves this tradition:

[‘Abd al-Razzāq → Abū Ḥanīfa → Ibrāhīm → ‘Alqama → Ibn Mas‘ūd, who stated:] “If God took the contract (*mīthāq*) of a *nasama* from the loins of Adam and put it (*aḥraḡha-hu*) on a rock, he would let it come out (*akhraḡahu*) from that rock, so practice ‘*azl* or, if you like, do not practice it.”³⁶

³² Abū Nu‘aym (1998), 2460; Ibn Mandah (2002), 1:232; Bayhaqī (1993), 2:261.

³³ The same *nasama*-to-‘*abd*-exchange can be witnessed in a variant obviously with the *matn* of the ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar-tradition (see below) but (mis)attributed to Ḥudhayfa b. Asīd (Ṭabarānī (1994): 3:177).

³⁴ See Pavlovitch (2016), 39 on relative dating. The variant in Bayhaqī (1993), 2:261 incorporates the Qur’an reference into the ḥadīth, but has not adjusted the object at the end from “in whatever form he pleases to model you” (Q 8:82) to “him”.

³⁵ For a superb overview and analysis of the different positions see Benkheira (2013). For the following material, Benkheira points to a possible parallel in Matthew 3,9 (p. 268).

³⁶ ‘Abd al-Razzāq (1983), 7:144.

Within the discussion about *ʿazl* this statement expressed the position that if God wants to create life he will do so, no matter how one behaves concerning contraception. For the present discussion about *nasama*, the explicit link with Adam is of interest, since a slightly later version of the same tradition omits him:

[Yūsuf [b. Yaʿqūb] (d. 246 / 860) → Abīhi [Abū Yūsuf] (d. 182 / 798) → Abū Ḥanīfa etc.:] “If God took the contract of a *nasama* from the loins of a man and then threw it (*ṣabbahu*) on a rock, he would let come out from it [the rock], that *nasama* of which he took its contract.”³⁷

I interpret this as a strong indication that probably before 860 (during the first half of the third century hijra) the link between the term *nasama* and Adam was considerably weakened, something which could also be witnessed above in the material on the authority of Mālik b. al-Ḥuwayrath. Consequently, the creation of the *nasama* was moved in time from the beginnings of humankind to the emergence of each individual human. This process might also explain other nuances in the ḥadīth material on *ʿazl* in which Muḥammad states one of the following variants (I translate close to the Arabic sentence structure):

- a) “There is no *nasama* existing until the day of resurrection, except it is existing” (*mā min nasama kāʿina ilā yawm al-qiyāma illā wa-hiya kāʿina*).³⁸
- b) “God has not written down the creation of a *nasama*, that it is existing until the day of resurrection, except that she will exist” (*mā kataba Allāh khalq nasama hiya kāʿina ilā yawm al-qiyāma illā sa-takūn*).³⁹

This material cannot easily be dated in an exact manner. The first variant is attested earlier, preserved by Mālik b. Anas (d. 179 / 795). His source is Rabīʿa b. Abī ʿAbd al-Rahmān⁴⁰, who is removed three transmitters from the prophet. The second variant, preserved by Muslim (d. 261 / 875) goes back via two transmitters to the same *isnād* via Rabīʿa. Here, the point is again that one may practice *ʿazl* or not, a pregnancy might result anyway if God wills. The sentence has a *mā / laysa ...illā...-structure*, in which the first half defines something (e.g. a group) as “not” (e.g. not existing) and then formulates an exception (*illā*) from this first part. Often this construction translates as “only”. Variant a) could be understood as “nothing exists, but that which exists” (a truism); or “...which already exists” or “...which

³⁷ Abū Yūsuf (n.d.), 154.

³⁸ Mālik (2003), 3:317f (note the considerable efforts of the editor to disambiguate the sentence in the footnotes); Muslim (2013), 525 [*Kitāb al-nikāḥ*. Bāb ḥukm al-ʿazl].

³⁹ Muslim (2013), p. 525 [*Kitāb al-nikāḥ*. Bāb ḥukm al-ʿazl]. The addition of “until the day of resurrection” possibly echoes the tradition on the *nasamas* coming out of Adam’s back, where the phrase ties in with the Qur’anic text.

⁴⁰ Died 130s or 142 hijra, 759 CE the latest (Mizzī (1992), 9:123ff).

will exist”; compared to this phrasing variant b) takes considerable efforts to clarify unambiguously that the *nasama* is created in time according to God’s will which he wrote down before time.⁴¹

Until now I have analyzed several examples of ḥadīth material which use the term *nasama* and make a statement in connection with the generation of new human life. It could be shown how in the 9th century CE the latest this ḥadīth material underwent noticeable changes, which cut the link to the idea of pre-existence of *nasamas* which were in this context imagined as bodily entities. Rather the aspect of the *nasama* being created in time was emphasized, which moved the meaning of the term more towards “human being”. As a possible culmination of this process *nasama* was substituted in this material by unambiguous terms such as *‘abd*.

4. The ḥadīth by ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar

Against this background I turn now to material related on the authority of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar:

“When God wants to create the *nasama*, the angel of the uterus (*malak al-arḥām*) – showing up – says: Oh Lord, male or female? So God decrees his order (*fa-yaqḏī Allāh amrahu*). Then he says: Oh Lord, wretched or blessed? So God decrees his order. Then he writes on his forehead what he will experience, even the misfortune that reaches him (*thumma yaktub bayna ‘aynayhi mā huwa lāq ḥatta al-nakba yankabuhā*).”⁴²

Its *isnād* structure can be gleaned from table 3, the CL is Muḥammad b. Muslim Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī.⁴³ After Zuhrī, the *isnāds* can be divided into Egyptian (Yūnis b. Yazīd and ‘Uqayl b. Khālīd) and Non-Egyptian transmitters (the rest).

⁴¹ For similar material with the CL Ibrāhīm b. Sa’d (d. 183 / 799) (Dhahabī (2001), 8:305ff) see Ibn Mājah (n.d.), 1:620 and Dārimī (2013), 531. In other variants the root *k-w-n* (to exist) is exchanged for *kh-r-j* (to go out), which surely refers to birth – an additional means to clarify that the *nasama* is created in time (see Bukhārī (2015), 376 [*Kitāb al-buyū‘*]. Bāb bi’ al-raḥīq]: “She is not a *nasama* [for who] God wrote down that she will go out, except that she is going out.” (*laysat nasama kataba Allāh an takhruj illā hiya khārija*). See similarly *ibid.*, 1175 [*Kitāb al-Qadar*]).

⁴² Dārimī (1985), 128. The translation follows van Ess (1975), 25.

⁴³ After ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar the name of the first transmitter ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Hunayda / Ibn Hubayra varies between the collections which partly express explicit uncertainty about the exact name. See also van Ess (1975), 25f with Fn 77. The five *isnāds* from Zuhrī are in Firyābī (1997), 1:118 [Nos.138, 139]; Ma’mar (1983), 11:123; Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim (1980), 1:81 [Nos. 182, 183, 186]; and the six from Yūnis in Lālakā’ī (2003), 4:656; Ajurrī (1999), 2:782f; Mawṣilī (1989), 11:154; Haythamī, *Maqṣad*, 3:76; *ibid.*, *Mawārid*, 1:448; Dārimī (1985), 128. The *isnād* via ‘Uqayl is from Abbott (1967), p. 167 (see below).

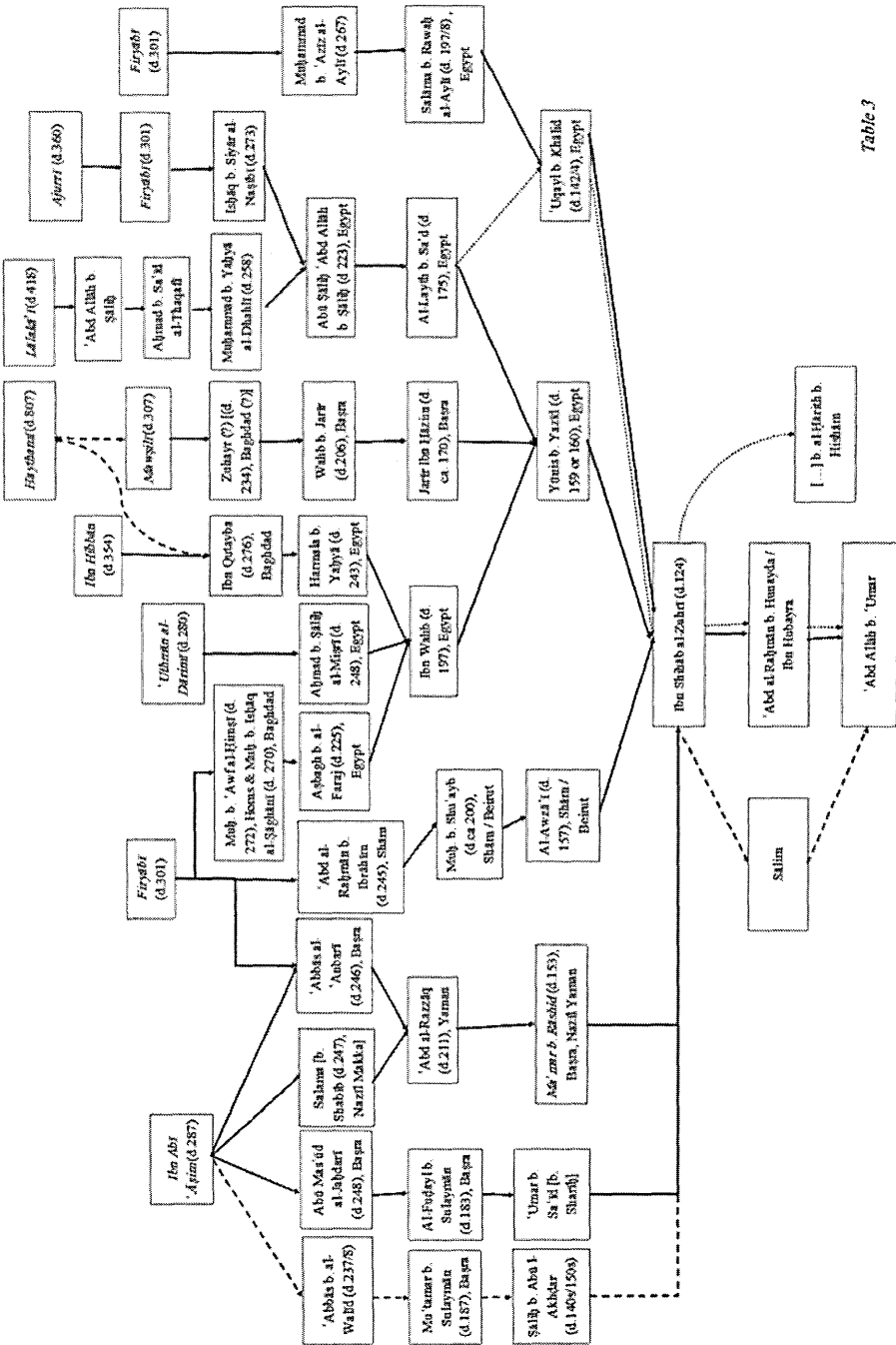


Table 3

I start my ICMA with the group of non-Egyptian transmitters. Most of them are preserved in the collection of Ibn Abī Ṣāṣim (d. 287 / 900) and one in the collection ascribed to Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 153 / 770) which also re-occurs in the collection of Firyābī (d. 301 / 913), who additionally preserves a Syrian *isnād*.⁴⁴

Ibn Abī Ṣāṣim preserves three *matns*, two with one *isnād* each and one with a collective *isnād*, which has Maʿmar as PCL (see table 3, where it is represented by the *isnād* via Ṣabd al-Razzāq to Maʿmar).⁴⁵ As to the two single strands (table 3, first two from the left), in several instances the prosographical sources might raise doubts, e.g. due to providing only little information independent from the *isnāds*.⁴⁶ In one case (dashed line in table 3) a different transmitter is given between Zuhri and Ṣabd Allāh b. Ṣumar. This material cannot be included meaningfully into the analysis for dating purposes. However, the two *matns* provide precious evidence for a very crucial point: the term *nasama* obviously posed problems for the transmitters and they had no over-arching pattern for replacing it. One *matn* exchanges it for the term *naḥs* and the other drops it entirely.⁴⁷ Similarly, in the Syrian transmission via al-Awzāʿī (d. 157 / 774) (see table 3, center) *nasama* is exchanged for *nutfa*.⁴⁸

As to PCL Maʿmar, material survives in three collections: Ibn Abī Ṣāṣim's (d. 287 / 900), Maʿmar's (d. 153 / 770) and Firyābī's (d. 301 / 913). The *matns* in the first two collections are identical whereas Firyābī has a variant. For dating purposes, the following has to be kept in mind: strictly speaking Maʿmar's collection is material dictated by Maʿmar's student Ṣabd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211 / 827) to one of his students. Generally, I comply with the assumption that the material from Maʿmar's collection very probably reflects Maʿmar's teaching comparatively closely. However, I think that a comparison between the exact wording of the material as preserved in his collection and the material in Firyābī's can only

⁴⁴ Firyābī (1997), 1:117f [Nos. 137 (Syrian); 138]; Maʿmar (1983), 11:123; Ibn Abī Ṣāṣim (1980), 1:81 [Nos. 182-186]. Nos. 183-5 are a collective *isnād*, represented in table 3 through No. 185, which seems the most reliable to me. No. 184 (Ibn Abī Ṣumar (d. 243) → Maʿmar (d. 153) and ṢAmrū b. Dīnār (d. 126) → al-Zuhri (d. 124)), seems questionable. (Dhahabī (2001), 12: 96f also does not mention transmission neither from Maʿmar nor ṢAmrū to Ibn Abī Ṣumar), and in No. 183 Ibn Kāsib (d.?) → ṢUbayd Allāh b. Muʿādh (d. 237) → Maʿmar (d. 153), the time span between the latter two is remarkably long. See also the critical discussion about Ibn Kāsib in Dhahabī (2001), 11:158ff.

⁴⁵ The *isnād* only has Salama. The identification as Salama b. Shabīb is my guess.

⁴⁶ See Ibn Ḥibbān (1973-1983), 7:175 (for ṢUmar b. Saʿīd b. Sharīḥ) 8:102 and Ibn Ḥajar (1999), 138 (on Abū Masʿūd al-Jahḍarī), Dhahabī (2001), 7:304 (on Ṣāliḥ b. Abū l-Akhḍar) and 8:477f (on Muʿtamar b. Sulaymān, providing long lists of names of his teachers and students and suspiciously lacking the ones in the *isnād* analyzed here).

⁴⁷ Ibn Abī Ṣāṣim (1980), 1:81ff [Nos. 182 (dropping *nasama*), 186 (exchanging for *naḥs*)].

⁴⁸ Firyābī (1997), 1:117.

provide reliable results for the time-frame between the generation of ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Firyābī rather than Abd al-Razzāq’s *teacher* and Firyābī, i.e. between 827 and 913, and not 770 and 913.

Now, the two earlier versions (Maʿmar, Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim) read: “When God creates the *nasama* (...)” (*idhā khalaqa Allāh al-nasama*). The latest version of the three (Firyābī) reiterates that this takes place in the uterus: “When God creates the *nasama in the uterus*” (*idhā khalaqa Allāh al-nasama fī l-rahim*).⁴⁹ One could argue that the point should not be overstated since the ḥadīth continues “the angel of the uterus says” (*qāla malak al-arḥām*). But I would argue the other way round that this addition to the ḥadīth is an indication that the reference to the *malak al-arḥām* was not considered to suffice here. This change has to be dated after ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211 / 827), i.e. in the 9th century CE.

Now I turn to the material transmitted in Egypt. There, ʿUqayl b. Khālid can be found in one *isnād* preserved by Firyābī and in a papyrus edited by Nabia Abbott which contains ḥadīths transmitted from ʿUqayl to his pupil al-Layth b. Saʿd and written down by one of the latter’s students before 231 / 845.⁵⁰ This latter *isnād* is represented with a dotted line.⁵¹ Firyābī’s is highly suspicious (witness the extensive gaps between the death dates of several transmitters). However, due to the *isnād* in the papyrus the link ʿUqayl b. Khālid → al-Zuhrī can be confirmed as an early transmission line.⁵² Firyābī preserved an additional *isnād* through Yūnis b. Yazīd. Ajurrī included this transmission line and did not the more suspicious one. This scenario is difficult to interpret, but it cannot be ruled out that Firyābī transferred the *matn* to a different *isnād*, which he considered to be better. This possible transfer might also raise doubts whether a similar process took place for the ḥadīth preserved by Lālakāʿī, since it shares the PCL Abū Ṣāliḥ and also goes to al-Layth.⁵³ This transfer from Layth → ʿUqayl to the *isnād*-segment Layth → Yūnis implies a considerable reduction of the time-span to be covered between the two transmitters, roughly 30 lunar years in the first constellation versus 15 in the second. This is something *isnāds* usually try to avoid and as such is noteworthy. The *isnād* from Jarīr Ibn Ḥāzim to Yūnis also shows this pattern (approx. 10

⁴⁹ Maʿmar (1983), 11:123; Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim (1980), 1:81; Firyābī (1997), 1:118.

⁵⁰ For the identity of that student see the discussion in Abbott (1967), 172f who prefers Yaḥyā b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Bukayr (d. 231 / 845) but also discusses Abū Ṣāliḥ (d. 223 / 838) as another possible candidate.

⁵¹ The papyrus contains two *isnāds* with different transmitters above Zuhrī: Abū Bakr b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Hunayda and Abū Bakr b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥārith b. Hishām, the latter going directly to the prophet. (Abbott 1967, 167; compare van Ess (1975), 25f with Fn 77).

⁵² Compare Mizzī (1992), 26:115-117 for a critique of Muḥammad b. ʿAzīz al-Aylī’s transmission from Salāma b. Rawāḥ al-Aylī.

⁵³ Ṭaḥāwī (1994), 8:81 also preserves an *isnād* going to ʿUqayl b. Khālid → Zuhrī referencing the *nasama* but the *matn* differs so much that it cannot be included in the analysis here.

years covered)⁵⁴ and against the background of the mentioned other cases of a possible *matn*-transfer in this bundle it might be speculated whether a similar process might have occurred here as well.⁵⁵

What all these *isnāds* have in common is that they bypass Ibn Wahb and it is perceivable that this is exactly what they were aiming at (i.e. a “dive” in the terminology of Juynboll)⁵⁶. As I will show shortly, this pattern of *isnāds* through Ibn Wahb and *isnāds* bypassing him largely coincides with differences in the *matns*. One could thus speculate that the latter group would be later variants put into circulation against the Ibn Wahb-variant. However, the *isnād* contained in the papyrus (which is the earliest definite surviving source) is part of this latter group and we therefore have to assume the other way round that this group reflects an earlier layer, pre-dating Ibn Wahb.

To sum up so far, the material within the Egyptian transmission process can be divided into the following groups (I use the collectors as labels for reference, see table 3 from right to left):

- a) Material explicitly ascribed to the transmission of ʿUqayl b. Khālid (Firyābī and papyrus).
- b) Material where this ascription was *possibly* moved from ʿUqayl to Yūnis (Firyābī, Ajurrī, Lālakāʿī, Haythamī with the *isnād* via Jarīr).
- c) Material where the ascription to Yūnis is very likely reliable (CL Ibn Wahb).

Among these sources the papyrus edited by Abbott is the earliest and can safely be dated to the first third of the third century hijra (i.e. before 845 CE), the rest of the material representing collecting efforts at least fifty to seventy years afterwards (Dārimī, Firyābī) or considerably later. This overall picture has implications for the dating of the *matn* – though later redaction processes can never be ruled out as alternative explanations of observed phenomena, of course.

The final phrase from the *matn* “Then he writes on his forehead...” can only be found in the Egyptian transmissions, either ascribed through ʿUqayl or Yūnis to al-Zuhrī. It is lacking in the other material going back to al-Zuhrī. I therefore conclude that this final phrase is Egyptian, cannot be ascribed to al-Zuhrī and has to be dated not only in the lifetime of Yūnis (before ca. 776 CE) but in the lifetime of ʿUqayl b. Khālid, i.e. ca. 760 CE. However, it is difficult to assess the implications of the addition. It could be that it intended to signal that the writing takes place *in time*, during each pregnancy when the unborn has acquired human bodily shape. On the other hand, the Adam-tradition analyzed above imagined the pre-existent *nasamas* to have such shape as well and the reference to the *nasama*’s

⁵⁴ Dhahabī (2001), 6:300 (death dates for Yūnis: 152, 159, and 160), 7:101 (Jarīr, d. 170).

⁵⁵ Dhahabī (2001), 7:101 preserves the memory that Jarīr transmitted from al-Layth b. Saʿd “a long copy” (*nuskha ṭawīla*).

⁵⁶ See Pavlovitch (2016), 24.

forehead (*bayna ʿaynayhi*) might thus echo the same expression in the Adam-tradition.⁵⁷

One can also notice a slight change in the opening formula of the Egyptian material. The earlier versions all read *idhā khalaqa Allāh nasamat*^{an}. This could either mean “when God creates a *nasama*” or “...created a *nasama*”. Against the background of my previous analysis such an interpretation is possible. It could be objected, that grammatically speaking the use of perfect tense owes to the Arabic grammatical rules for conditional clauses, which always consist of two verbal clauses both in perfect tense but according to context have to be understood either as perfect or imperfect tense. Here, the angel asks two questions (male / female, wretched / blessed) and the second question is introduced with *yaqūl*, i.e. imperfect tense, which would then indicate that the whole plot has to be read as taking place *in* time and not before it. Therefore, *idhā khalaqa Allāh* would *have* to mean “when God creates” and not “created”. However, it has to be noted that a group of the ḥadīth material shows traces of a redaction process for the passages following the initial conditional clause: the repeated insertion of an additional “he said” (*qāla*) which refers back to the transmitter and disrupts the flow of the *matn*’s narrative (for example, “He [the transmitter] said: Then he [the angel] says” (*qāla thumma yaqūl*)).⁵⁸ This peculiarity only shows up in the Egyptian material of the groups a and b⁵⁹, i.e. the earliest transmission layer, and it shows clear traces of a redaction process for the passages following the initial conditional clause. Therefore, to base such a possible objection on grammatical logic derived from those follow-up passages rests on very shaky ground.

Now, in one strand especially from the link Ibn Wahb (d. 197 / 813) → Yūnis b. Yazīd (d. ca. 160 / 776f)⁶⁰ we find “If God wants to create a *nasama*...” (*idhā arāda Allāh an yakhlūq nasama*).⁶¹ This particular phrasing *idhā arāda Allāh* is

⁵⁷ See also Abū ʿAwāna (1998), 1:119f who compares two transmission lines describing a vision of Muḥammad in the heavens: He sees Adam plus a group of people “to the right”, who will enter paradise, and a group “to the left”, who will enter the fire. According to Abū ʿAwāna the major difference between the two transmissions was that the second omitted the word *nasama*. This second *isnād* contains the segment from Muḥammad al-Aylī to Ibn Shihāb which supports the impression that in this line the term was considered as somehow problematic, at least when linked to predestination and Adam. However, this material does not allow for a dating when this occurred exactly.

⁵⁸ Ajurrī (1999), 2:782; Lālakāʿī (2003), 4:656. See also Haythamī, *Maqṣad*, 3:76 and Firyābī (1997), 118 for variations of these traces.

⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the papyrus in Abbott (1967), plate 11 is destroyed in the specific short passage under discussion here.

⁶⁰ Dhahabī (2001), 6:298ff.

⁶¹ The *matn* of the *isnād* Jarīr → Yūnis also has this formula. This material is difficult to assess. As mentioned above, here the *isnād* might possibly have been moved from ʿUqayl to Yūnis which might point to an even earlier dating. But then one would have

not random in the ḥadīth material on the angel and the unborn, where it particularly shows up in the ḥadīth from Anas b. Mālik (all variants, see below).⁶² It can also be found in the above-mentioned ḥadīth from Mālik b. Ḥuwayrath, where the opening phrase is identical (“When God wants to create the *nasama*...”). In my eyes, what the occurrences in the ḥadīths from Anas b. Mālik and from Mālik b. Ḥuwayrath have in common is that they unambiguously speak about an act of God *in time* at the beginning of or during each pregnancy. I therefore assume that the change in the phrasing of the opening formula ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar-ḥadīth in the link Ibn Wahb → Yūnis b. Yazīd had the same tendency.⁶³ Also, I suggest – though more tentatively⁶⁴ – that this probable act of disambiguation can be dated to the lifetime of Ibn Wahb.

To sum up so far: The non-Egyptian transmission preserves clear indications that the term *nasama* was perceived as problematic and documents attempts to replace it. Further, for the material which kept *nasama* it was considered necessary during the 9th century to add *fī l-raḥim* and make unambiguously clear that the *nasama* is in the uterus. The Egyptian transmission preserves the earliest datable material. Only there is the final phrase “Then he writes on his forehead...” attested though its implications cannot be established in definite manner. Further, in this transmission line the earlier formulation *idhā khalaqa Allāh* was eventually considered as ambiguous and therefore was rephrased during the lifetime of Ibn Wahb, i.e. before 813. All the material analyzed here taken together indicates that possibly starting in the late 8th century and definitely during the 9th century the understanding of the term *nasama* in the analyzed ḥadīth material underwent a noticeable development in order to disambiguate it and to indicate that the ḥadīth describes an event in the uterus – and thus by implication something happening *in time*.

to explain why the formula is missing in the other material through ‘Uqayl (including the papyrus). On the other hand, the material comes from a very late source (Haythamī (d. 807)) and Haythamī also knew the version from Ibn Wahb, so an interpolation of the (slightly changed) formula at a later date can very easily be imagined.

⁶² Beyond this, it occurs only in the ḥadīth from Ḥudhayfa b. Asīd via Rabī‘a b. Kulthūm (Muslim (2013), 991; Bazzār (1988-2009), 4:280; Ṭabarānī (1994), 3:176, probably influenced by the Anas-material, see below) plus one single strand (Ṭabarānī (1994), 3:177), and a variant of the ḥadīth from Ibn Mas‘ūd via his grandson Mas‘ūdī (Firyābī (1997), 111; Ṭabarānī (1994), 9:267) plus one single strand (Ibn Ḥanbal (2001), 6:13).

⁶³ A mutual influence is very likely between the ḥadīths from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar via Ibn Wahb and from Mālik b. Ḥuwayrath, sharing the identical opening formula. But it seems impossible to me to identify in definite matter in which direction this process of influencing took place (if a model of directionality makes sense here at all).

⁶⁴ See footnote 61.

5. The ḥadīth by Anas b. Mālik

Now I analyze a ḥadīth related on the authority of Anas b. Mālik which also treats an angel's visit in connection with predestination:

“God has assigned an angel for the uterus. And he says: Oh Lord! Semen (*nufṣa*), oh Lord, blood-clot (*‘alaqa*), oh Lord, lump of flesh (*muḍgha*). And if God wants to decree a creation (*yaqḍī khalqan*) the angel says: Oh Lord! Male or female? Wretched or blessed? And what is his sustenance? And what is his time of death? So he writes likewise in the belly of his mother.”⁶⁵

This ḥadīth is attested with 10 collectors with 11 different *isnāds* (see table 4).⁶⁶ All but one *isnād* have Ḥammād b. Zayd (d. 795) as CL.⁶⁷ The ḥadīth is clearly structured in two parts, part two starting with the conditional interjection “if God wants to decree its creation” (*idhā arāda Allāh an yaqḍiya khalqa-hā*). This material generally shares the following characteristics: God has assigned an angel in / for (*fī / bi*) the uterus; reference to the quranic tripartite formula *nufṣa-‘alaqa-muḍgha* is made;⁶⁸ the angel is asking questions about the following items: *shaqī/ sa‘īd*, *dhakar / unthā*, *rizq*, *ajal*;⁶⁹ and it ends with the sentence “so he writes in the belly of his mother” (*fa-yaktub fī baṭn ummihi*).⁷⁰ The CL Ḥammād b. Zayd (d. 179 / 795) transmitted in Baṣra. Most of the students in the *isnāds* where Baṣran as well and died at a time which makes it possible that they could have heard the tradition from Ḥammād. The biographical entries in their totality are specific enough to infer that they mostly did not only rely on the *isnāds*.⁷¹ Against the background of this structure of *isnād* and *matn* I date the earliest version of the tradition with certainty to the lifetime of Ḥammād, i.e. before 795.

⁶⁵ Muslim (2013), 991.

⁶⁶ Bukhārī (2015), 71, 584, 1174; Muslim (2013), 992; Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim (1980), 1:82 [No. 187]; Ibn Asakir (2000), 1:458; Ibn Ḥanbal (2001), 19:201, 482; Ṭayālisī (1999), 3:548; Ibn Mandah (2002), 246; Bayhaqī (1993), 1:351, (1981/2), 1:172, (2000), 1:151 (counted as one *isnād*); Firyābī (1997), 1:122f [Nos. 144, 145]; Ajurrī (1999), 2:783 (*isnād* following Firyābī No. 144 and not counted as independent).

⁶⁷ Many have only Ḥammād, but early sources (Ibn Ḥanbal, Ṭayālisī) are unambiguous.

⁶⁸ See Q 22:5, 23:12-14. Only Ibn ‘Asakir 1:558 lacks the *nufṣa*. Bukhārī (2015), 71 has this ḥadīth in the book on menstruation in the chapter about the exegesis of Q 22:5 *mukhallaqa wa ghayr mukhallaqa*. This link to the exegesis of (*ghayr*) *mukhallaqa* is further substantiated by the probably earliest variant preserved by Ṭayālisī ((1999), 3:548), which has “...wants to *complete* (*yatimm*) its creation”. The exegesis of (*ghayr*) *mukhallaqa* partly equated the terminology with “complete and incomplete” (*tāmm wa-ghayr-tāmm*). See Muqātil (1980-89), 3:115 and Ṭabarī (1957), 9:110f.

⁶⁹ Exceptions are Ṭayālisī (see below) and Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim (1980), 1:82 (no *dhakar/unthā*).

⁷⁰ The only exception is Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim (1980), 1:82 with “and he writes what he says”.

⁷¹ Dhahabī (2001), 9:176ff (Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd Qaṭṭān), 379ff (Abū Dawūd), 473ff (Yūnis b. Muḥammad), 523ff (Yaḥyā b. Ādam), 10:266ff (Abū Nu‘mān), 331ff (Sulaymān b. Harb), 591ff (Musaddad), 677f (Abū Rabī‘ Zahrānī), 661 (Muqaddamī), 11:112f (Abū Kāmil al-Jahdarī), 477f (Ishāq b. Abī Isrā‘īl).

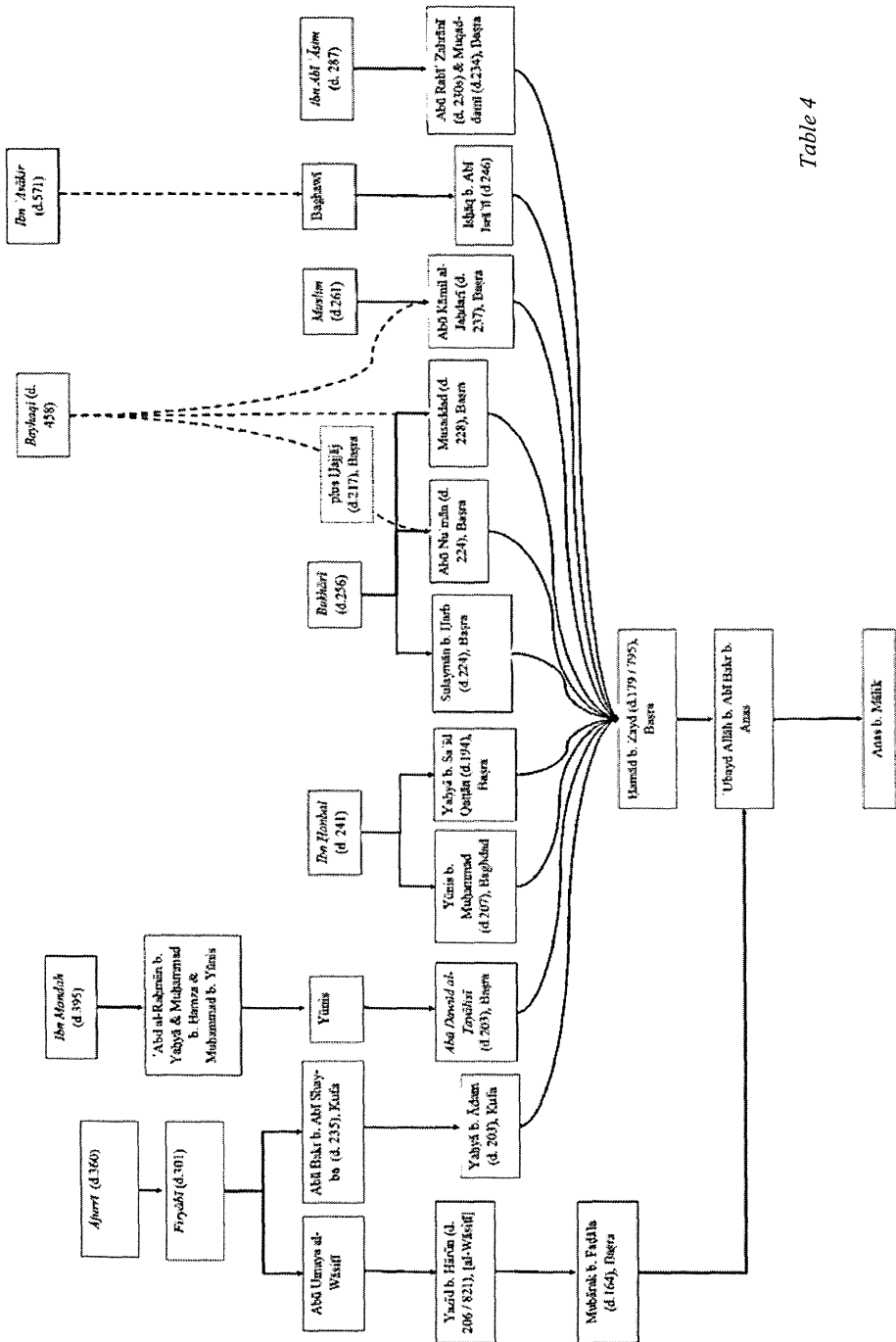


Table 4

Firyābī preserves a different version with an *isnād* branching out before Ḥammād b. Zayd,⁷² sharing several features with the other material ascribed to Anas b. Mālik, especially the passage after the formula “if God wants to create” where the angel asks the identical set of questions in the identical order. However, there are also significant differences: the opening formula “God has assigned an angel...” is lacking; the reference to the unborn is not made through the tripartite quranic formula but only through *nutfā*; it gives the number 40, which the Ḥammād-version does not; and the wording of the final clause differs. Because of these differences in the *matn* plus the fact that this is a single strand *isnād*, the material cannot be included meaningfully into the analysis.

The material via Ḥammād b. Zayd shows two signs of redaction history. First, after the structural marker of the conditional interjection several transmissions have an additional *qāla* / *yaqūlu*: “he said: the angel [then] says...”.⁷³ The first *qāla* is unnecessary and probably refers back to the CL Ḥammād b. Zayd, thus disrupting the narrative flow of the ḥadīth. This can be taken as an indication that the linking together of the two *specific* phrasings of the two parts of the ḥadīth took place during the lifetime of Ḥammād b. Zayd (d. 795). Eventually, the doubling of *qāla* was removed in the redaction history of the other variants.

Second, the probably earliest variant of the ḥadīth preserved by Abū Dawūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 203) from Baṣra strongly suggests that the material originally only included the predetermination of *shaqī* / *saʿīd* and *dhakar* / *unthā*, and not the two other elements *rizq* (sustenance) and *ajal* (time of death) as in all the other variants.⁷⁴

6. A possible relation between the two ḥadīths

Let us now look at the ḥadīths on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar and Anas b. Mālik together (later additions in the transmission process are marked by square brackets; major points which I will address shortly are bold face):

When God creates / created [wants to create] the *nasama*, **the angel of the uteruses** – showing up – says / said: **Oh Lord, male or female?** So God decrees his order. Then he says: **Oh Lord, wretched or blessed?** So God decrees his order. [Then he writes on his forehead what he will experience, even the misfortune that reaches him.]

⁷² Firyābī (1997), 1:123.

⁷³ Firyābī (1997), 1:122 [No.144]; Ajurrī (1999), 2:783; Muslim (2013), 992; Ibn Ḥanbal (2001), 19:482.

⁷⁴ Abū Dawūd supposedly took his variant directly from Ḥammād b. Zayd, whereas all the others have at least one transmitter in between. This suggests that Abū Dawūd’s version can be considered earlier than the others. This view is supported by the fact that Ibn Mandah (2002), 246 preserves a later variant from the same transmission line through Ṭayālīsī (see table 4), which shows considerable differences to the earlier version and brings the *matn* in line with the rest of the material.

God has assigned **an angel for the uterus**. And he says: Oh Lord! Semen (*nufṣa*), oh Lord, blood-clot (*ʿalaqa*), oh Lord, lump of flesh (*mudḡha*). And if God wants to complete its creation [decree a creation] says the angel: **Oh Lord! Male or female? Wretched or blessed?** [And what is his sustenance? And what is his time of death?] So he writes likewise in the belly of his mother.

I propose that the two ḥadīths represent different stages or lines of a redaction process of earlier extra-quranic material. This material is reflected more closely in the ḥadīth from ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar than in the ḥadīth from Anas b. Mālik: *nasama* is not a quranic term whereas the tripartite formula *nufṣa-ʿalaqa-mudḡha* is. It is reasonable to assume that the material using extra-quranic terminology is earlier than the material clearly referring to the Qurʾān. This proposal of a possible relation of the two ḥadīths rests on the following observations:

- 1) The earliest versions of both ḥadīths referred exclusively to male / female & wretched / blessed, in the identical order.
- 2) Both ḥadīths give the angel a specifying signifier.
- 3) Both do not mention any number to specify when the event takes place during pregnancy.

None of these three points alone would suffice to suggest that the two ḥadīths represent different manifestations of redaction processes of the same earlier material, but taken together I find them hardly coincidental.

Ad 1): To the best of my knowledge, the ḥadīth material in the sunnī⁷⁵ collections (canonical as well as non-canonical) showing the combination of “the unborn”, “angel”, and “pre-destination” is covered exhaustively by the ḥadīths from ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd, Ḥudhayfa b. Asīd,⁷⁶ Jābir, ʿĀʿisha,⁷⁷ Anas b. Mālik, and ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar. All of them in most of their variants contain the reference to male / female & wretched / blessed, but only in the ḥadīth from ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar and Anas b. Mālik can this clearly be shown to be the historically earliest kernel of the surviving material which – in the case of the Anas b. Mālik-tradition – was expanded upon in a second step.

Ad 2): Only the Anas b. Mālik and ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar-traditions systematically specify the angel, either as “an angel assigned for the uterus” or “the angel

⁷⁵ The shīʿī material generally represents later, much more elaborate versions of this material (see Kulaynī [1959], VI: 12-16).

⁷⁶ There are more than a hundred variants of these two ḥadīths which I will address in a future publication. See on them van Ess (1975), 1-32 and Cook (1981), 107-116.

⁷⁷ Jābir in Ṭaḥāwī (1994), 7:94f, Firyābī (1997), 1:121, and Ibn Ḥanbal (2001), 23:414; ʿĀʿisha in Ṭaḥāwī (1994), 9:488, Ajurrī (1999), 2:787, and Lālakāʿī (2003), 4:657. This material is preserved in respectively three works only and each has only one common link (Khaṣīf and Abū ʿĀmir al-ʿAqdī), which rules it out for *isnād-cum-matn*-analysis.

of the uteruses”. All the other material just refers to “the or an angel” (*[al-] malak*).⁷⁸ It could be stated that it is obvious that the whole plot takes place in the uterus and therefore the other material simply does not give an extra specification of the angel for this reason. However, for a formal analysis of the ḥadīth material the fact that the Anas- and ‘Abd Allāh-material do specify the angel still remains noteworthy and puts them *semantically* closer to each other than to the other material because they both need to be seen as contributing to or being part of a similar discussion: the question where / when pre-destination occurs. This is the clearest in the Anas b. Mālik-tradition which starts with “God has assigned an angel for the uterus...”. Here, the highlighted topic of the ḥadīth is specifically the identification of the angel. The concluding sentence “...so he writes this in the belly of his mother” (*fa-yaktub [ka-]dhālika fī batn ummihi*) reiterates that the plot of the story is the uterus and as such cannot be found in the other material.⁷⁹

Ad 3): Only the Anas b. Mālik and ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar-traditions do not mention a number specifying when the angel comes – again in noteworthy contrast to all the other traditions. Of course, the findings of modern studies of memorization show that numbers are among the items to be easily forgotten.⁸⁰ This might have been the case here. But I find this unlikely for two reasons. First, a number occurs nowhere in the transmissions of the Anas- and ‘Abd Allāh-material. Is it really perceivable that *all* these transmitters forgot the same item? Second, the process of forgetting can refer to two different things: forgetting the exact number and forgetting that there had been a number at all. A case showing ambiguity or uncertainty concerning the exact number can easily be identified in variants of the traditions from Ḥudhayfa b. Asīd.⁸¹ However, these cases show that the transmitters did not forget that there had been a number in the first place. I would thus conclude that *if* a number would have been in earlier layers of the transmission of

⁷⁸ There are a few exceptions to this. One variant of the Jābir-ḥadīth in Ṭaḥāwī is an example (see references above), which is referring to the assigned angel. No other variant has this version. The version from Firyābī even has a PCL after Khaṣīf with this variant. I therefore assume the ḥadīth in Ṭaḥāwī to be a case of misattributed *isnād* or of a contamination with the Anas b. Mālik-tradition. Similarly, the only cases of the Ḥudhayfa b. Asīd-material using *malak muwakkal* occur in the CL Rabi’a b. Kulthūm after whom the transmitters are basran (Muslim (2015), 991; Ṭabarānī (1994), 3:176). This is very likely a contamination with the basran transmission of the Anas b. Mālik-ḥadīth, which is using this formula indiscriminately.

⁷⁹ The Ibn Mas‘ūd- and Ḥudhayfa-material also take a position on these issues, but they do so only in passing or implicitly, which suggests that the focus of the discussion they are referring to is a different one.

⁸⁰ Delnero (2012), 193, 195.

⁸¹ For example Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim (1980), 1:80: “...after the *nufsa* has established itself in the uterus 40 – or he said 45 ...”. The CL of this material is Sufyān b. ‘Uyayina and Ibn Ḥanbal (2001), 25:64 preserves: “(...) 40 nights – and once Sufyān said: or 45 nights ...”.

the Anas- and ʿAbd Allāh-material, there should be at least some miniscule traces of it. Therefore, I conclude it not to be a coincidence that the Anas- and ʿAbd Allāh-traditions do not contain any reference to numbers in contrast to all the other material.

In my eyes these three observations taken together justify to view the two ḥadīths as developing further the same sort of source material and are in this sense more linked to each other than to other ḥadīth material describing predestination in connection with an angel's visit to the unborn. This source material is more closely reflected in the ḥadīth from ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar than in the ḥadīth from Anas b. Mālik. In that sense I find it likely that the ḥadīth from Anas b. Mālik substituted the non-quranic term *nasama* with the quranic tripartite *nufṣa-ʿalaqa-mudgha*.⁸² As noted above, some transmissions of the Anas b. Mālik-ḥadīth preserve indications that the specific phrasings of the ḥadīth's two parts might have been put together in the lifetime of Ḥammād b. Zayd, i.e. before 795. Beyond this one can only speculate about earlier layers of the ḥadīth and what their *specific* phrasing might have been. However, against the background of all that has been said above, I consider it more than just a possibility that the redaction process contained an exchange of the term *nasama* for the quranic tripartite formula. This process would not only have brought the tradition much closer to quranic terminology but would also have had the effect to strengthen the major point that the ḥadīth is actually making: that it refers to an event relating to the unborn in the uterus and that therefore the plot takes place *in* time and not before it.

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⁸² To be unmistakably clear: I do not assume that the ḥadīth from Anas b. Mālik is a reworked variant of the ḥadīth from ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar. Rather I assume them to be different reflections of other, comparable material.

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