

## THE *ISNĀD* CUM *MATN* ANALYSIS OF *ZAKĀT AL-FIṬR* TRADITIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF HARALD MOTZKI'S METHOD

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### Abstract

Harald Motzki (d. 2019) is a highly accomplished scholar of Ḥadīth who used historical critical method in its study by offering a combination of *isnād* and *matn* analytical techniques. His method, the *Isnād* cum *Matn* Analysis has been adopted by his students at his university as well as elsewhere. This hybrid method for ascertaining the date and text of Traditions of the Prophet *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam* first compares the chains of transmission after combining them graphically as GHA Juynboll had done before him and in the second step, the variant texts transmitted by those chains are also compared. The oldest text elements are pointed out as well as the approximate date of that text. Its importance notwithstanding, his method and application have also been critically viewed by scholars of Ḥadīth and its history. The present paper analyses Motzki's application of the said method to Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* while also pointing out to some of the shortcomings of its application by Motzki.

**Keywords:** *Isnād*, *Matn*, *Zakāt al-Fiṭr*, Motzki, Juynboll, Hadith.

### 1. Introduction

The personality of Prophet *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam* holds central for all Muslims and his life is the model and ideal example for every believer. Muslims seek the correct way to live and guidance in

his teachings and actions. This is the reason why Muslims, since the dawn of Islam (circa 610 AD) devoted their lives serving and preserving the *Sunnah* (or the way Prophet *Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam* lived). After this first generation of Muslims (the Companions) we come across such names as Abū Ḥanīfa (d.767 AD), Mālik (d.795 AD), Al-Shāfi‘ī (d.820 AD), Al-Shaibānī (d.805 AD), Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal (d. 855 AD), Al-Bukhārī (d. 870 AD) and Muslim (d. 875 AD) among the milieu of scholars who embody this endeavor to protect the *Sunnah*. It was of great importance to these Muslims to protect the *Sunnah* since their lives and those of the subsequent generations had to be in harmony and concordance with the Prophetic model for their ultimate success in both worlds. They strived to preserve and compile the *Sunnah* of their Prophet-in the form of Ḥadīth, *Fiqh* and *Sīrah*- with great care and having this in mind, they engaged themselves in separating the chaff from the pure. It is the fruit of those early Muslim scholarly efforts that even now in the third millennium, Muslims have access to the Prophetic narrations. They developed historical critical methods to ascertain the quality of reports attributed to the Prophet (*Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam*) called sciences of Ḥadīth. Ḥadīths were classified according to principles of *isnād* and *matn* by its major collectors as well as the *Fuqahā’* who drew religious norms from them. At least one classification of Ḥadīth from the early times has been *fiqhi* (or juristic) one which found favour with the likes of Mālik, Bukhārī and Muslim.<sup>1</sup>

West too has had something to write about this legacy of the Prophet *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*, especially in the last couple of centuries and the above-mentioned view of how Ḥadīth, *Fiqh*, and *Sīrah* developed in concordance is predominantly not shared by them.<sup>2</sup> The first two centuries A.H. have been at the center of their attention since it was that period in Islamic history when these three disciplines started, their fundamentals formed and they saw their early development. Some of these western scholars rejected the Muslim version of their own religion’s early history and thought it to be quite incorrect, while others, rejecting parts of it reviewed the rest. These scholars include: Ignaz Goldziher (d.1921), Leone Caetani (d.1935), Snouk Hergronje (d.1936), Margoliouth (d.1940), Lammens (d.1937), Guillaume (d.1965), Wensink, Joseph Horovitz (d.1974), Patricia Crone (d.2015), G.H.A. Juyenboll (d.2010), N.J.Coulson (1986), Michael Cook (b.1940), John Burton (2010), Nabia Abbot (d.1981), Harald Motzki (d.2019) and Gregor Schoeler (b.1944). One of the most renowned of these scholars was Ignaz Goldziher (d.1921) who studied a

number of traditions and concluded that most of them were fabrications and so quite spurious,<sup>3</sup> followed by Joseph Schacht (d.1969) who took this skepticism to its epitome. He rejected the historicity of Ḥadīth by critically analyzing its text in his *Origins*. While commenting on the *isnāds*, he rejects their use for ascertaining the historicity of Ḥadīth anyway, since he considers them to have been invented by the common link and pasted to the text.<sup>4</sup> GHA Juynboll (d.2010), in his *Tradition*, focused on the chains of narration of Ḥadīth and concluded that they were spurious and invented by the “common link.”<sup>5</sup> Western and Muslim scholars onwards have been writing on the subject of *isnād* and *matn*. Ansari (d. 2016) with his “Early Development”<sup>6</sup> and M M Azami (d. 2017) with *On Schacht’s*<sup>7</sup> are two of the important critical works on western critique of Ḥadīth. Abbott (d. 1981) with her *Papyri*<sup>8</sup> has also critically rejected the revisionist view of western scholars on Ḥadīth origins.

## 2. Background

A relatively recent scholar, Harald Motzki (1948-2019) rejects some of his predecessors’ ideas and attesting to the rest, tried to develop a new discourse in the study of Ḥadīth. His contribution to the study of Ḥadīth is spread over his post doc, *Biography, Analysing* and many papers like “Dating” over the years.<sup>9</sup> This has had its widespread implications on the rubric of contemporary western Ḥadīth studies like those of Schoeler, Goerke, Boekhoff, etc.<sup>10</sup> The latter has employed Motzki’s *isnād* cum *matn* analysis method in her doctoral thesis and affirmed its worth in dating Ḥadīth. Shoemaker is critical of Motzki’s soft critical approach to *Ḥadīth*,<sup>11</sup> while the author has pointed out some lapses in his “Textual Criticism” and “Harald Motzki”<sup>12</sup>

## 3. Research Objective

The following pages serve to critically analyse this method in his study on *Zakāt al Fiṭr* traditions and answer the question whether Motzki’s *isnād* cum *matn* method offers any viable conclusions in Ḥadīth historical criticism. The author views the method under discussion as one which can offer meaningful results if it is applied to Ḥadīth objectively, and the following critical analysis would serve towards the affirmation or negation of this preliminary proposal. This study also serves towards highlighting the merits and demerits of this

important contemporary historical-critical method when applied to Ḥadīth.

#### **4. Discussion**

##### **4.1 The *Isnād cum Matn* Analysis**

Motzki's *isnād* cum *matn* analysis of a tradition starts with a discussion consisting of a critique of selected contemporary western studies on the subject followed by his arrangement of instances of the same tradition as they appear in different collections, differences in the *isnāds* considered and plotted. The common links (The person responsible for the first formal dissemination of the information/tradition.) and the other important members of the *isnāds* are highlighted. In the next step, the *matn* analysis, text variants are grouped according to their common links (loosely *madārs*) highlighted in the first step. Similarities and differences in texts are then pointed out, highlighting the extent to which they vary or agree. Next, Motzki draws conclusions from the *matn* analysis after comparing them with the results of his analysis of the *isnāds*. It is a painstaking process which Motzki carries out with a lot of patience and minuteness, and the following example would serve to illustrate his *isnād* cum *matn* analysis with lucidity as it appears.

##### **4.2 Motzki's Analysis of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* Tradition**

Motzki's examination of the texts (*mutūn*) of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition is preceded by an analysis of Juynboll's (d.2010) *isnād*-centric study on it. Such an *isnād*-centric approach is problematic according to Motzki since it seems to imply that there was 'one' text carried forth by different *isnāds*. Juynboll had focused on the *isnāds* because he considered the text variants to be forgeries by their transmitters and therefore unimportant for dating these traditions. Motzki however does not think that textual variations of 'one' tradition may be because of this only. He notes: "If reports are handed down from one generation to another, they are bound to change. These changes are, as everyone knows from everyday experience, most significant in the case of oral transmission."<sup>13</sup> He further comments that the distortions in content decrease proportionally with the increase in the standardization of the process of transmission ...for instance by writing them down. Apparently, Motzki is not outright accusing transmitters of forgery but

saying that differences appear when anything is transmitted especially orally, hints towards it. His definitive statement above ‘...bound to change’ however is sweeping of all transmissions oral. Audition in fact has it uses and merits and sometimes its validity goes beyond that of the written text as is the case with Quranic transmission which was conveyed both orally and in written form and remained unchanged.

In one of the illustrations of change in text and the merit of audition, Ibn Ṣalāḥ (d.1245 CE) mentions the case of misreading in a text and tells that it happens when a text is taken from the source by someone in written form without confirming it by audition. Similar words may sometimes be confused as a result of this,<sup>14</sup> something which should be clarified by audition. Thus, methodologically viewing transmissions as oral/written is not elementary, but more importantly the motives behind preservation of texts, mental abilities and strength or weakness, and the honesty or dishonesty of those who transmit it deserve to be considered among other things. Another consideration which supports the cause of audition is that most of the writings from the past which reached us as manuscripts had in fact started as oral transmissions and were noted down by one’s students or disciples. Besides, manuscripts- written transmissions- of the same book and coming from the same era generally differ from one another. It probably refers to the abilities and approaches of those who transmitted them more than to their mode of transmission. Furthermore, a ‘tradition’ is a report of what the Prophet (Ṣal Allah-u- ‘alaihe wa sallam) did, said and/or approved/disapproved, and has held central for Muslims throughout their history, which is quite natural for a personality such as his. Different traditionalists, naturally, would transmit it in different ways, oral or written; word by word or in meaning, owing to differences in approaches and their abilities among other things and does not imply changes but differences in transmitting the *Sunnah* in its above mentioned forms. So, the important thing is how well they reflect the *Sunnah* and that can be checked in two ways, namely checking out the transmitters qualitatively and quantitatively and then comparing the texts with others on the same issue with the goal to find their due place in the Islamic discourse. Thus to see things in isolation from their context is not expected to yield accurate results here.

Coming to Motzki’s *isnād cum matn* analysis of *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition, the *isnād* and the *matn* analyses progress in tandem and in a more refined manner unlike his another *isnād cum matn* analysis of the reports about the murder of Ibn Abī al Ḥuqayq, whence he first analysed the *isnāds*, then the *matn* and later joined the results of the two analyses,

one kind delving into another at the end in any case. Here, in the case of *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition, the first step is to determine the ‘point of reference’-the earliest available source where a tradition text under scrutiny starts with- which is Mālik’s *Muḥaḍḍa*’ according to Motzki.<sup>15</sup> It comes to us in two well-known versions, Shaibānī’s and Yaḥyā’s, the former being the earlier of the two, and is considered even by many Muslim scholars as a primary source for later collections of *Hadīth*. The tradition under scrutiny is however not found in Shaibānī’s and only in Yaḥyā’s *Muḥaḍḍa*’. Motzki says that if one goes by Juynboll’s instinct, the tradition was spread by Yaḥyā and does not go back to Mālik and later transmitters adduced false chains to it. Both these are conclusions reached at by Juynboll in haste and there may be other possible reasons for the presence of the *Zakāt* tradition in Yaḥyā’s and its absence in Shaibānī’s versions according to Motzki. It might be that Mālik lectured with incomplete notes in Shaibānī’s time, while they became more complete later on, or Shaibānī may have well forgotten some parts of *Muḥaḍḍa*. Here Motzki clearly rejects the *e-silentio*, an argument developed by Joseph Schacht, which goes thus: “The best way of proving that a tradition did not exist at a certain time is to show that it was not used as a legal argument in a discussion which would have made reference to it imperative, if it had existed...and in a number of cases one or the other of the opponents himself states that he has no evidence other than that quoted by him, which does not include the tradition in question”.<sup>16</sup>

The next step in Motzki’s *matn* analysis of the *Zakāt* tradition constitutes analyses of other texts from Mālik and close to the one in *Muḥaḍḍa*. One such early instance is found in Shāfi‘ī’s *Umm* who quotes it from Mālik: “Yaḥyā from Mālik from Nāfi‘ from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar (693 CE) that the Messenger of God imposed the breaking of the fast at Ramaḍān upon the people, [being] a *ṣā‘* of barley for every free man or slave, male or female among the Muslims.”<sup>17</sup> It is similar to the text in *Muḥaḍḍa* but differs from the one attributed to Mālik in later collections of traditions, called by Motzki as ‘canonical’, as well as in a twelfth century A.H. exegesis of *Muḥaḍḍa*’- Zurqānī’s *Sharḥ*- whence all the texts have: “*ṣā‘* (an old Arab weighing tool equivalent to around 3150 grams) of dates or a *ṣā‘* of barley...”<sup>18</sup> The latter phrase appears in another place in Shāfi‘ī’s *Umm* too,<sup>19</sup> which is also an early treatise and Motzki wonders which the text that Mālik transmitted was, keeping in view the variations. It seems to him that the omission in Yaḥyā’s version of Mālik’s *Muḥaḍḍa*’ must be sought in an error in the transmission process which in all probability goes to Yaḥyā himself

according to him.<sup>20</sup> Missing a word however does not necessarily constitute an error in transmission since other possible equally valid reasons may be given for such occurrences. Mālik, in the legal treatise *Al Mudawwanah* contextualizes the choice of items in *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* when he says that something which is dear in a region should be given for this charity, and gives the example of wheat for the people of Egypt and dates for the people of his own city- Madinah.<sup>21</sup> This does not mean that Mālik, a jurist in his own right, redacted traditions. A more plausible reason for it may be that he was talking to people of different regions at different times, and mentioned only the item relevant for his audience-to avoid confusion among them- which Yaḥyā transmitted in his version of the *Muṭṭa*'. An excellent, detailed discussion by Ibn Ṣalāḥ gives some other well needed possibilities on the issue of omission in text, the most important of which is the principle that one must differentiate between a scholar-transmitter and a one who is not a scholar. On word omissions, he comments that although one has to be careful with them, yet great credible scholars also did it, and if it does not affect the meaning nor the injunction, it is acceptable.<sup>22</sup>

All the above notwithstanding, errors did happen in transmission of traditions, as Ibn Ṣalāḥ also points out, and to confirm one on the part of a transmitter, one needs to view him critically for his strengths and weaknesses, and once his status is ascertained, the reasons for such omissions would become clearer. Coming to Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā- who is held responsible for the error in text transmission by Motzki - one finds him to be a reliable enough personality according to biographers of traditionists. Al Dhahabī (d.1348 CE) describes him as a great scholar with a merit unparalleled by any and when he went to Andalus (Muslim Spain) people used to come to him for their needs and held him in great esteem. It is admitted that some people thought that Yaḥyā reported the chapters on *I'tikāf* indirectly-via Ziad Shabatūn -while the rest of *Muṭṭa*' directly from Mālik<sup>23</sup> and that does not imply error in reporting. At this point, Motzki says: "Experts on the *Muwṭṭa*' like Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d.1071) pointed out several mistakes and *lapses calami* in Yaḥyā's version."<sup>24</sup> Even a casual reading of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's comments about Yaḥyā's worth as a transmitter reveals that he was among the best of Mālik's students in accuracy in reporting and among the most uncompromising on points of disagreement among them<sup>25</sup>; As far as Yaḥyā's mistakes are concerned, a careful reading of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's *Tamhīd* shows that while recognizing the merits of Yaḥyā's version of *Muṭṭa*', in a few places he does find Yaḥyā to have missed in transmission<sup>26</sup> or gives his own opinion against Yaḥyā's and uses a

version by another transmitter but such comments don't affect the veracity of the report under discussion here by Yaḥyā; since the difference between it and other reports is reconcilable. Yaḥyā's report can also be verified by the fact that others like Shāfi'i also reported it in his *Umm*. Motzki's comments about Yaḥyā thus seem a bit exaggerated here in the light of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's own words of praise about him, and Shāfi'i's attestation, not to mention Mālik's own explanation in the *Mudawwanah*.<sup>27</sup>

Motzki moves on to analyse other transmitters of slightly different versions of *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition besides Mālik and following Juynboll's *isnād* diagrams, considers the following five *isnād* bundles to be important ones (including those containing Mālik as their common link). Along with Mālik's these are Mūsā b. 'Uqbah's, 'Ubayd Allāh b. 'Umar's, Ayyūb al Sakhtiyān's, and Layth b. Sa'd's *isnād* strands:

❖ Mūsā b. 'Uqbah (d.758 CE) narrated a tradition on *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* from Nāfi' which is shorter than Mālik's aforementioned report. It first appeared in 'Abd al-Razzāq's (d.826 CE) *Muṣannaḥ* via Mūsā- Nāfi' - b. 'Umar *isnād* and tells that Allah's Messenger (*Ṣal Allah-u- 'alaihi wa sallam*) ordered the alms of breaking the fast before the people went out to the place of prayer.<sup>28</sup> When compared to Mālik's report on *Zakāt al-Fiṭr*, Mūsā's is brief and lacks in details like who has to pay the alms and according to which measure? Motzki starts with a rejection<sup>29</sup> of Juynboll's idea that it was constructed after Mālik's tradition as its model because he had thought that "Mālik's juridical expertise and his concise, finely-chiseled legal parlance in these *mutūn* (or texts) eventually acquired widespread fame."<sup>30</sup> Had it been a fabrication, the narrators could have easily taken Mālik's *matn* and pasted their own concocted *isnāds* to it, which does not seem to be the case here according to Motzki, since the text is very different from Mālik's and it seems improbable that on the one hand it may be modeled on Mālik's text while on the other it clearly deviates from it.

Here Motzki also compares the five text variants coming from different narrators of Mūsā b. 'Uqbah's tradition mentioned above. Four out of five of these versions appear close enough to Motzki since the text varies little among them but he finds Ibn Abī Zinād's report from Mūsā which is to be found in Tirmidhi's collection differing considerably from all other Mūsā versions. A change of tense occurs from "*amara...*" (he ordered) in other versions to "*kāna ya 'muru...*" (he would order) making the text suffer severely according to Motzki. Still a graver corruption according to him is "*bi-ikhrāji zakāti qabla al-ghuduwwi li-l-ṣalāti yawma al-fiṭr*" (with the drawing of *zaka*t before

leaving for the prayer on the Eid day) instead of “*bi-zakāti l-fiṭri qabla khurūji l-nāsi l-ṣalāh*” (with *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* before the people going out for the prayer).<sup>31</sup> and he does not give here any sound reason for his claim of corruption and what constitutes that. Moreover, a look at the section on *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* in Tirmidhi’s *Jāmi‘* is enough to clarify Motzki’s confusion here, where the given traditions vary in details but never tend to contradict each other, thus clearly reporting the same *Sunnah* of the Prophet (*Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam*) as reported by his different Companions (*Raḍi Allah ‘anhum*) to their subsequent audience in varying levels of detail, everyone in one’s own individual manner and till these found their place in different Ḥadīth collections. Sezgin mentions eight methods of Ḥadīth transmission in *Geschichte*<sup>32</sup> among them is usage of the word ‘*an* (from) as different from *akhbaranī* (he informed me) when mentioning one’s source, the former of which is used in the variants of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition and conveying the Companion Ibn ‘Umar’s statement-that the Prophet (*Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam*) commanded the payment of ‘*Īd al-Fiṭr* alms- in his words and without corruption.

In sum, Motzki thinks that Mūsā’s version of *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition is distinctive and does not seem to have been modeled over Mālik’s version. Mūsā may well have been the source of the *matn* of his version and therefore a genuine common link according to Motzki.

❖ The *matn* of ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Umar’s report is found in different collections like the *Muṣannaḥ*s of ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shaibah (d.849). These versions are different from one another and from Mālik’s version in some of their details, one transmitter using one word and the other another, like *amara bi* and *faraḍa* both signifying obligation, and *ṣadaqah* and *zakāh*, both meaning alms. According to Motzki its *matn* seems independent from Mālik’s version because of these differences.

Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī’s report about the Prophetic injunction on *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* which appears in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaḥ* is very similar to Mālik’s version according to Motzki. In another collection, his report is quite brief as well as having some word differences, like using the word *qāla* in place of *faraḍa* or *amara* which are found in other reports.<sup>33</sup> *Qāla* signifies that the Prophet (*Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam*) said what comes after. Other differences also appear in the texts of other reports containing Ayyūb in their *isnāds*. Motzki thinks that these are not modeled over Mālik’s tradition since they do not have the latter’s characteristic words like ‘*ala al Nās* (upon the people) and *min al Muslimīn* (from the Muslims). Motzki thinks that the common

features of Ayyūb's and Mālik's texts do not necessarily suggest interdependence- and there is no need to suggest it here- but they may have been caused by 'dependence on a common source'<sup>34</sup> and which that source is, he does not tell.

Regarding interdependence, Motzki's principle is postulated by him thus: "If one wishes to assume an interdependence of the two traditions of texts, it makes more sense to postulate that the Ayyūb *matn* was the model for Mālik rather than the other way around since Mālik's *matn* is more detailed and precise."<sup>35</sup> It implies that he views the texts as having developed over time and becoming more detailed and precise, a point on which one can't easily agree with him. Of course, many religious texts were developed over the ages till they became finely polished and refined, but such is not the case with Ḥadīth. The New Testament is sometimes compared to it<sup>36</sup> since they both report the life and times of Christ and Muhammad (*Ṣal Allāh-u- 'alaihe wa sallam*) respectively, yet unlike it, Ḥadīth were not canonized by its mainstream scholars; they were instead collected, analysed, classified, and published<sup>37</sup> and all discussion among the Ḥadīth scientists revolved around separating the authentic from the spurious, and not improving upon the texts nor merging the variants to form canonized Ḥadīth collections. Different people reported traditions which appear less refined and briefer than Mālik's reports of the same, not just before him but after him as well. As before, what matters is the traditionalist's method in reporting and not whether the report is detailed or otherwise; sometimes detailed versions are redactions or forgeries of short ones and vice versa. In any case, accepting Motzki's comment would be tantamount to accepting that later texts are probably 'improved upon' the older ones, which does not seem plausible here.

❖ Layth ibn Sa'd (d.791 CE) is the fifth transmitter of *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition discussed by Motzki, and his version appears in Muslim's as well as Ibn Mājah's collections. It does not mention the group of persons for whom the order is obligatory, a feature separating it from the versions of Mālik, 'Ubayd Allāh, and Ayyūb.<sup>38</sup> Motzki finds Layth's version as individual and distinctive as the other versions mentioned above and rules out dependence of this version upon Mālik's for the same reason mentioned by him in the case of Ayyūb's version mentioned above.<sup>39</sup>

Having discussed the five most frequently occurring and important versions of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition coming from Nāfi' b. 'Umar chain, Motzki comes to three others which he finds to be less frequent in their occurrence, but nonetheless important for a comprehensive study

of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition. These are the versions of Ayyūb b. Mūsā, Ibn Abī Laylā, and ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar.

The first one, by Ayyūb ibn Mūsā, appears in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf* via Ibn Jurayj - Ayyūb - Nāfi‘, and is almost identical to Layth’s version discussed above. Motzki thinks that Juynboll would probably say: ‘Abd al-Razzāq copied the text from one of Layth’s pupils or from Layth himself, but not wanting to admit this, fabricated his own *isnād* to support the tradition.<sup>40</sup> This he does not find plausible since there appears to be no reason why ‘Abd al-Razzāq would choose Layth’s tradition when there were much more detailed ones at his disposal and also points out that ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf* contains a number of traditions by Layth which makes Juynboll’s supposed comments implausible. Motzki concludes that ‘Abd al-Razzāq was not a forger of the tradition under discussion. What Juynboll ‘would have said’ is not so significant here as what Motzki gives in support of genuineness of Ayyūb’s report under discussion here.

Next, Motzki comments that since Ibn Jurayj - who transmitted the text from Ayyūb - is a generation older than Layth (d. 175 A.H.), his version can hardly go back to Layth. Thus, either Layth’s version depends upon Ayyūb’s or both depend on a common source, Nāfi‘, Motzki thinks and concludes that it is not possible to decide in favour of either possibility without including more texts in the comparison.<sup>41</sup> To the fact that both Layth and Ayyūb are reported to have reported from Nāfi‘ may be added another, that Layth also reported from Ayyūb. Different traditions are reported in these collections from different sources, all containing the ‘Al Layth- Ayyūb’ string.<sup>42</sup> It shows his honesty and it would leave little charm for him in taking a tradition from Ayyūb and pasting his own name in place of the real reporter, a point missed by Motzki here. It also deserves to be noted that they are both considered as trustworthy and truthful by Ḥadīth scientists. Layth’s report from Nāfi‘ is also considered quite reliable.<sup>43</sup> It seems strange that Motzki, who relies upon Ibn Ḥajar’s *Tahdhīb* at other places, does not even mention the many attestations by numerous Ḥadīth scientists reported in it and attesting to Layth’s integrity as a Ḥadīth transmitter. Moreover, as Layth himself was quite the Egyptian jurist of the second century A.H. and one of the most well-known and respected traditionists of his time, there seems little reason to accept that he would need to invent a tradition in the first place or would have gotten away with it so easily. It therefore is safe enough to say that Layth’s version of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition probably came from Nāfi‘ and not Ayyūb, whose version too seems to have come from the same source.

‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaḥ* contains a slightly different report of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition from Ibn Abī Laylā. Motzki rejects any probability of forgery on the part of ‘Abd al-Razzāq and attributes the version to Ibn Abī Laylā.

‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar also reports the *Zakat al-Fiṭr* tradition which Motzki compares to his brother’s, ‘Ubayd Allāh and finds out to be different but close. ‘Abd Allāh’s version mentions six categories of persons who are asked to pay the alms. Two of these “a minor and an adult” had earlier been considered by Motzki as typical of ‘Ubayd Allāh. ‘Abd al-Razzāq writes in his *Muṣannaḥ* that he took the ‘Abd Allāh text from Ma’mar and tells that it is similar to ‘Ubayd Allāh’s text without quoting the former. Motzki mentions that if this comment were taken literally, then it would mean that the former’s text was originally identical to the latter, which in turn would imply that other transmitters expanded it to the version in Aḥmad’s *Musnad*. Motzki says:

“[t]he phrase ‘*mithla ḥadīth ‘Ubayd Allāh*’ may, but need not refer to a *word-for-word* correspondence of the texts. Here it can only denote similarity, since the text of ‘Ubayd Allāh (as given by ‘Abd al-Razzāq) is in any case a hybrid containing elements of Ibn Abī Laylā’s version. Therefore, ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s remark about the tradition of ‘Abd Allāh tells us nothing about the original wording of the text.”<sup>44</sup>

In his analysis of Ibn Abī Laylā’s version, Motzki’s comment however seems to be diametrically opposed to this: “The fact that the tradition of Ibn Abī Laylā is not just a copy of the ‘Ubayd Allāh *matn*’ but rather an independent tradition...”<sup>45</sup> The claim that ‘Ubayd Allāh’s version’ is a hybrid of Ibn Abī Laylā’s, seems to be an exaggeration here since Motzki had himself concluded in his analysis of ‘Ubayd Allāh’s version that it had its distinctive features and was distinct from Mālik’s version, and did not point out that it was a hybrid.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, ‘Abd Allāh’s version appears to Motzki as a combination or a hybrid of ‘Ubayd Allāh’s version and that of Mālik’s, since it shares features of the both.<sup>47</sup> Whether a variant can be labeled as a hybrid since it has characteristic elements found in older, more reliable versions of a Ḥadīth, is a claim which demands a deeper insight into its transmission process and it does not seem very probable on its own since all variants have common elements with variations here and there; otherwise they would be altogether different traditions. An equally valid possibility is that different reporters reported from the same source Nāfi‘, thus

resulting in similarities among variants. Motzki's use of 'characteristic' words like *amara* or *faraḍa* is also debatable since both denote obligation and are quite common words in Arabic, used interchangeably commonly. An equally probable explanation for similarities in 'characteristic' elements would be that they have a common source - Nāfi' - who might have used different synonyms at different times while instructing different audiences in matters of religion. One also needs to examine the persons alleged with creating the 'hybrid version' to see who among them had a known tendency of such behavior or didn't have. Here Motzki alleges that either 'Abd Allah or his reporter Surayj is responsible for creating this version.<sup>48</sup> Upon checking Surayj, one finds him to be strong and reliable in his Ḥadīth transmission and most of the important collections of traditions report from him without hesitation.<sup>49</sup> Regarding 'Abd Allah, some prominent scholars like al-Ḥākim, Bukhārī and Tirmidhī did not consider him to be careful enough in reporting.<sup>50</sup> So, the tradition's *isnād* is weak owing to 'Abd Allah's weakness, yet many other transmitters have also reported its text in slightly different wording, therefore it remains valid.<sup>51</sup>

Harald Motzki also discusses three secondary reporters of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition like al-Ḍaḥḥāk, 'Umar b. Nāfi', and Ibn Abī Rawwād, whose reports appear in the collections with the least frequency of all its versions. Two versions of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition - one short and the other long - are reported from al-Ḍaḥḥāk in Muslim's and Ibn Abī Shaybah's *Ḥadīth* collections. Both have similarities with other variants of the tradition under question and Motzki finds the shorter one to be independent of Ayyūb b. Mūsā's and Layth's versions although it uses the *amara* - which is characteristic of them - because it lacks their additional comment by Ibn 'Umar. The longer version is similar to 'Abd Allah's version - a forged hybrid according to Motzki - since "it combines several elements of texts which are found in a number of different *matn*-traditions."<sup>52</sup> So, Motzki thinks that the longer version is not coming from Ḍaḥḥāk, but a creation of the transmitter Ibn Abī Fudayk, who is immediately after him in the *isnād*.<sup>53</sup> He is considered as a reliable transmitter by Ibn Ma'īn, Nasā'ī, and Ibn Ḥibbān among others, and many scholars have reported from him including Shāfi'ī.<sup>54</sup> Such attestations weaken Motzki's hypothesis that he was a forger, especially since his principle: it combines several elements of texts which are found in a number of different *matn*-traditions, too is weak in its applicability to Ḥadīth. So, al-Ḍaḥḥāk's version seems to be just another narration of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition by a traditionist. One may expect the principle to be applicable to books which are clearly

known to have been redacted into one authorized, canonical version where elements ‘characteristic’ of persons, time and space are found in them, and to find the oldest version is the goal of the scholar studying them. An example is the Bible, whose versions were authorized by the Church after redaction and modern day biblical scholars try to sift out its source from the available material. But such a principle is not generally applicable to Ḥadīth, which was never canonized by any mainstream Muslim religious authority nor an institution. Motzki’s principle is quite out of the context here and is another example of a faulty view of Ḥadīth whence he alleges of ‘attempts’ to construct texts by traditionists out of older ones to lend them authority. Mainstream Muslim scholarship on Ḥadīth has never tried this, and had they done it, they would have tried to hide their fabrications by presenting just ‘authorised-canonised’ versions and hiding or destroying the others.

‘Umar bin Nāfi’s version of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition is almost the same as Mālik’s and Motzki notes that the latter version probably served as model for the former. Also, ‘Umar’s version has elements ‘characteristic’ of some other versions like al-Ḍaḥḥāk’s and Mūsā b. ‘Uqbah’s, and added to this is the fact that the latter’s *matn* is even attached to ‘Umar’s version. Motzki thinks that this points to “an attempt to construct the text of ‘Umar b. Nāfi’ is a single version of all Nāfi’- traditions which would be as complete as possible.”<sup>55</sup> The absurdity with such an idea as Motzki’s here has been mentioned earlier and it would be redundant to mention it again and again. Here Motzki also says that a third century A.H. scholar Muḥammad b. Jahḍam- who must have been quite active as a scholar then- is a likely candidate for this text amalgam and oddly enough, Ibn Ḥajar - who is cited by Motzki as his source of information here -<sup>56</sup> writes that he was considered as a truthful and reliable person by scholars like Abū Zura’ and Ibn Ḥibbān.<sup>57</sup> The reason for Motzki’s allegation on Ibn Jahḍam seems out of place here, not to mention his other claims against ‘Umar’s version.

The last version of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition discussed by Harald Motzki is Ibn Abī Rawwād’s from Nāfi’. It appears in Abū Dāwūd’s collection only and is different from the other traditions in that it narrates common practice of the Companions in the time of the Prophet *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam* regarding alms on the day of *‘Īd al-Fiṭr*. Motzki finds it to be a case of elements which do not belong to the Nāfi’ transmission feeding into the Nāfi’ context,<sup>58</sup> since it does not have the characteristics of that transmission. He then links it to another tradition, by the Companion Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī who comments that

they used to bring the alms...in the time of the Prophet (*Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam*).<sup>59</sup> Motzki concludes that the Ibn Abī Rawwād text is either a forgery or an error and thinks that he himself was responsible for it. He vindicates Abū Dāwūd from this forgery/error because the collectors of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.H. and their pupils knew the two textual traditions too well for anyone to have been able to do it.<sup>60</sup> There are two problems with Motzki’s conclusion here. The first problem -as with the last example above- is that Motzki takes his information about Ibn Abī Rawwād from Ibn Ḥajar incompletely since he ignores the part where Ibn Ḥajar mentions renowned Ḥadīth scientists like Ibn Jurayj, Ibn Ma‘īn, Nasī‘ā, Yaḥyā al-Qaṭṭān, al-Ḥākīm, Aḥmad, and others praising Ibn Abī Rawwād for his piety and consider him to be reliable.<sup>61</sup> Considering a couple of negative comments,<sup>62</sup> error is not out of question but the positive comments seem to be overwhelming here.<sup>63</sup> The second problem with Motzki’s conclusion is his over-emphasis on his theory of ‘characteristic elements’ in Ḥadīth versions which sometimes ignores context and gives a false impression that forging amalgams of traditions was routine among Muslims before the third century A.H. In fact, elements characteristic of one report are commonly found in other reporters’ versions of the same tradition mainly because they have a common source and represent the same incident. Therefore a much clearer approach to Ibn Abī Rawwād’s version of *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* tradition would be that he was reporting Ibn ‘Umar’s memories of the Prophet’s times as he recalled them from Nāfi‘ which need not include all the details given by others who reported the same from Nāfi‘ as long as they does not negate any other version of the traditions about *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* and it may be considered as a part of traditions about this obligatory part of the annual Muslim festival *‘Īd ‘l fiṭr*.

## 5. Conclusion

As it is the case with tradition complexes in general, the traditions about *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* also vary in detail as well as textual accuracy. The preserved *isnāds* also vary in strength. One should not though generalise Harald Motzki’s *isnād cum matn* analysis of the *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* Ḥadīth complex without comparing its results to his *isnād cum matn* analysis of other analysed tradition complexes. It would serve towards relating these into a systematic affirmation or rejection of his comments, and this takes the paper to its end. What appears here is that although Motzki has put a great amount of effort into his *isnād cum matn*

approach to Ḥadīth case studies, yet his source-selective method, sweeping statements as well as his over dependence on Juynboll's *isnād* studies, discussed in this case study are what define his approach to traditions and they seem to mar the reach of his efforts.

The present study is generally elaborative of its own conclusions which are applicable to Prophetic Traditions on *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* as analysed by Motzki, while his other case studies have been analysed elsewhere. Moreover, his students like Boekhoff have extensively extended Motzki's method to other Traditions with similar conclusions which shows the limitations of his *isnād* cum *matn* analysis method in its present form. It owes to his dependence of *isnād*-revisionist studies by scholars Juynboll and an in-depth comparison of Motzki's *isnād* analysis method to that of Juynboll is expected to further elucidate the state of current western *isnād* critical methods. His *matn* analyses may also be similarly compared to concurrent methods.

## Notes and References

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<sup>2</sup> Fred Donner, "Modern Approaches to Early Islamic History" *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Chase C. Robinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 625-647

<sup>3</sup> Ignaz Golziher, "The Principles of Law in Islam", *The Historians History of the World*, ed. H.S. Williams (London: The Times, 1907) viii: 294-303.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Zafar Ishaq Ansari, "The Early Development", Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1966.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Riyadh: King Saud University, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II- Qur'ānic Commentary and Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence-Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* translated by Marion Katz, (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Harald Motzki, Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort and Sean W. Anthony, *Analysing Muslim Traditions: Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); *The Biography of Muhammad-The Issue of the Sources*, ed. Motzki, (Leiden: Brill. 2000).

- <sup>10</sup> Gregor Schoeler, "The Constitution of the Koran as a Codified Work: Paradigm for Codifying Ḥadīth and the Islamic Sciences?" *Oral Tradition* 25, no. 1 (2010): 201-203, 206-207; Andreas Görke, "The Historical Tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya. A Study of 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr's Account", in *Biography*, ed. Motzki, 257.
- <sup>11</sup> Stephen J. Shoemaker, "In Search of 'Urwa's *Sira*: Some Methodological Issues in the Quest for 'Authenticity' in the Life of Muḥammad," *Der Islam* 85 (2011), 339-344.
- <sup>12</sup> Bilal Ahmad, Harald Motzki aur Ḥadīth: aik Jā'izah, *Fikr o Nazār* 56, no.1, (2019), 113-114.
- <sup>13</sup> Motzki, Voort & Anthony *Analyzing Muslim Traditions*, 91.
- <sup>14</sup> Uthmān b. 'Abd al Raḥmān Ibn Ṣalāḥ, *Ma'rifā Anwā' 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth, Muqaddimā Ibn Ṣalāḥ.*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr (Beirut: al Maktaba Al Farabi, 1984), 94-97.
- <sup>15</sup> Motzki, Voort & Anthony *Analyzing Muslim Traditions*, 91.
- <sup>16</sup> Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 140.
- <sup>17</sup> Motzki, Voort & Anthony *Analyzing Muslim Traditions*, 94.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Mālik b. Anas, *Al-Mudawwana al-Kubrā*, (Egypt: Al Hāj Muḥammad Afandī Sāsī al-Maghribī, 1323 A. H), 464.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibn Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddimah*, 187-217.
- <sup>23</sup> Shams al Dīn Al Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, (Al Resalah Publishers, Beirut: 1998), 10: 520-524.
- <sup>24</sup> Motzki, Voort & Anthony *Analyzing Muslim Traditions*, 94.
- <sup>25</sup> Yusuf bin 'Abd Allah Ibn `Abd al Barr al-Andalusi, *Al Tamhīd li ma fī al-Muaṭṭa' min al ma'āni wa al Asānīd*, (Rabaat: Al-Matbaul Malikiah, 1967.), 1:10-12
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 10-12.
- <sup>27</sup> Mālik, *Mudawwanah*, 2:118-119.
- <sup>28</sup> Motzki, Voort & Anthony *Analyzing Muslim Traditions*, 99.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 99.
- <sup>30</sup> Juynboll, 'Nāfi' the *mawla* of Ibn 'Umar and his position in Muslim Ḥadīth literature', *Der Islam* 70, no. 2 (1993), 237.
- <sup>31</sup> Motzki, Voort & Anthony *Analyzing Muslim Traditions*, 101.
- <sup>32</sup> Faut Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), 1:55-60.
- <sup>33</sup> Motzki, Voort & Anthony *Analyzing Muslim Traditions* 105-106.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 107.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 107.
- <sup>36</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 46.
- <sup>37</sup> Sezgin, *Geschichte*, 55.
- <sup>38</sup> Motzki, Voort & Anthony *Analyzing*, 107-108.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 108.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 109.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 110.

<sup>42</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhari*, (29:71), Translated by Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Kahn (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 1997); Muḥammad b. Naṣr al Marwazī, *Al-Sunnah*, (Riyadh: Darul Saqafat ul Islamia, 1408 A.H.), 77.

<sup>43</sup> For Layth ibn Sa'd. Ibn Hajar al Asqalani, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, (Hyderabad Deccan, Dairat ul Marif, nd), 8:460-465; *ibid.* 1: 412-3, for Ayyūb.

<sup>44</sup> Motzki, *Analysing*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 110-111.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 101-104.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, 3: 457.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 5: 326-328.

<sup>51</sup> *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, (10:164), ed. Shu'aib al-Arnu'wūṭ (np.: Mu'assat al Risāla, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> Motzki, *Analysing*, 114.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, 9:61.

<sup>55</sup> Motzki, *Analysing*, 115.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 115. He cites from Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, 9: 100.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, 9: 100.

<sup>58</sup> Motzki, *Analysing*, 115.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 116.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 116.

<sup>61</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, 6:338-339.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Badr al-Dīn al-'Ainī, *Sharḥ Sunan abi Dāwūd*, (6:329), ed. Khalid b. Ibrāhīm (Riyadh: Maktaba al Rushd, 1999).