

Patterns in the history of the commentation on the so-called *ḥadīth Ibn Masʿūd**

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the so-called Ibn Masʿūd ḥadīth (see below) on two levels: the specific wording of the ḥadīth on the one hand and a significant portion of the commentation written about it since the 10th century until today¹ on the other. This aims at three things. First, I will show how the ḥadīth's exact wording still developed after the stabilization of the material in collections. Although this development occurred only on the level of single words, it can be shown that it is a reflection of discussions documented in the commentaries. Therefore, these specific examples show that there was not always a clear line separating between ḥadīth-text and commentaries on that text. Second, the diachronic analysis of the commentaries will provide material for a nuanced assessment in how far major icons of commentation such as Nawawī and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī significantly influenced following generations in composing their respective commentaries. Third, I will argue that in the specific case study provided here significant changes in the commentation can be witnessed since the second half of the 19th century which are caused by the spread of basic common medical knowledge in that period.

The ḥadīth

The so-called Ibn Masʿūd ḥadīth reads in the translation of the variant in the *Kitāb al-Qadar* of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*:

The creation of [each] one of you is put together in his mother's womb in forty days, then he becomes in it a clot of blood (*ʿalaqa*) likewise, then in it a little lump of flesh (*muḍgha*) likewise. Then an angel is sent to him and the soul is breathed into him. He is ordered to write four things: his [i.e., the new creature's] livelihood, his date of death, his deeds, and whether he will be blessed or wretched. By the one, there is no

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1 For easier navigation there is a chronological list of the respective authors at the end of this chapter.

God apart from him. One of you does as the inhabitants of paradise do until only a cubit is left between him and paradise; but then the “book” [i.e., what has been written down] interferes and he does as the inhabitants of hell do and he enters it. Another one of you does as the inhabitants of hell do until only a cubit is left between him and hell; but then the 'book' interferes and he does as the inhabitants of paradise do and so he enters it.²

Other, very similar variants are in, for example, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (*Bad' al-khalq; Aḥādīth al-anbiyā'*; *al-Qadar; al-Tawḥīd*), Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān (*Kitāb al-tārīkh*), Sunan Abī Dawūd (*Bāb fī l-Qadar*); Sunan Ibn Māja (*Bāb fī l-Qadar*); and Sunan al-Tirmidhī (*abwāb al-qadar [...] bāb mā jā'a anna al-a'māl bi-l-khawātīm*) and many others. As can be seen from this quick glance, the ḥadīth was often, but not always, referred to in the context of the debate about predestination (*qadar*). Within this debate, the ḥadīth expressed a position focusing on the importance of the last deeds. This position was specific. For example, in Sunan al-Tirmidhī it follows shortly after a ḥadīth expressing “who is from the people of blessedness, he acts towards blessedness and who is from the people of wretchedness, he works towards wretchedness,”³ without any specific focus on the last deeds.

Changes in the *matn* after the big collections

The ḥadīth is also included in the *Arbaʿīn* collection of al-Nawawī (d. 1277), where it is ḥadīth number four. Starting from the last half of the 13th century a remarkable history of commentation until today developed around this collection.⁴ I will first show that the exact phrasing of the ḥadīth as No.4 in the *Arbaʿīn* throughout its commentation history was not always stable and, second, that Nawawī did not simply take it from any collection.

The first point relates to the oath-formular in the middle of the ḥadīth. Two variants circulate: *fa-wa-lladhī lā ilāha ghayruhu* and *fa-wa-llāhi lladhī lā ilāha ghayruhu*. I arranged the data chronologically according to the life-times of the respective authors until the early 19th century. Afterwards I mostly arranged the chronology according to publication dates.⁵

2 *Inna aḥadakuṃ yujmaʿu khalquhu fī baṭni ummihi arbaʿīna yawman thumma yakūnu fī dhālika ʿalaqatan mithla dhālika thumma yakūnu fī dhālika muḍghatan mithla dhālika thumma yursalu l-malaku fa-yanfukku fīhi l-rūḥa wa-yuʿmaru bi-arbaʿi kalimātin [:] rizqīhi wa-ajalihi wa-ʿamalihi wa-shaqīyyun aw saʿīdun fa-wa-lladhī lā ilāha ghayruhu inna aḥadakuṃ la-yaʿmalu bi-ʿamali ahli l-jannati ḥattā mā yakūnu baynahu wa-baynahā illā dhirāʿun fa-yasbaqu ʿalayhi al-kitābu fa-yaʿmalu bi-ʿamali ahli l-nāri fa-yadkhuluhā wa-inna aḥadakuṃ la-yaʿmalu bi-ʿamali ahli l-nāri ḥattā mā yakūnu baynahu wa-baynahā illā dhirāʿun fa-yasbaqu ʿalayhi l-kitābu fa-yaʿmalu bi-ʿamali ahli l-jannati fa-yadkhuluhā.*

3 “(...) *ammā man kāna min ahli l-saʿādati fa-innahu yaʿmalu lil-saʿādati wa-ammā man kāna min ahli l-shaqāʿi fa-innahu yaʿmalu lil-shaqāʿi.*” (Tirmidhī, 1:13)

4 See, for example, al-Ghafīlī.

5 This aims at getting an overall picture over 700 years of commentation. I am aware that an arrangement according to the date of copying the manuscript would also work. Among the authors since the late 19th century I only used for Jardānī the date of death as *terminus ante quem*, because his *Arbaʿīn* commentary is a late 20th century edition.

Fa-wa-lladhī lā ilāha ghayruhu Fa-wa-llāhi lladhī lā ilāha ghayruhu

Ibn Farah, fol.4r	
Ibn Daqīq, 39	
Ṭūfī, 83	
Fākihānī, 191	
Taftazānī, 81 and 85 ⁶	
	Ibn Rajab, 103
Ibn Mulaqqin, 111	
Ibn Jamā'a, fol.57r	
Khūjandī, fol.4v	
Dalajī, fol.20v	
	Haytamī, 229
Fashnī, 25	
Lārī, fol. 104r	
Shibshīrī, 79 ⁷	
Qārī, fol.73r	
Munāwī, fol.73r	
Mu'īn Ibn Ṣāfi, fol. 34r	
	Shabrakhītī, 135
	Sindī, 56
Dasūqī, fol.33r	
Bin Sūdah, 240	
	Nubrāwī, 50
	Sharnūbī, 15
Jardānī, 59	
	Anṣārī, 16
Farhūd, 59	
	Zakariyyā, 19
	Ibn 'Uthaymīn, 99
	Ibn Mubārak, 22
	Tātāy, 44
Yusrī	
	Āl al-Shaykh, 97

- 6 The print edition of Taftazānī has *fa-wa-llāhi* in the ḥadīth which is presented *in toto* and separately from the commentary. However, the text in the commentation is *fa-wa-lladhī*. I also consulted two manuscripts and one super-commentary, which all have the shorter version and do not present the ḥadīth *in toto* separately from the commentary. (Ms *Sharḥ li-Muḥyī l-Dīn al-'Arabī* [sic! Read: al-Nawawī] Petermann II 678, fol. 40v Staatsbibliothek Berlin; dated in the late 17th century; see Ahlwardt II.3, p. 221 where the author is not identified, however the text is clearly Taftazānī's; Ms *Sharḥ al-arba'īn al-nawawīyya* Princeton Islamic Manuscripts Garrett No. 5067Y, fol. 21v dated mid 18th century; and super-commentary on Taftazānī dated in the late 18th century (*Kitāb fī sharḥ al-aḥādīth al-nabawīyya*, Ms. Or.1255, fol. 41r St Cyril and Methodius National Library, Sofia)). For this reason I assume the version in the publication to go back to the editor.
- 7 Shibshīrī, 75 shows a variant of the ḥadīth without any oath formula, which I interpret as clearly going back to the modern editor. The commentation on page 79 refers to the shorter oath formula.

It is noteworthy that the right column contains mostly modern editions of older commentaries or commentations from the 19th century until today. The overall impression is that the more extended oath formula is probably not early in the transmission of Nawawī's *Arbaʿīn*. In the right column there are only four which were authored before the late 19th century, all of them being modern editions. It is difficult to compare these editions to the manuscripts on which they were based, mostly for reasons of accessibility. However, in three cases (Ibn Rajab, Shabrakhītī, and Sindī) there are strong indications that the manuscripts might not have had the more extensive oath formula.⁸ This phenomenon reminds us of the fact, that ḥadīth commentaries in published printed editions echo modern readers' expectations to have a ḥadīth printed on the upper side of a page and a commentary below it. Historically, the ḥadīth material was often not represented separately from the commentary.⁹ Rather, the commentaries often presupposed the knowledge of the ḥadīths as text entities. However, the change in the oath formula surely predates modern print editions and possibly started in the 18th century,¹⁰ very likely going back to the commentary of Munāwī (d. 1662).¹¹ Thus the commentaries give an insight, why the word Allāh was possibly added to the specific wording of the ḥadīth, namely that the clear identification by whom the oath formula was sworn was simply missing but could easily be inserted from context. Of course, this argument is not made arbitrarily. Rather, the addition of the word *Allāh* is carried out with a reference to the variant in Bukhārī's *Kitāb al-Qadar*. Since the late 19th century this process of adding Allāh to the formula has intensified and the version with the more extended

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- 8 The Ibn Rajab, Shabrakhītī, and the Sindī edition all have the longer oath-formula in the ḥadīth, but evidently the shorter formula in the commentary (compare Ibn Rajab, *Khamsīn*, 1:103, 121; Shabrakhītī, 135, 146; Sindī, 56, 59). In all three cases, I assume that the specific wording in the ḥadīth *matn* goes back to the modern editor.
- 9 The phenomenon that in modern editions discrepancies between the ḥadīths—added by the editors—and the commentary texts do occur, has been mentioned before for Ibn Ḥajar's *Faḥ al-Bārī* (Fück, 83).
- 10 Compare the two Mss. at the Staatsbibliothek Berlin of the commentary authored by Shabrakhītī (d. 1694): Ms Landberg 549, copied in 1858, has the extended formula (fol. 117r), while MS Landberg 987, copied in 1737, has the shorter one (fol. 50v), like in the 2006 edition. The case of the edition of *al-Faḥ al-mubīn* by Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1567) is not entirely conclusive, because the commentary text has the longer version, but this might still be an interpolation of the editor since the commentation does not address the exact wording of this segment. However, the supercommentary on Haytamī's by al-Madābighī (d. 1756), published with *al-Faḥ al-mubīn*, clearly reflects the insertion as a conscious choice (p. 246).
- 11 Madābighī, 246, quotes a short statement by Munāwī (d. 1622) “‘and by the one who’ [i.e., ḥadīth segment] the attribution to the one the oath relates to is missing, i.e., ‘and God, who’” (*fa-wa-lladhī ṣifatum li-muqṣam bihi maḥdhūf ay wa-llāhi lladhī*). (Compare Munāwī, fol. 73v, where Munāwī does not adapt the wording of the ḥadīth to his commentation.) In the Madābighī edition a short reference to the Shabrakhītī commentary closes off this passage and it looks as if Madābighī quoted from Munāwī through Shabrakhītī (d. 1694/5). However, while Shabrakhītī surely uses Munāwī in the respective passage, he does not attribute the quote to Munāwī in any of the three texts I consulted (the 2 Mss and the edition). It is therefore not possible to determine on the basis of these texts, how the phenomenon of the change in the *matn* of ḥadīth No. 4 in Nawawī's *Arbaʿīn* spread in those centuries. But it seems likely that it goes back already to Munāwī's comment in the early 17th century, but only during the 18th and 19th century did it start to have an impact on the level of the *matn*.

formula is overwhelmingly represented in the publications.¹² This overall picture shows that the exact wording of a ḥadīth can still develop after the stabilization in a collection (such as Nawawī’s *Arba‘īn*). In addition it can be interpreted as a reflection of the rising importance of Bukhārī’s collection over the last half millennium as well as an outgrowth of a wish towards standardization and thus reducing complexity in the ḥadīth material with its many variants.¹³

A similar phenomenon can be observed with the version Nawawī originally put into his *Arba‘īn*. There is no exact match of the version preserved by Nawawī in any of the collections, be they canonical or non-canonical, as they are known today. Building on the work of Josef van Ess,¹⁴ I identified several elements in the *matn*, for comparison with the version in Nawawī’s collection. There are by and large two ways of phrasing of the opening formula of the ḥadīth: *inna aḥadikum yujma‘ khalquhu* [as in Nawawī] vs. *inna khalq aḥadikum yujma‘*. The first can be found in 17 other places.¹⁵ The oath formula *fa-wa-lladhī lā ilāha ghayruhu* I could locate in twelve other places beside Nawawī with a considerable overlap with the first group.¹⁶ However, a third element is discernible in the *matn* in Nawawī: the opening passage “the creation of each of you is collected in the belly of his mother for forty days” is specified as *nutfat^m*, “as a drop”. This exact wording plus specification I could not identify in any other ḥadīth collection.¹⁷ Therefore, Nawawī did not “take” the ḥadīth from any collection, rather he introduced a specific version of it as ḥadīth no. 4 into his collection. This example further shows that in ḥadīth transmission a certain dynamic flexibility concerning the *matn* was still possible after the era of the collections. However, the background of the addition of *nutfat^m* is more complex than in the previous case of the word *Allāh*.

The term *nutfat^m* in the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth

As such, the addition of the word *nutfat^m* clearly resembles a sort of exegetical process in which the *matn* is brought in line with certain passages of the Qur’an, especially Q 22:5 and

12 In one recent case, the word *allāh* received glossatory attention in the commentary (Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, 103).

13 See Brown, *passim*.

14 Van Ess, 2.

15 **CL Abū Mu‘āwiya:** Muslim [*Qadar*]; Bayhaqī, *I‘tiqād*, 1:137f; Bayhaqī, *Asmā’*, 2:260; Ibn Ḥanbal, 6:125; Ibn Bishrān 1:175 [*isnād* via Ibn Ḥanbal]; Tirmidhī, 4:15; **CL al-Ṭanāfusi:** Ḥumaydī, 1:221; Ḥanbalī, 3:538; **CL Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān:** Aṣbahānī, 5:1634; Ibn Ḥanbal, 7:169; Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim, 1:77; Bayhaqī, *Qadā’*, 160, Ṣaydāwī, 60f; [remote] **CL Sufyān al-Thawrī:** Dārimī, 150; Ibn al-Muqri’, 56; **Other:** Shāshī, 2:140; Bukhārī [Bad’ al-Khalq].

16 **CL Abū Mu‘āwiya:** Muslim [*Qadar*]; Bayhaqī, *I‘tiqād*, 1:137f; Bayhaqī, *Asmā’*, 2:260; Ibn Ḥanbal, 6:125; Ibn Bishrān 1:175 [*isnād* via Ibn Ḥanbal]; Tirmidhī, 4:15; **CL Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān:** Ibn Ḥanbal, 7:169; Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim, 1:77; Bayhaqī, *Qadā’*, 160; **Other:** Rāzī, 1:138; Shāshī, 2:140; Lālakā‘ī, 4:625.

17 There are versions mentioning the *nutfat^m* (Ibn al-Ja‘d, 1:370; Shāshī, 2:142; Abū ‘Awāna, 20:192), however, they differ from the *matn* in Nawawī in other respects.

23:12-14, both of which speak about pre-natal life with a tri-partite formula *nutfā* – ‘*alaqa* – *mudgha*. In the tafsīr literature on the two passages, the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth is not always quoted. I could identify only eight instances among 49 commentaries until 1373 so far, the year of Ibn Kathīr’s demise and arbitrary end-point of my overview (“spec.” indicates the addition of *nutfā*):¹⁸

	Q 22:5	Q 23:12-14
Hūd b. Muḥkam (d. 3rd cent. h / before 912)	X (spec.)	
Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 942)	X (spec.)	
Samarqandī (375 / 983)		X
Ibn Abī Zamanayn (d. 399h / 1008f)	X (spec.)	
Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib (437 h / 1045f)	X	X
Qurṭubī (671 h / 1273)	X	
al-Khāzin (741 h / 1341)	X (spec.)	
Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373)	X	X (spec.)

This rough picture indicates that linking the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth to Qur’ān very likely originated in the commentation on Q 22:5 at the end of the 3rd century hijra. The *tafsīr* of Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 942) is of particular interest here, because he gives an *isnād* going back via Abū Dawūd (d. 888), whose collection does not have the specification.¹⁹ This would indicate the time-frame between 888 and 942. On the other hand, one of the few larger collections containing the addition in the ḥadīth is the *Musnad* of Shāshī (d. 946) in a variant attributed to an *isnād* segment <Wahb b. Jarīr (d. 821) → Shu‘ba (d. 777)>, which is a different *isnād* than Abū Dawūd’s.²⁰ Later commentary tradition knows the addition with the same *isnād* segment from Abū ‘Awāna (d. 928).²¹ Many other variants transmitted via Shu‘ba do not have the addition. It is thus possible to speculate that the addition might have originated in the generation of Wahb, but given the complex nature of *isnād-cum-matn* analysis, further analysis on this point will be necessary. For now, it can only be safely concluded that the addition of the specification of *nutfā* to the *matn* of the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth can be dated around 900, towards the end of the 3rd century hijra, and that it very likely originated in tafsīr ad Q 22:5. But there is more to be said about the term *nutfā*.

¹⁸ If not indicated otherwise, I use the online tafsīr database <altafsir.com> throughout this paper when it comes to Qur’ān commentaries. I am aware that this database does not include all Qur’ān commentaries accessible in print, the commentary of Jaṣṣāṣ being just one example. However, it provides a good overview.

¹⁹ Jaṣṣāṣ 3:296 and Abū Dawūd, 7:93.

²⁰ Shāshī, 2:142.

²¹ Ibn Ḥajar, 15:189; Qaṣṭallānī, 9:344; Bin Zakrī, 5:105 (*Qadar*) simply attributes the addition to Wahb b. Jarīr. The passage is in the *Kitāb al-qadar* of Abū ‘Awāna, 20:192. Abū ‘Awāna has two *isnāds*, <Abū Dawūd al-Ḥarrānī → Wahb b. Jarīr and Ibn al-Munādī → Wahb b. Jarīr>. The latter is also the source in Shāshī 2:142.

Other, similar material related to Ibn Mas‘ūd

I will now introduce other material which goes back to Ibn Mas‘ūd as well, but shows considerable differences in the *matn* and has an entirely different *isnād*.²² I will briefly address three groups:

- (1) *tafsīr* material ad Q 3:6 “he forms you in the womb as he will” (*huwa lladhī yuṣawwirukum fī l-arḥāmi kayfa yashā’*)
- (2) *tafsīr* material ad Q 76:2 “We created man of a sperm-drop, mingling, trying him, and We made him hearing, seeing” (*innā khalaqnā l-insāna min nuḡfatⁱⁿ amshājⁱⁿ nabtālīhi fa-khalaqnāhu samī’an baṣīran*)
- (3) *ḥadīth* material going back to Ibn Mas‘ūd through Abū Wā’il (d. 701).

Group 1 is represented in Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* and explains Q 3:6 with a statement by Ibn Mas‘ūd:²³

When the semen (*nuḡfa*) falls into the wombs, it wanders in the body forty days. Then it is *‘alaqa* forty days, then it is *mudḡha* forty days. If it happens that it is created, God sends an angel, who forms her. So the angel brings dust with his two fingers and mixes it into the *mudḡha* and kneads it [the dust] with it [the *mudḡha*], then he forms it as it is ordered. So he says: is it male or female, is it wretched or blessed, what is its sustenance, what his age, what his impact and what his misfortunes? So God answers and the angel writes. When that body dies, it will be buried at the place from which that dust was taken.²⁴

Group 2 gives a statement by Ibn Mas‘ūd in the discussion over the word *amshāj* in Q 76:2:²⁵

The *nuḡfa* is in the womb forty nights, then it is *‘alaqa* forty nights, then it is *mudḡha* forty nights. If God wants to create the creation he sends down an angel. It is said: Write. He says: What do I write, oh Lord? It is said: Write wretched or blessed, male or female, what is his time of death, what his sustenance. So God reveals what he wants and the angel writes. Then ‘Abd Allāh [b. Mas‘ūd] read {We created man of a

22 The *isnād* of the “commonly known” *ḥadīth* goes to <al-A‘mash (CL) → Zayd b. Wahb → Ibn Mas‘ūd>. I will provide an in-depth analysis of the Ibn Mas‘ūd *ḥadīth* in a future publication.

23 See also Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 2:590. The *isnāds* of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ṭabarī meet in ‘Amr b. Ḥammād (d. 837).

24 *Idhā waqa‘at il-nuḡfatu fī l-arḥāmi ṭārat fī l-jasadi arba‘īna yawman thumma takūnu ‘alaqatan arba‘īna yawman thumma takūnu mudḡhatan arba‘īna yawman fa-idhā balagha an yukhlaq ba‘atha llāhu malakan yuṣawwiruhā fa-ya’tī l-malaku bi-turābin bayna iṣba‘ayhi fa-yukhlīṭuhū fī l-mudḡhati thumma yu’jīnuhu bi-hā thumma yuṣawwiruhā kamā yu’maru fa-yaqūlu a-dhakarun aw unthā a-shaqīyyun aw sa‘īdun wa-mā rizquhu wa-mā ‘umruhu wa-mā atharuhu wa-mā maṣā’ibuhū fa-yaqūlu llāhu wa-yaktubu l-malaku fa-idhā māta dhālika l-jasadu dufīna ḥaythu ukhidha dhālika l-turābu.*

25 Ṭabarī mentions it, but does not quote it. I translate from Firyābī, 111. See also Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr*, 9:267. The three *isnāds* meet in Mas‘ūdī (d. 776).

sperm-drop, mingling [*amshāj*], trying him, and We made him hearing, seeing), ‘Abd Allāh said: “And its [the *nutfā*’s] *amshāj* are its inherited traits (*‘urūquhā*)”²⁶

Both are clearly identified as exegetical statements attributed to Ibn Mas‘ūd, not a ḥadīth. They have in common that they use the tripartite Qur’anic formula which is not or not entirely present in the two respective Qur’an passages (Q 76:2 has the term *nutfā*). It is difficult to date this material, because only few *isnāds* survive and all the authors whose works contain the material lived roughly in the same timeframe around 900.²⁷ For this reason the material cannot be used here for pushing the dating of the term *nutfā* in the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth much further than late 3rd century hijra / around 900. However, what the two variants show is that two clearly different concepts about the *nutfā* stage were expressed: Group 1 understood the *nutfā* to leave the uterus and wander through the body of the woman, while in Group 2 it clearly stays in the uterus.²⁸

This difference becomes even more visible when looking at group 3. The material in this group is always attributed to the prophet. Two subgroups can be identified. In the first (3a) the *isnāds* only meet in Abū Wā’il (d. 701), while the second (3b) is a cluster where the *isnāds* already meet at Abū Ḥudhayfa Mūsā b. Mas‘ūd (d. ca. 835) before continuing to Abū Wā’il. In the overall group the *matns* show greater variance than in groups 1 and 2. Still, several observations can be made. Group 3a always starts with “the *nutfā* is (*takūn*) in the uterus”.²⁹ Group 3b always starts with “the *nutfā*, when it has established itself in the uterus” (*al-nutfā idhā staqarrat fī l-raḥim*).³⁰ In two out of three cases from 3b, the ḥadīth then continues “it has taken all of the hair and the skin” (*nālat kulla sha‘rin wa-bishr*).³¹ Against the background of the material in group 1 it seems likely that these specific variants in group 3b put forward the concept, that the *nutfā* leaves the uterus, while group 3a clearly indicates that it does not.

26 *Inna l-nutfata takūnu fī l-raḥimi arba‘īna laylatan thumma takūnu ‘alaqatan arba‘īna laylatan thumma takūnu mudghatan arba‘īna laylatan fa-idhā arāda llāhu ‘azza wa-jalla an yakhlūqa l-khalqa anzala malakan fa-yuqālu ktub fa-yuqālu mā aktubu yā rabbi fa-yuqālu ktub shaqiyyun am sa‘īdun dhakrun am unthā wa-mā ajluhu wa-mā rizquhu wa-yūḥī llāhu ‘azza wa-jalla mā yashā’u fa-yaktubu l-malaku thumma qara’a ‘Abdu llāhi {innā khalaqnā l-insāna min nufatin amshājin nabtalihi fa-ja‘alnāhu samī’an baṣīran} qāla ‘Abdu llāhi wa-amshājuhā ‘urūquhā.*

27 Ṭabarī died 923, Ibn Abī Ḥātim in 938, Firyābī in 913, and Ṭabarānī in 918.

28 This aspect is always expressed with the root *k-w-n*. In a single strand ḥadīth preserved by Ibn Ḥanbal, 6:13, this becomes even clearer: “The *nutfā* is in the uterus 40 days, as it is, it does not change (...)” (*inna l-nutfata takūnu fī l-raḥimi arba‘īna yawman ‘alā ḥālihā lā tuḥayyaru (...)*).

29 Rāzī 2:81; Lālakā’ī 4:779f; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr*, 10:240f.

30 Ḥanbalī, 3:539; Ibn al-A‘rābī, 2:760; Ṭabarānī, *Ṣaghīr*, 269.

31 I follow the wording in Ḥanbalī, 3:539 here. Ibn al-A‘rābī, 2:760 has *wa-alat* instead of *nālat*.

The exegetical statement by Ibn Mas‘ūd on the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth in ḥadīth commentaries

So far, we have encountered four different sets of text material related to Ibn Mas‘ūd: the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth quoted at the beginning, which is contained in many collections plus Nawawī’s *Arba‘īn*; two exegetical statements by Ibn Mas‘ūd ad Q 3:6 and Q 76:1; and a ḥadīth transmitted via Ibn Mas‘ūd to Abū Wā’il, which is contained in only few collections, around which, to the best of my knowledge, no commentary tradition evolved.

As to the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth, it is important to keep in mind that in most ḥadīth collections it was not transmitted with the tripartite *nutfa–‘alaqa–muḍgha* formula.³² Rather the variants stated “the creation of each of you is brought together...” (e.g. *inna khalqa aḥadikum yujma‘u*) and therefore had a *jam‘–‘alaqa–muḍgha* structure. The question arose what the root *j-m-‘* (“collecting”) actually meant here. In his Bukhārī commentary Khaṭṭābī (d. 998) brought forth the following statement by Ibn Mas‘ūd [henceforth “the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement”]:

The *nutfa*, when it falls into the uterus and God wants to create out of it a human, it wanders beneath the skin of the woman, beneath all nails and hair, then it stays for forty nights, then it descends as blood into the uterus. This is its collection.³³

This statement strongly echoes parts of the group 1 material above, with which it shares the explicit idea of the *nutfa* wandering through the woman’s body using the identical verb (*tārat*), and the group 3b material, which explicitly mentions the woman’s skin and all her hair. Through the final phrase “this is its collection” (*fa-dhālika jam‘uhā*), it established an explanatory link to the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth with its *jam‘–‘alaqa–muḍgha* structure, which after some time had obviously required explanation for the term *jam‘*. None of the other statements attributed to Ibn Mas‘ūd surveyed so far provide this link. Rather, a sentence is crafted out of a larger pool of possible descriptions and linked in explanatory manner to the ḥadīth. As such, it further nuances our understanding of the processes behind the adding of the term *nutfa* to the ḥadīth in certain transmission lines. As shown above, this can partly be explained as a process of interaction of the ḥadīth especially with Q 22:5. However, the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement shows that this process was very likely more complex: in itself, the statement does not refer to the Qur’ān at all and simply explains the term in question (*jam‘*) with a sort of medical model. This model in turn—viewed against the background of possible imaginations of early pregnancy laid out above—is rather specific: it indicated that the *nutfa* did *not* stay in the uterus and that *jam‘* is a process taking place at least forty days after the semen had entered the female body. In other words, by simply identifying that in

32 For some few exceptions see Ibn al-Ja‘d, 1:370; Shāshī, 2:142.

33 *Inna l-nufata idhā waqa‘at fī l-raḥimi fa-arāda llāhu an yakhlūqa minhā basharan tārat fī bishrat il-mar‘ati tahta kulli zufurin wa-sha‘rin thumma tamkuthu arba‘īna laylatan thumma tanzilu daman fī l-raḥimi fa-dhālika jam‘uhā*. (Khaṭṭābī, 2:1482f, who gives the *isnād* <Abū l-‘Abbās al-Aṣamm → al-Sarī b. Yaḥyā → Qubayḍa → ‘Ammār b. Ruzayq>, who asked al-A‘mash “What is collected in the belly of his mother” (*mā yujma‘u fī baṭni ummihī*) to which al-A‘mash replied that Khaythama had told him that ‘Abd Allāh had told him (...)). In the ḥadīth commentaries following Khaṭṭābī the *isnād* is quoted only rarely (Ibn Baṭṭāl 10:298; Ibn Rajab, *Khamsīn*, 1:104; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī 15:190; Yūsufzādeh, 5:fol. 238v).

some transmission lines the term *nutfā* was added to the ḥadīth after some point in time, we still cannot be sure what exactly people of the 9th and 10th centuries understood from this addition. I would argue that only starting with Khaṭṭābī did the scenario put forward in the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement become the major explanatory paradigm for the *nutfā* term in the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth.

As can be seen from the following table, the statement became part and parcel of the commentary tradition after Khaṭṭābī over roughly 800 years until the early 19th century (*italics indicate that the statement is mentioned*).

<i>Khaṭṭābī</i>	(d. 998)	Suyūfī (Muslim)	(d. 1505)
<i>Ibn Baṭṭāl</i>	(d. 1057)	<i>Qaṣṭallānī</i>	(d. 1517)
<i>Qāḍī ‘Iyād</i>	(d. 1149)	Dalajī	(d. 1540)
Ibn al-Jawzī	(d. 1201)	<i>Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī</i>	(d. 1566)
<i>Abū l-‘Abbās al-Qurṭubī</i>	(d. 1258)	Fashnī	(d. after 1570)
Ibn Abī Jamra	(d. 1277)	<i>Lārī</i>	(d. 1572)
Nawawī (Muslim)	(d. 1277)	<i>Shibshūrī</i>	(d. 1581)
Nawawī Arba‘īn	(d. 1277)	<i>Qārī</i>	(d. 1605)
<i>Ibn Faraḥ</i>	(d. 1300)	<i>Munāwī</i>	(d. 1662)
<i>Ibn Daqīq</i>	(d. 1302)	Shabrakhīfī	(d. 1694/5)
Ṭūfī	(d. 1316)	<i>Bin Zakrī</i>	(d. 1731) ³⁴
<i>Ḥamawī</i>	(d. ca. 1320)	<i>Sindī</i>	(d. 1750)
<i>Fākihānī</i>	(d. 1330)	<i>Dasūqī</i>	(d. ca. 1751)
<i>Kirmānī</i>	(d. 1384)	<i>Yūsuf Efendi Zadeh</i>	(d. 1754) ³⁵
<i>Taftazānī</i>	(d. 1390)	<i>Al-Tāwudī Bin Sūdah</i>	(d. 1794) ³⁶
<i>Zarkashī</i>	(d. 1392)	<i>Bin Sūdah</i>	(d. 1823)
Ibn Rajab (Bukhārī)	(d. 1393)	Nubrāwī	(publ. 1874)
<i>Ibn Rajab</i> (Khamsīn)	(d. 1393)	Sharnūbī	(publ. 1903)
<i>Ibn Mulaqqin</i> (Bukhārī)	(d. 1401)	Jardānī	(d. 1912)
<i>Ibn Mulaqqin</i> (Arba‘īn)	(d. 1401)	Anṣārī	(publ. 1960)
Ibn Jamā‘a	(d. 1416)	Farhūd	(publ. 1971)
<i>Damamīnī</i>	(d. 1424)	Ibn ‘Uthaymīn	(d. 2001)
<i>Khūjandī</i>	(d. 1447)	Zakariyyā	(publ. 1993)
<i>Ibn Ḥajar</i>	(d. 1448)	Ibn Mubārak	(publ. 1993)
<i>al-‘Aynī</i>	(d. 1451)	Tātāy	(publ. 1994)
<i>Mu‘īn b. Ṣafī</i>	(d. 1500)	<i>Yusrī</i>	(publ. 2005)
<i>Suyūfī</i> (Bukhārī)	(d. 1505)	Āl al-Shaykh	(publ. 2010)

³⁴ *Kitāb al-Qadar* (vol. 5:105).

³⁵ *Bad’ al-khalq* (vol. 14:fol. 439v); *Qadar* (vol. 27:fol. 238r); *Tawḥīd* (vol. 30:fol. 626r).

³⁶ *Bad’ al-khalq* (vol. 3:337); *Qadar* (vol. 6:129).

The visualization indicates that after a certain point in time in the 19th century the link ceased to be made.³⁷ However, all of these later commentaries are commentaries on the *Arba'īn* (the last non-*Arba'īn* commentaries in this sample are the Bukhārī commentaries by Bin Zakrī (d. 1731), Yūsufzādeh (d. 1754) and al-Tāwudī Bin Sūdah (d. 1794)). Is it therefore possible that the visible shift in the composition of the data is caused by the fact that from the early 19th century onwards it consists exclusively of *Arba'īn* commentaries? I do not think so.

In his *Arba'īn* collection Nawawī writes on *j-m-ʿ*:

His creation is collected (yujmaʿ) in the belly of his mother, it is possible that it is united between the semen (māʾ) of the man and the woman and that from it³⁸ the child is created, as God said: he was created from gushing water (khuliqa min māʾ dāfiq) [86:6]. It is also possible, that it means that it is collected (yujmaʿ) from the entire body. On this it is said that the nufʿa in the first period, flows in the body of the woman forty days, these are the days of the craving, then after this it is collected (tujmaʿ) and dust [of the grave]³⁹ of the born is strewn over it, so it becomes an ʿalaqa. (...)⁴⁰

In the commentation history which developed about Nawawī's *Arba'īn* this passage is quoted almost verbatim twice (Dalajī, d. 1540; Dasūqī, d. ca. 1751) to which one instance can be added, where the first part is quoted until Q 86:6 (Fashnī, d. after 1570). Parts of the passage read like a paraphrase of the above statement by Ibn Mas'ūd quoted ad Q 3:6 ("group 1"). Nawawī does not mention Ibn Mas'ūd's name and he does not quote the Ibn Mas'ūd statement. But already starting with Ibn Farah (d. 1300) and Ibn Daqīq (d. 1302) the statement was introduced into the history of the commentation on ḥadīth No. 4 in Nawawī's *Arba'īn* and until the early 19th century it clearly became an intrinsic part of this history.⁴¹ I thus conclude that the disappearance of the link since the 19th century is obviously not caused by the composition of the data and therefore requires explanation.

37 This impression is strengthened if we bracket two of the earlier commentaries, which do not have it, i.e., the Bukhārī commentaries of Ibn Abī Jamra (d. 1277) and Ibn Rajab (d. 1393), which do not comment on the entire Bukhārī and cover none of the four instances of the collection which contain the Ibn Mas'ūd ḥadīth.

38 *Min-hā*: The only femina until this point are "mother" from the ḥadīth and "woman" from the commentation. I assume that it refers to *nufʿa*—imaginatively inserted by Nawawī—, because one understanding of the term *nufʿa* is that it means the result of the mixing of male and female semen.

39 *Turbat al-mawlūd*. On *turba* see Lane, I: 300f.

40 Nawawī, 25f. The commentation continues further, among other things establishing a reference to Q 22:5 and to the question of abortion, which is followed by commentation on predestination.

41 It is integrated as a quote in the following: Ibn Farah, fol. 4vr; Ibn Daqīq, 40; Fākihānī, 197; Taftazānī, 81f; Ibn Rajab, *Khamsīn*, 1:104; Ibn Mulaqqin, 114; Khūjandī, fol. 20v (does not identify Ibn Mas'ūd as the source); Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, 233; Shibshīrī, 76; Qārī, fol.66r-67v; Munāwī, fol. 66v (clearly dependant on Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī); Sindī, 57f; Dasūqī, fol. 31r; Bin Sūdah, 1:247. It is not quoted in Ṭūfī, Ibn Jamā'a, Dalajī, Fashnī, Shabrakhī.

The Ibn Mas‘ūd statement and the critique of Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī

Obviously, the link was considered problematic by commentators already long before the 19th century. A first indicator is the fact that several commentaries give the quote without indicating it as Ibn Mas‘ūd’s, as can sometimes be observed in the sample, starting with Kirmānī, who introduces the verbatim quote with “it was said” (*qālū*).⁴² Second, an explicit critical engagement with the statement emerged at least as early as the lifetime of Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233). In his *al-Nihāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth wa-l-āthār* he had pointed out that Ibn Mas‘ūd had offered an interpretative conclusion. Especially the section at the end “*fa-hādhā jam‘uhu*” would be clearly Ibn Mas‘ūd’s speech. Ibn al-Athīr added: “possibly he means with *al-jam‘* that the *nutfa* stays in the uterus forty days, fermenting in it and preparing for the creation and forming, then it is created after the forty.”⁴³ In other words, Ibn al-Athīr added *contra* Ibn Mas‘ūd that *jam‘* might describe a process in which the *nutfa* did *not* leave the uterus and rather stayed in it. I interpret this as a strong indication that the interpretation of the term *jam‘* ascribed to Ibn Mas‘ūd had become challenged. However, later al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ṭībī (d. 1342) had critically engaged with Ibn al-Athīr’s suggestion and had formulated the rule that one should not challenge the *ṣaḥāba* in their interpretations since they knew these things best.⁴⁴

Roughly 100 years later, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 1448) wrote his famous Bukhārī commentary. He focussed his commentation on the Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth entirely in his commentary on the *Kitāb al-Qadar*. He first discusses the term *nutfa*, which he explains with a medically inspired passage, which he closes with “and God knows best”. Then he quotes Ibn al-Athīr’s interpretation, which ties in with the medically inspired passage, especially in the aspect that the semen stays in the uterus. Then he continues that “it was said that Ibn Mas‘ūd” had stated his model in which the semen wanders through the woman’s body and gathered only after forty days the earliest. Ibn Ḥajar engages critically with Ibn al-Athīr’s opinion that *fa-hādhā jam‘uhu* would be Ibn Mas‘ūd’s speech. Rather, Ibn Ḥajar suggests that the segment would have been added either by al-Khaṭṭābī or at least one of the later transmitters after Ibn Mas‘ūd, suggesting al-A‘mash as the most likely candidate.

He then continues with a discussion of a ḥadīth transmitted by Mālik b. al-Ḥuwayrith, which had become integrated into the commentary tradition only recently (it can be detected in the sample for the first time with Ibn Rajab (d. 1393)):⁴⁵

42 Kirmānī gives the quote twice, in his commentation on *Kitāb bad‘ al-khalq* and *Kitāb al-tawhīd* (13:168 and 25:163). Similar phenomena can be seen in Khūjandī, fol. 20v; ‘Aynī, 15:179 (*Bad‘ al-khalq*), Dasūqī, fol. 31r. Yūsufzādeh, 14:fol.439v has *qālū* first, but adds after the quote that it is from Ibn Mas‘ūd.

43 Ibn al-Athīr, 1:297 (*wa-yajūzu an yurīda bi-l-jam‘i mukthū l-nuṭfati fī l-raḥimi arba‘īna yawman tatakhammaru fīhi ḥattā tatahayya‘a lil-khalqi wal-taṣwīri thumma tukhlaqu ba‘da l-arba‘īna*).

44 Ṭībī, 2:533.

45 This is Ibn Rajab’s *Khamsīn* collection which overlaps with Nawawī’s *Arba‘īn* entirely and adds several other *aḥādīth*.

When God wants that he creates a human being, the man cohabits the woman, his semen wanders in each vein and body part / organ of hers. When it is the seventh day, God gathers it (*jama‘ahu*) and makes present to it every (inherited) disposition, except for Adam {in whatever form he pleases to model him}.⁴⁶

While Ibn Rajab thought that this ḥadīth tied in nicely with concepts put forward by medical doctors (*aṭibbā’*)⁴⁷ and did not see any tension with other material here,⁴⁸ this was very different only a few decades later for Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. Not only did he insist that *fa-hādhā jam‘uhu* in the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement could be rejected as an addition either by Khaṭṭābī or al-‘A‘mash, he also argued that the number “seven” in the ḥadīth via Mālik b. al-Ḥuwayrith was as later insertion and therefore could also be bracketed.

This means that the overall passage in Ibn Ḥajar’s *Fath* continued to put forward two different concepts that the semen either stayed in the uterus or wandered through the woman’s body. Now, the latter was not only bolstered by an exegetical statement by Ibn Mas‘ūd but also through a ḥadīth. Bracketing the *fa-hādhā jam‘uhu*-exegesis in the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement had the effect that the differences in concept for *jam‘* as compared to the ḥadīth via Mālik ceased to exist, because now the two did not appear to describe the same thing in different ways anymore. Bracketing the seventh day-part in the ḥadīth via Mālik had the effect that possible tensions with other material mentioning forty days vanished. Although this tension between the seventh and the fortieth day as being decisive cut-off points in early pregnancies existed in medical literature already before Ibn Ḥajar⁴⁹ I would not interpret his exegesis here as an immediate reflection of the medical issue. Rather, to my mind Ibn Ḥajar’s main goal was to show that there existed no contradictory ḥadīth material, here concerning the description of pre-natal development. In this specific case the issue was slightly complicated further through Ṭībī’s—apparently widely accepted—statement that later exegetes could no challenge the *ṣahāba* (like Ibn Mas‘ūd) on their interpretations. Probably for this reason, Ibn Ḥajar applied the same technique to the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement and the ḥadīth via Mālik, i.e., a sort of historical text criticism aiming at (or at least resulting in) the bracketing of segments of the text material.

46 Ibn Rajab, *Khamsīn*, 1:104. *inna llāha ta‘ālā idhā arāda khalqa ‘abdin fa-jāma‘a l-rajula l-mar‘ata ṭāra mā‘uhu fī kulli ‘irqin wa-‘udwin minhā fa-idhā kāna yawma l-sābi‘a [sic] jama‘ahu llāhu ta‘ālā thumma aḥḍarahu fī kulli ‘irqin lahu dūna ādamīn {fī ayyi ṣūratin mā shā’a rakkabaka}* [Q 82:8] See Ibn Mandah, 1:232; Ṭabarānī, *Ṣaghīr*, 1:82; idem, *Awsaṭ*, 2:170. The matn preserved by the two collectors differs slightly. See my “The term *nasama* in *ḥadīth*”, 28f.

47 Ibn Rajab, *Khamsīn*, 1:109. On the importance assigned by the medical literature to the seventh day of the conception see Weisser, 160.

48 Ibn Rajab, *Khamsīn*, 1:112. Ibn Rajab has the quote from Ibn Athīr here without identifying the author.

49 Weisser, 160.

The impact of the critique

I will now assess the impact of this Ibn Ḥajar passage on the commentary tradition before the early 19th century. For reasons of clarity, I will approach the commentations on the *Arbaʿīn* separately from the Bukhārī-commentaries. The order is chronological.

Considerable traces or quotes of the Ibn Ḥajar passage can be found in the following *Arbaʿīn* commentaries: Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1566), ʿAlī al-Qārī (d. 1605), Munāwī (d. 1662), and Bin Sūdah (d. 1823).

Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī quotes the Ibn Masʿūd statement followed by the ḥadīth via Mālik, which Haytamī explicitly labels as a different interpretation of *jamʿ* than Ibn Masʿūd's. Nowhere does he mention Ibn Ḥajar's specific interpretation.⁵⁰ The same can be said for ʿAlī al-Qārī whose passage is very similar to Haytamī's.⁵¹ Munāwī has the same structure. He quotes Ibn Ḥajar's interpretation of the Ibn Masʿūd statement but drops the interpretation of the ḥadīth via Mālik.⁵² As to the Ibn Masʿūd statement, Munāwī rephrased Ibn Ḥajar's interpretation decisively. Where Ibn Ḥajar unambiguously had stated: "this is his collection" is the speech of al-Khaṭṭābī" (*fa-dhālika jamʿuhu kalāmu l-Khaṭṭābī*), Munāwī has "he said in the *Fath*: al-Khaṭṭābī mentioned this exegesis" (*qāla fī l-faṭḥi hādihā l-tafsīru dhakarahu l-Khaṭṭābī*).⁵³ Munāwī's formulation leaves it open for the reader / listener whether it means that al-Khaṭṭābī mentioned the exegesis by Ibn Masʿūd or that the exegesis was al-Khaṭṭābī's. Bin Sūdah quotes the Ibn Masʿūd statement plus the Ṭībī position, followed by the ḥadīth via Mālik. Then he continues that there is no contradiction between the two. The ḥadīth via Mālik would give additional information which explains why children resemble their parents and this similarity would be fixed on the seventh day (an idea going back in the sample at least until Ibn Ḥajar). After quoting Ibn Ḥajar—without the decisive statement that "on the seventh day" and *fa-hādihā jamʿuhu* would be a later addition—Bin Sūdah continues that the different material would be complementary, i.e., the *jamʿ* would start on the seventh day and last until the fortieth.⁵⁴

As to commentations on Bukhārī, considerable quotes or traces of the Ibn Ḥajar passage can be found in the following: Qaṣṭallānī (d. 1517), Yūsufzādeh (d. 1754), Bin Zakrī (d. 1731) and al-Tāwudī Bin Sūdah (d. 1794). Note, that Ibn Ḥajar focused all his interpretation in the *Qadar* section, while especially Qaṣṭallānī and Yūsufzādeh showed a

50 Haytamī, 233f. The super-commentary by Madābighī on Haytamī also does not follow Ibn Ḥajar on these pages.

51 Qārī, fol. 66r-67v.

52 He relies heavily on Ibn Ḥajar's passage here, which is not always clearly indicated. He addresses the ḥadīth via Mālik twice (fols. 66v and 67r) as does Ibn Ḥajar. However, since Munāwī in the first instance does not quote Ibn Ḥajar's interpretation that "on the seventh day" would be a later addition, the understanding of the second passage changes significantly and does not clearly speak against the seventh day anymore.

53 Munāwī, fol. 65r-66v. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that Munāwī relied on a manuscript of Ibn Ḥajar's *Fath* with this specific phrasing, which would have differed from the Ms. used for the *Fath*'s print edition. For a first study on this issue see Blecher.

54 Bin Sūdah, 1:247-250.

different pattern of spreading their commentation across several sections in which Bukhārī had inserted the ḥadīth.

Qaṣṭallānī has two passages. In his *Bad’ al-khalq*, he quotes al-Khaṭṭābī with the quote of the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement, followed by the Ṭībī quote that the *ṣahāba* knew these things best. Then follows a quote from Ibn Ḥajar, that the ḥadīth via Mālik b. al-Ḥuwayrith would posit a scenario which would appear to contradict the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement. Qaṣṭallānī quotes neither of Ibn Ḥajar’s specific interpretation about the ḥadīth via Mālik or the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement.⁵⁵ In the *Kitāb al-Qadar* he has a passage summarizing a medical conceptualization of the process of conception. This is followed by the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement plus the quote from Ṭībī.⁵⁶ Here, the ḥadīth via Mālik is not mentioned. Nowhere does Qaṣṭallānī refer to Ibn Ḥajar’s specific interpretation of bracketing segments from the ḥadīth and the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement.

Bin Zakrī has a short passage with word material of the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement only in the *Kitāb al-Qadar*, where it is rendered in a paraphrase followed by reference to the idea that Ibn Mas‘ūd would have known best what *jam‘* means.⁵⁷

Yūsufzādeh has the word-material of the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement in three different places. In *Bad’ al-khalq* he clearly identifies that it was Ibn Mas‘ūd who equated *jam‘* with the description of how the semen wanders beneath the woman’s skin.⁵⁸ In the *Qadar* passage, he states that this was al-Khaṭṭābī.⁵⁹ However, this passage is immediately followed by the Ṭībī quote which does not make much sense anymore, if the interpretation in question is attributed to al-Khaṭṭābī. Shortly after this passage he refers to the ḥadīth via Mālik. He does not refer to Ibn Ḥajar’s suggestion to bracket the “on the seventh day” segment here. In the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, he has the wording of the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement, however, without any attribution.⁶⁰

Al-Tāwudī Bin Sūdah mentions the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement and the ḥadīth via Mālik in two places.⁶¹ He is well aware of Ibn Ḥajar’s opinion that the two seem incompatible in the first place. However, al-Tāwudī Bin Sūdah does not mention Ibn Ḥajar’s specific solution to the problem. Rather, he posits that the discrepancies in the material would simply reflect differences in the development of individual embryos.

From this I conclude that within the commentary tradition Ibn Ḥajar was not successful. Although his *Fath* clearly had an influence on later writers as to the structuring of the exegetical passage and the issues to be raised, his specific interpretation was almost never

55 Qaṣṭallānī, 5:266f.

56 Qaṣṭallānī, 9:344f. The passage has overlaps with the *Kitāb al-anbiyā’ passage* (5:323), which does not contain any traces of the discussion about the Ibn Mas‘ūd-statement or the ḥadīth via Mālik.

57 Bin Zakrī, 5:105.

58 Yūsufzādeh, 14:fol.439v (*Bad’ al-khalq*).

59 Yūsufzādeh, 27:fol.238r (*Qadar*), “(...) *thumma tanzil daman fi l-raḥim* [end of Ibn Mas‘ūd quote here] *qāla al-Khaṭṭābī ba‘da mā naqalahu ‘anhu [:] fa-dhālika jam‘uhu*”.

60 Yūsufzādeh, 30:626r (*Tawḥīd*). In this passage Yūsufzādeh creates a flowing text by dropping the references. The Ibn Mas‘ūd statement (without Ibn Mas‘ūd) is followed by a segment from Ibn al-Athīr without mentioning him by name.

61 al-Tāwudī Bin Sūdah, 3:337 (*Bad’ al-khalq*) and 6:129 (*Qadar*).

followed. The cases that came the closest to adapting his position—Munāwī and Yūsufzādeh—either cautiously rephrased Ibn Ḥajar (Munāwī) or were inconsistent in their adaption (Yūsufzādeh with different attributions in the *Bad' al-khalq* and the *Qadar* chapter). By and large, the Ibn Mas'ūd statement as well as the ḥadīth via Mālik b. al-Ḥuwayrith remained an intrinsic part of the commentary tradition on the Ibn Mas'ūd ḥadīth for almost 500 years after Ibn Ḥajar's *Fath*.

Changes in the pattern since the 19th century

In the commentaries written and published since the second half of the 19th century this situation changed radically. With only one exception,⁶² none of the commentaries in the sample contained the Ibn Mas'ūd statement.⁶³ I posit the existence of two groups: first the commentations of Nubrāwī (publ. 1874), Sharnūbī (publ. 1903) and Jardānī (d. 1911), where the reference has not vanished entirely; and second the commentaries written afterwards, in which the link ceased to be made. The following table presents the phrasings of the commentations in the first group:

Nubrāwī	<i>al-maniyyu yaqa'u fi l-rahimi hīna nzi'ājihi bi-l-quwwati l-shahwāniyyati l-dāfi'ati mutafarriqan bi-bishrati l-mar'ati tahta kulli sha'ratin wa-zafarin fa-yajma'uhu llāhu fi l-rahimi wa-yaj'aluhu fihi hādhihi l-muddata li-yatakhammara fa-yatahayya'a li-l-khalq⁶⁴</i>
Sharnūbī	<i>[t]uḍammu māddatu khalqihi {fi baṭni ummihi} ay raḥimihā {arba'īna yawman} ḥālu kawnihi {nutfatan} ba'da an kānat muntasharatan fi jamī'i badanihā⁶⁵</i>
Jardānī	<i>ay maniyyan ya'nī annahu yamkuthu fi l-rahimi hādhihi l-muddata majmū'an ba'da ntishārihi fi jamī'i badani l-mar'ati⁶⁶</i>

Already Nubrāwī does not contain the Ibn Mas'ūd statement as such, but the reference to the woman's skin (*bishra*), hair (*sha'ra*) and nails (*zafar*) are a very strong echo of it. The sentence as a whole is composed of three elements from the commentary tradition: its first

62 This is the *Arba'īn* commentary by Yusrī published 2005. I would classify this publication as a significant exception because Yusrī obviously aimed at much stronger reference to older commentaries (before the 19th century) through copy-pasting considerable parts of the text than all other publications since mid 19th century.

63 This also applies to the ḥadīth via Mālik b. al-Ḥuwayrith.

64 Nubrāwī, 48 (“The semen falls into the uterus at the time of its ejection through the pushing power of lust, spread in the skin of the woman, beneath every single hair and nail, so God collects it in the uterus and makes it [the semen] in it [the uterus] in this period so that it becomes frothy and gets prepared for the formation”).

65 Sharnūbī, 14. “the material of its creation is added to each other *after it has been spread within her [the woman's] entire body*”

66 Jardānī, 62 (“i.e., the semen, i.e., that it stays (*yamkuth*) in the uterus in this period, collected after it has been spread within the entire body of the woman”).

part until *mutafarriqan* can be traced back to the Bukhārī commentary of al-Qurṭubī.⁶⁷ Word material from the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement is represented in the second part, until *al-rahim*. The final segment goes back to Ibn al-Athīr. In the cases of Sharnūbī and Jardānī such neat identifications of whole quotation segments are not possible. However, what the three passages have in common is that they refer to the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement conceptually.⁶⁸ The formulations make unmistakably clear that the aspect of the semen being “spread” at the beginning of a pregnancy means “spread in the body of the woman”—a considerable contrast to the later commentations from the 20th and 21st centuries, as I will show shortly. What is also remarkable about this group is that two of the three commentators, Nubrāwī and Jardānī, obviously felt it necessary to insist explicitly that during the *nutfā* stage male and female semen would not intermingle.⁶⁹ Although both passages match each other almost verbatim, I could not identify a predecessor for this statement in the sample corpus. Of course, there are several instances, where the issue of mixing of the respective parental contributions to procreation is discussed. However, these passages always refer to the mixing of male semen with female blood, not semen, and often use a different terminology for mixing (*imtizāj* rather than *kh-l-l*).⁷⁰ I thus conclude that the text passage in Nubrāwī and Jardānī constitutes a specific reflection of the second half of the 19th century. To me the most plausible explanation is that both authors reacted to new medical knowledge of the time about the beginnings of human life.⁷¹ While this first group of commentations—ending roughly in the early 20th century—retained recognizable traces of the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement, it entirely vanished afterwards in the second group. There, certain commentators continue using some of the vocabulary which has become established in the commentary tradition since Qurṭubī. This is particularly word material using the roots of *f-r-q* or *n-sh-r*, such as *mutafarriqan* or *muntasharan*, which I have translated as “spreading (within the entire body of the woman)”. However, the commentaries of the second half of the 20th century dropped the second part of the construction, i.e., the information *where* the semen was actually spread. This is most obvious in the case of the commentary of Ismā‘īl al-Anṣārī from 1960, who obviously depends heavily on the

67 Qurṭubī, 6:649f.

68 The Jardānī passage also has traces of the Ibn Mas‘ūd quote—especially the verb *yamkuth*—but not as clearly as in the case of Nubrāwī.

69 Nubrāwī, 48 (*wa-fihā lā yakhtaliṭu mā’u l-rajuli bi-mā’i l-mar’ati bal yakūnāni mutajāwirayni wa-fī l-arba’ina l-thāniyati yakhtaliṭāni*); Jardānī, 62 (*wa-fī tilka l-muddati lā yakhtaliṭu maniyyu l-rajuli bi-maniyyi l-mar’ati bal yakūnāni mutajāwirayni lā yughayyiru aḥaduhumā l-ākharā*). “And in it / in this period the semen of the man does not mix with the semen of the woman, rather the two are next to each other [Nubrāwī continues: and in the second [period of] forty they mix] / [Jardānī: and none of them impacts on the other]”.

70 See, for example, Qaṣṭallānī 5:323.

71 For the changes in the training of medical personnel in Egypt over the 19th century, including the translation of gynecological text books see, for example, Abugideiri. Other possible explanations such as reformist discourse or genre do not look convincing to me. Nubrāwī (publ. 1874), e.g., clearly did not aim at writing an easily accessible commentary for the masses as some reformists of the time tried to do. As to genre, Nubrāwī calls his text a *ḥāshiyā* while Jardānī and Sharnūbī wrote a *sharḥ*. In other words, the recognizable change occurs in a *ḥāshiyā* and a *sharḥ* respectively and therefore makes the explanatory link to genre difficult to make.

commentary of Sharnūbī (publ. 1903) from the first group (many statements almost look like verbatim quotes). However, while Sharnūbī had clearly identified, *where* the semen had spread (“after it had been spread in her entire body”), Anṣārī evidently skipped over this point and simply stated “after the spreading” (*ba‘da l-intishār*). The following table shows the two passages in comparison.⁷²

Sharnūbī	<i>{yujma‘ khalquhu} ay [t]uḍammu māddatu khalqihi (...) {nutfatan} ba‘da an kānat muntasharatan fī jamī‘i badanihā</i>
Anṣārī	<i>{yujma‘ khalquhu}: yuḍammu ba‘ḍuhu ilā ba‘ḍin ba‘da l-intishāri wal-murādu bi-khalq: māddatuhu wa-huwa l-mā‘u lladhī yukhlaqu minhu.</i>

After Anṣārī, the same phenomenon of “spreading without location” can be observed in the commentations of Farhūd, Ibn ‘Uthaymīn and Āl al-Shaykh,⁷³ while in the other commentaries of that segment of the sample (Tātāy, Ibn Mubārak, Zakariyyā) there is no trace of the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement in the commentation history anymore.⁷⁴

Conclusion and further examples

This paper has addressed three issues related to the study of ḥadīth commentaries. I have first shown how the ḥadīth’s exact wording still developed after the stabilization of the material in collections. In both cases it could be shown that this was surely (the case of *Allāh*) or very likely (the case of *nutfā*) a reflection of exegetical processes. This challenges us not to think of text and commentary as two always clearly separated categories. Second, I studied the diachronic impact of two iconic Sunni commentators, Nawawī and especially Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. The result cautions against simplifying assumptions that such overarching figures of ḥadīth commentation will always impact on the commentaries composed after them. Third, I have argued that in the specific case study provided here, which relates to common imaginations of early pregnancy, significant changes in the commentation can be witnessed since the second half of the 19th century. These changes are very likely caused by the spread of basic common medical knowledge over the last two centuries. The study of the history of the Ibn Mas‘ūd-statement in the commentation of the

72 Sharnūbī: “{his creation is gathered}, i.e., the material of its creation is added to each other (...) {as a drop} after it had been spread in her entire body”. Anṣārī: “{his creation is gathered} it is added to each other after the spreading, and ‘creation’ means: its material, which is the semen from which it is created.”

73 Āl al-Shaykh, 100; Farhūd, 1:61f; Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, 100.

74 As mentioned above, I bracket Yusrī’s commentary here, because it heavily consists of verbatim quotes of Qurtubī and Ibn Ḥajar, among others, which seems unusual to me in the commentations of the 20th and 21st centuries. However, it can never be ruled out, of course, that more commentations of this kind will be produced in the future. Beside that, Zakariyyā, 19, has an interesting further development of a commentation phrase that had developed around the *yujma‘ khalquhu* segment of the ḥadīth and the Ibn Mas‘ūd statement: “its emergence starts through adding the elements of its generation to each other” (*yabda‘u takawwunuhu bi-ḍammi ‘anāṣiri takwīnihi ba‘ḍuhā ilā ba‘ḍin*) [compare to Anṣārī above].

Ibn Mas‘ūd ḥadīth therefore shows how the commentary tradition develops in a complex interaction process of factors from at least two fields: the field of ḥadīth scholarship, i.e., a field fully under the scholars’ control, and fields completely beyond this control or even influence, such as modern medicine.

Two further examples will provide additional nuance to this model. The first relates to “an impact from within the field of hadith knowledge production”, giving an example, where Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī’s ḥadīth criticism was strikingly successful. The second relates to “impact from outside this field” and alerts us to the necessity of asking when exactly certain forms of common medical knowledge developed.

For the *first example*, recall that the ḥadīth is composed of two parts, the first speaking about “embryology” and concrete pre-destination while the second part delivers a specific message about the last deeds in life. In many variants, the point where the two parts are linked together is indicated by an oath formula. Most variants of the Ibn Mas‘ūd-ḥadīth go back to the isnād segment <al-A‘mash → Ibn Wahb → Ibn Mas‘ūd>. However, there is a group branching off before A‘mash via Ibn Kuhayl. In the Ibn Kuhayl cluster the oath formula reads: “by the one in whose hand the soul of ‘Abd Allāh is” (*wa-lladhī nafsu ‘Abdi llāhi bi-yadihi*). In ḥadīth criticism of the 10th and 11th centuries, this was interpreted as a reference of ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Mas‘ūd to himself. Authors like Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 933) or al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 1071) concluded that the second part would not be ḥadīth from Muḥammad, rather than an exegetical statement by Ibn Mas‘ūd and it would constitute an earlier transmission layer.⁷⁵ This issue entered the commentary tradition with reference to al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s work, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201) being the first in the sample followed by Ibn Mulaqqin (d. 1401) and al-‘Aynī (d. 1451).⁷⁶ They simply mention this point briefly and approvingly. However, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 1448) argued extensively against this interpretation and among the Bukhārī-commentators he was followed by Yūsufzādeh who quoted him verbatim.⁷⁷ His position also impacted on the Arba‘īn-commentaries until the early 19th century.⁷⁸ Then, after a short hiatus, the issue resurfaced in the late 20th century, very likely through the Arba‘īn commentary of Ibn ‘Uthaymīn from Saudi-Arabia. He subscribed to Ibn Ḥajar’s position, and so did one commentator after him, quoting Ibn ‘Uthaymīn.⁷⁹ However, in the most recent commentary in the sample (publ. 2010) by Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh (also from Saudi-Arabia), the author simply adopts the opposite position without any further reference or discussion.⁸⁰

I interpret this overall picture as an example, where the position formulated by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī clearly had a decisive impact on the commentary tradition after him.

75 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 1:218f; Ṭahāwī, 9:483f. See also van Ess, 16f who came to the same conclusions independently of the two.

76 Ibn al-Jawzī, 4:252 (reference going back to Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Thābit [=al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī]); Ibn Mulaqqin, *Tawdīh*, 19:77 (reference to al-Khaṭīb’s *al-Faṣl li-l-waṣl*); *ibid.*, *Arba‘īn*, 113; ‘Aynī, 15:178 (no reference). All three Bukhārī-commentaries make this point in *Kitāb bad’ al-khalq*.

77 Ibn Ḥajar, 15:200; Yūsufzādeh, 27:fol.239v-240r.

78 Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, 254; Lārī, fol. 104r; Munāwī, fol. 73v (quoting Ibn Ḥajar); Nafrāwī, fol. 56v (quoting Munāwī); Bin Sūdāh 1:263.

79 Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, 103; Yusrī 1:210f.

80 Āl al-Shaykh, 114.

Very likely this position is a reflection of the successive canonization of the *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* as a collection of *prophetic* sayings and in this framework the position was simply not acceptable anymore, that the Ibn Mas‘ūd-ḥadīth as represented in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* might contain a statement which had originally not been prophetic.⁸¹ This example also sheds additional light on the question why, as shown above, Ibn Ḥajar’s critique of the Ibn Mas‘ūd-statement had not been successful: it did not apply to a ḥadīth and therefore the critique could not build on an underlying consensus on how such a text had to be approached.⁸² This shows that commentators after Ibn Ḥajar were clearly aware of his work and often copied entire, long passages from it. However, they did not do this in an uncritical manner—a reminder of the necessity to study the history of commentaries beyond modern prejudices of unoriginality.

The *second example*, illustrating “cause from outside of the field of hadith knowledge production”, refers to medicine again. Here the commentary of Farhūd is of interest. The Egyptian Muḥammad al-Sa‘dī Farhūd (1923-2000) was not an Islamic scholar by training, but held a PhD in literature. Since the late 1950s he built a career in the administration of the educational sector which climaxed in the post of president of Azhar University in 1983-1987.⁸³ His *Arba‘īn* commentary was published in 1971.

In his commentation on ḥadīth no. 4 Farhūd posits, there would be two sides to the ḥadīth, a hidden side, which you simply have to accept, and a scientific side, which you can verify. Then follows a whole page of description of how the zygote, i.e., the “fertilized egg”, and the embryological development until the 10th week of pregnancy. Here Farhūd also uses medical-technical terminology, particularly the word “zygote”, which is also given in Latin script as an explanation of the Arabic transcription of the term. Then follows a passage with references to Q 23:12-14 and 22:5 plus exegetical statements attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid and Ibn Mas‘ūd. The last of these statements also mentions the determining of the unborn’s sex, which is most probably the reason why Farhūd gets back to modern embryo research of his time. He writes about chromosomes in general and X and Y chromosomes in particular (with Latin script again) and their role in the emergence of male and female sex. Then he postulates that humankind has no possibility to know the sex of the unborn, which he sees as a confirmation of Q 31:34 which reads: “[Only God] knows what is in the wombs.”⁸⁴

81 The resurfacing of the issue in the late 20th century through Ibn ‘Uthaymīn is very likely a reflection of increasing interest in ḥadīth criticism among Salafī authors in that time. Viewed in that context, the fact that Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh adopts—in passing—the opposite position might have deeper repercussions which are beyond the scope of this paper. He is a representative of the Āl al-Shaykh family which dominates the Saudi religious establishment. Also the Saudi state was supportive to through Ibn ‘Uthaymīn’s rise to popularity, there is a general tension between Salafist authors like him and the Saudi state (see Gharaibeh). Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh is long-time Saudi minister of religious endowments.

82 This might also have been the case for the ḥadīth via Mālik b. al-Ḥuwayrith to a certain degree, in the sense that it was not transmitted in any of the canonical collections.

83 This rough biographical sketch was drawn from <<http://www.azhar.edu.eg>> (accessed May 2016).

84 Farhūd, 1:67-69.

When Farhūd wrote this in 1971 he reflects absolutely accurately the medical-scientific state of the art in his time. The history of using ultra-sound as a means of medical diagnostics only starts after 1945. There were several pivotal steps in the development of this technology. One of those steps were developments in the 1970s regarding the visualization of the results of the scan, consisting among other things in the introduction of gray scaling in the visualization. The then decisive breakthrough came in the late 1970s, i.e., the step to realtime ultra sound. Only after this breakthrough came during the 1980s the introduction of this technology into the market of medical equipment on a wide scale.⁸⁵ Thus, around 1970 humankind had no possibility to know the unborn's sex, just like Farhūd wrote.

However, since then medical technology has expanded further and one can witness this in the commentary of Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh. The structure of his text shows very similar elements as Farhūd's and also mentions Q 31:34 as well as other text material containing sex determination.⁸⁶ Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh continues that the Qur'ān passage would not be contradicted by modern medicine. Qur'ān and ḥadīth taken together would specify that until the 42nd day the knowledge about the embryo's sex would be exclusively with God and only then this knowledge would be communicated to others such as the angel. He writes:

And exactly at this time it is known through modern methods whether it is male or female. But in this there is no claim to have knowledge of the hidden. Because they [the scientists] do not know this with absolute certainty and they are only capable of knowing this after the mentioned period [of 42 days]. Before this it belongs to the exclusive knowledge of God.⁸⁷

This statement is not entirely correct in the sense that the development of external sexual organs takes place after the 8th to 9th week of pregnancy, and diagnosis with a low rate of error is only possible even later—that means, clearly a considerable time after the 42nd day.⁸⁸ Entirely correct is, of course, Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh's statement that pre-natal diagnosis only very rarely produces 100% reliable results—and if this is the case, this is only possible at a time when the pregnancy has already advanced considerably.

The overall picture of this second example shows two things. First, it is a further illustration of how common medical knowledge, i.e., from a field beyond the control of the religious scholars, clearly impacts on the ḥadīth commentaries. Second, the example shows the necessity to study closely the development of this common knowledge in historical perspective. Put into such a framework, the dynamics of the interaction between the two different fields of knowledge production can be understood in a much more nuanced way than any sort of simplifying dichotomy would allow for.

85 Woo, "A short history of the development of Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology".

86 In contradistinction to Farhūd, who had referred to exegetical statements attributed to Ṣaḥāba, Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh quoted a ḥadīth transmitted by Ḥudhayfa b. Asīd, which is not in Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* but in Muslim's.

87 Āl al-Shaykh, 104.

88 The same is true for invasive methods such as amniocentesis or for blood tests for pregnant women. They produce reliable results only after the 10th week of pregnancy. All of this does not apply, of course, for extra-corporal embryos.

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