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Criteria for dating early *tafsīr* traditions - the exegetical traditions and variant readings of Abū Mijlaz Lāḥiq b. Ḥumayd

The question of the beginnings of Qurʾānic exegesis has been highly controversial in Western scholarship for more than a century, with positions ranging from a beginning of exegesis at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad to its emergence not before first half of the second/eighth century. The opposing positions arise from very different approaches to the sources taken by different scholars as well as the underlying assumptions that guide their research. This article aims to overcome these differences by developing criteria that allow for the dating of allegedly early exegetical traditions and for the assessment of the reliability of their ascription to specific authorities of the first/seventh century. These criteria will then be applied to the exegetical traditions attributed to Abū Mijlaz Lāḥiq b. Ḥumayd, a Basran scholar who died sometime before 110/728. The article will show that the traditions circulated in the name of Abū Mijlaz must be considered to go back to him and thus allow us to get an insight into what exegesis in the first century was like. It will also demonstrate that the focus on minor figures rather than on major authorities is the most promising approach to unearth authentic traditions from the first century of Islam.

Introduction

At least from the early 20th century, the beginnings of Qurʾānic exegesis has been a contested field. Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally as well as Ignaz Goldziher had argued that many of the traditions traced back to Ibn ʿAbbās, cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad and the most highly regarded authority in *tafsīr*, did not in fact originate with him, but were only later attributed to him and that this ascription to him must be considered a mere fiction.[1] This sparked various responses and led to a lively controversy which continues today. There is no need at this point to discuss in detail all the different approaches taken and the conclusions reached by different scholars.[2] It suffices to note that over the years, based on a variety of different methods, three main positions with regard to the origins of exegesis have crystallised. Herbert Berg has dubbed them 'ascriptionist', 'sanguine', and 'skeptical',[3] and while one may find the terms useful or not,[4] they do delineate three rather different views of the early development of Islamic exegesis.

The traditional Muslim (or 'ascriptionist') position, which for some time also found some support in Western academia, sees exegesis beginning with the Prophet Muḥammad himself, who is said to have commented on various verses of the Qurʾān and explained their meaning and implications. After him, exegesis of the Qurʾān was practiced by several of his companions, most famously Ibn ʿAbbās and his students. According to this position, these early exegetical statements were passed on faithfully to further generations, who also complemented them with their own knowledge. They were partly written down from the very beginning (in the case of Ibn ʿAbbās), then formed into collections by scholars in the second and third generation, such as those by Mujāhid b. Jabr, Sufyān al-Thawrī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, and others, and were finally incorporated in large compendia such al-Ṭabarī's

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[1] Nöldeke/Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, vol. 2, pp. 165-167; Goldziher, *Richtungen*, pp. 65-83.
[2] Herbert Berg provided an excellent overview of the different approaches in the introduction to his study on the development of exegesis in early Islam: see Berg, *Development*, pp. 65-105.
[3] Berg, "Competing Paradigms", p. 261, n. 4.
[4] See Motzki, "Question", pp. 212-225 for an extensive critique of these categories.

Jāmiʿ al-Bayān. According to this view, these earlier texts can be extracted more or less verbatim from the later sources if their *isnāds* show a certain pattern that can be interpreted to indicate that written texts were passed on.[5]

The second position, which Berg calls the 'sanguine' approach, is less confident with regard to the ascription of exegetical traditions to the earliest generations. Several studies on individual 'works' ascribed to authorities of the first two generations of Muslims have shown that these works cannot be fully reconstructed, as parallel transmissions of the same traditions show considerable differences in wording and there is often evidence of later editorial changes in the purported works.[6] Proponents of this approach, however, argue that it is possible to reconstruct to some degree what major early figures in exegesis taught, although the exact wording of their traditions may have been lost in the course of transmission. These reconstructions are usually based on a careful analysis of the *isnāds* attached to the respective traditions as well as their textual variants. Studies of this type have focused mostly on collections of traditions ascribed to a specific prominent authority in the field, such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid b. Jabr, or al-Ḍaḥḥāk.

None of these studies, which would allow insights into the exegetical tradition of the first/seventh century, however, have convinced proponents of the the third (or 'skeptical') approach. Scholars following this approach dismiss the evidence of *isnāds* altogether. The *isnād* in their understanding at best indicates that the traditions were given their final form only after the year 200/815, when the *isnād* gradually became a requirement in all fields of learning.[7] They see themselves supported by the inconsistencies and contradictory traditions ascribed to the early authorities; these make it impossible to decide which, if any, of these traditions can be regarded as the authority's positions. Proponents of this approach would not as a rule argue that there was no exegetical activity before this time, but that it is impossible to assign specific statements to individual figures of the first two centuries.[8] According to this view, the exegetical literature as a whole only dates from the late second/eighth century or later, and references to earlier authorities are just a literary device, intended to enhance the credibility of the statements. The attempt to isolate and reconstruct allegedly early sources from later ones is thus futile, as these earlier 'works' are a mere fiction. Instead, the later commentaries need to be read as literature, using methods of literary criticism. John Wansbrough, the main advocate of this position, proposed on the basis of his examination of exegetical texts and a comparison to the emergence of Jewish exegetical literature that different types of exegesis developed at different times in a specific order. The earliest of these would be the haggadic exegesis, which is concerned with the narrative of the revealed text and comprises amongst other things prophetic traditions and anecdotes. The second, chronologically later, type of exegesis would be halakhic, focusing on the legal relevance of the text for the community, followed by masoretic exegesis, which is concerned with the textual structure of the Qurʾān and its linguistic features and includes discussions of variant readings as well as lexical and grammatical explanations. These are then, in turn, followed by rhetorical and allegorical exegesis.[9]

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[5] Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 1, pp. 82-83.

[6] See e.g. Stauth, "Die Überlieferung", pp. 148-191, 226-227; Leemhuis, "MS 1075 Tafsīr", pp. 170-176; Leemhuis, "Origins", pp. 19-22; Versteegh, "The name of the ant", pp. 282-283, Rippin, "Al-Zuhrī", p. 43.

[7] See Berg, "Competing Paradigms", pp. 275-276; Rippin, "Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās", p. 61, whom Berg cites, speaks rather of "the second century or later".

[8] See e.g., Rippin, "Studying", p. 314: "Some people, myself included, argued that these texts are late renditions at best, which have been filtered through several generations of editors, compilers and copyists. Theoretically, there may well be a 'historical kernel' of material that could be ascribed to a given person within these texts, but determining just what that kernel consists of is no longer possible."

[9] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, pp. 119-246.

The last position in particular seems irreconcilable with the other two, as it rejects the use of *isnāds* as evidence, which forms the basis of the other two positions. In contrast, proponents of the second position argue that the proposed chronological order of the development of different types of exegesis is arbitrary and can thus not be used as evidence for an early or late date of a tradition.

Michael Cook in his study of early dogmatic traditions aptly comments that "the respective methods tend more to illustrate the indefinite tolerance of the source-material for radically different historical interpretations than to identify evidence which can confirm or refute the approaches in question."[10] Berg goes even further and argues that the two paradigms dubbed 'sanguine' and 'skeptical' are mutually exclusive and that it is impossible for either side to convince the other. One important factor in this regard is that the underlying assumptions of both sides are not only irreconcilable, but appear to be practically immune to criticism, as they can easily account for evidence that does not support the respective theory but rather seems to contradict it. As he puts it:

"The sanguine scholar is certainly critical, suggesting that *matn*s have been manipulated and redacted, and the *isnād*s have occasionally been repaired or fabricated. Any anomalies produced by the method are easily accounted for by viewing them as the product of 'fabrication,' 'copyist error,' or even the combined oral/written method of transmission in the early centuries of Islam. Nevertheless, earlier texts can be 'reconstructed.'"[11]

The same kind of immunisation strategy also applies to 'skeptical' scholars:

"The skeptical scholar is certainly willing to accept evidence in favor of the Muslim epistemological framework, but only if that evidence is truly early, and not a later redacted work projected into the past through the use of *isnāds*. Any anomalies to the paradigm can be accounted for by arguing that the extant texts are later than they purport to be or that they are redactions of earlier texts by later scholars who interpolated material, such as the masoretic use of pre-Islamic poetry in the narratives of the *sīrah*."[12]

Thus these positions indeed appear to be irreconcilable: scholars following the 'sanguine' approach argue that the evidence shows that exegesis did not develop in the order proposed by Wansbrough, but that instead most exegetical devices were already in place in the late first or early second century.[13] This, however, is based on the assumption that a large part of the material that is ascribed to early figures such as Mujāhid b. Jabr, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, or Qatāda b. Diʿāma does indeed go back to them. Scholars of the 'skeptical' approach, however, argue that these apparently early attestations of the exegetical devices are no more than ascriptions or later redactions and only show that the texts have been modified in the course of transmission.[14]

A case in point is al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim's commentary, which was compiled from later sources and published in 1999.[15] Kees Versteegh, a scholar representing the 'sanguine' approach, studied the text with the assumption "that the compiled database of comments […] may serve as a starting point for the study of exegetical activities in the early period of Islam,"[16] and argued that the comments

[10] Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 156.
[11] Berg, "Competing Paradigms", pp. 287-288.
[12] Berg, "Competing Paradigms", p. 288.
[13] Versteegh, "The name of the ant", p. 283; Versteegh, "Search", p. 45.
[14] See e.g. Rippin, "Quranic Studies", pp. 43-44.
[15] Al-Ḍaḥḥāk. *Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk jamʿ wa-dirāsa wa-taḥqīq*. Muḥammad Shukrī al-Zāwiyyatī, ed. 2 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Salāma, 1999.
[16] Versteegh, "The name of the ant", p. 280.

likely originally belonged to a complete commentary.[17] Despite some cases in which several different explanations of the same verse are presented as those of al-Ḍaḥḥāk,[18] the existence of additions by later commentators,[19] as well as the use of grammatical terms which cannot go back to al-Ḍaḥḥāk, but must be assumed to derive from later insertions,[20] Versteegh nevertheless assumes that the contents of the traditions otherwise reflect al-Ḍaḥḥāk's teaching and "provide us with a profile of his exegetical activities."[21] Andrew Rippin, representing the 'skeptical' approach, takes the opposite stance. He comments on the work and Versteegh's study: "Al-Dahhak did not author the work that is being subjected to analysis; rather, that work is composed of traditions ascribed to him by later authors. The question must remain regarding the extent to which such ascriptions can be trusted. It comes as no surprise (to me, at least) that there is no consistent perspective to be extracted from an arbitrary collection of reports that are ascribed to one name."[22]

Is it possible overcome this impasse? How can we avoid interpreting the evidence we find within a specific framework, in which, as we have seen, almost any evidence can be interpreted as supporting the underlying assumptions? In such a situation, it may be effective to stand back and take a more methodical approach to the question. Rather than starting with the examination of specific texts or traditions and then explaining the findings in the light of the framework one chooses, it appears useful to first develop criteria according to which one would be able to date texts or assess the reliability of an ascription of a tradition to an authority, before applying them to a specific text or specific traditions. The aim, then, must be to find criteria that can be used for dating seemingly early texts that do not rely on the evidence of *isnād*s on the one hand, and that do not presuppose a given chronological order of the development of exegetical devices on the other hand.

Studying early *tafsīr*: texts and traditions

In the following I want to develop criteria that allow the scholar to establish whether a tradition ascribed to a specific figure does indeed go back to him. In contrast to previous scholarship, I want to focus on individual *traditions* rather than *texts*. By traditions here I mean statements or positions ascribed to a scholar. Most scholarship on the origins and early development of *tafsīr* has focused on what the later scholarly tradition has regarded as *tafsīr* works of particular scholars, be they authored works (such as the commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān) or collections of traditions ascribed to a specific prominent authority in the field (such as the so called *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās*, the *Tafsīr Mujāhid b. Jabr*, or the above mentioned *Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāq*). The approach taken here instead focuses on exegetical traditions ascribed to a given authority that were likely not part of any "work" by this authority and were not transmitted as such, but that are instead recorded as individual traditions in different sources. It is thus interested in *tafsīr* as an intellectual activity rather than *tafsīr* as a literary genre.

The rationale behind this is threefold: First, according to all we know, the composition of books in the stricter sense only began around the middle of the second century AH (eighth century CE).[23] If we want to say anything about exegetical activities before that time, we therefore have to take oral

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[17] Versteegh, "The name of the ant", p. 282.
[18] Versteegh, "The name of the ant", p. 282.
[19] Versteegh, "The name of the ant", p. 282.
[20] Versteegh, "The name of the ant", pp. 296-297.
[21] Versteegh, "The name of the ant", p. 297.
[22] Rippin, review of *The Transmission and Dynamics*, p. 101.
[23] See e.g. Schoeler, *Genesis*, pp. 68-73; Leemhuis, "Origins", pp. 21-22.

instruction and oral transmission into account. That is not to say that there was no writing involved – Gregor Schoeler's suggestion of a combined oral and written transmission based on personal notes in lecture-like circles[24] seems very convincing and well supported by evidence – but we cannot and should not focus solely on written texts if we are to study the beginnings of exegetical activities.

Second, traditions that were not transmitted together as one text are less likely to have been harmonised in the course of transmission. Collections of traditions ascribed to a single authority, such as the works ascribed to Mujāhid b. Jabr or Sufyān al-Thawrī, were likely transmitted in one piece from the time of their collection, and any transmitter would have been able to edit them in any way he wished, modifying, adding or omitting traditions. Individual traditions, in contrast, would have largely been transmitted, edited or even invented independently from each other. This is not to say that they cannot have been edited or invented at a later time, but these alterations or ascriptions to earlier authorities by later authors would more likely have been independent from each other, and would thus be less likely to show a coherent pattern.

And third, *tafsīr* has always had – and still has – a very strong oral component. It was never practiced solely as a written activity. If we want to find out more about the actual practice of exegesis, we therefore have to look beyond the written and authored works, which limit our view to the academic discipline of *tafsīr*.[25]

Criteria for the dating of traditions

Is it possible to develop criteria that allow us to date traditions or assess whether their ascription to individual scholars is correct? There are few criteria that all scholars would easily agree with. One of these would be the emergence of manuscripts (or fragments thereof) containing exegetical traditions and securely datable to the first centuries of Islam.[26] Such early manuscripts, however, have yet to be found.[27] In the absence of such manuscripts, one is bound to rely on criteria from within the text that give evidence of the date of a tradition.

Andrew Rippin in his study of the so-called *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* suggests a number of internal criteria for dating early *tafsīr* texts.[28] However, most of the criteria he discusses focus on texts, on commentaries rather than on individual traditions, and are thus not easily applicable to individual exegetical traditions or collections of the latter. This is the case, for example, with regard to the existence or absence of a discussion of canonical variant readings, the use of particular verse divisions, or the citation of different interpretations of a particular word or verse.[29] Others of his criteria, however, can also be applied to individual traditions.

One such criterion is the presence of direct or indirect references in the traditions to a historical period or event that can be dated externally.[30] But while this external dating of traditions seems

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[24] Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written*, pp. 28-86.
[25] See Görke, "Redefining", pp. 363-365.
[26] See Leemhuis, "Origins", p. 14; Berg, "Competing Paradigms", pp. 284-285.
[27] The earliest manuscripts of exegetical works discovered so far date from the third/ninth century. See Muranyi, "Neue Materialien", pp. 228-229.
[28] Rippin, "Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās", pp. 59-71.
[29] Rippin, "Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās", pp. 67-68.
[30] Rippin, "Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās", p. 60.

possible to some degree in eschatological traditions,[31] few if any such references can be found in exegetical traditions. The criterion can, however, be used to some degree with regard to the use of terminology or the allusion to dogmatic positions to find either a *terminus ante quem* or a *terminus post quem* of a given tradition, depending on the evidence. Rippin himself discussed the example of the interpretation of *ḥikma* ("wisdom") in the phrase *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikma*, which occurs in the Qurʾān several times.[32] According to him, any explanation of the word as referring to the *sunna* of the Prophet would make the tradition with this interpretation later than al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), who introduced and promoted this understanding.[33] If such a tradition were ascribed to an earlier authority, it would prove that the ascription is wrong. Versteegh, by contrast, argued that through the course of the development of Arabic grammar and its application to the study of the Qurʾān, the grammatical terminology changed, and later compilers tended to replace forgotten or uncommon terms with those current at their time. The occurrence in exegetical traditions of terms that were no longer in use could then be regarded as an indication of an early origin of these traditions, although it would not prove whether the ascription to a specific scholar is indeed correct.[34] In either way, such an approach requires that the development of certain dogmas or of terminology can be ascertained independently, as literary analysis alone cannot provide a historical framework.[35]

Another criterion advanced by Rippin is the existence of traces of editorial intrusion, when for example the explanation or interpretation of a word was in need of further clarification.[36] While this indicates later editorial activity and thus a secondary stage in the transmission, it also seems to imply that the interpretation that required clarification is older and was transmitted unchanged rather than having been rephrased in a way that would have made the additional comment redundant.

Rippin also discussed the dating on the basis of the *isnād*s, which, however, he believed could not yield any relevant results. The rationale behind this is twofold. He argued that later editors could always have added an *isnād* to any tradition to give it validity and enhance its authority.[37] Relying on the *isnād*s also presupposes that once the mechanism of the *isnād* as a means to validate a tradition was established, people used it consistently and honestly, which is far from certain.[38] Traditions could thus be later than their *isnād* indicates. But they could likewise be earlier: "The other problem that must be faced is the possibility that the *isnād* has been attached to a text which already existed, one which may have even originated earlier than the convergence of the *isnād*s would suggest. For this reason, analysis of the *isnād* cannot provide a full criterion for dating a text; it may provide some additional evidence in order to substantiate a conclusion based upon other grounds, but as independent evidence, it seems to me quite limited."[39]

We will follow Rippin in this argument and first try to establish criteria that are not dependent on the *isnād*. An analysis of the *isnād*s shall be used, however, to examine whether the *isnād*s do

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[31] See e.g. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 207-214; Cook, "Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions", pp. 27-38; Görke, "Eschatology, History, and the Common Link", pp. 200-207.

[32] Q. 2:129, Q. 2:151, Q. 2:231, Q. 3:48, Q. 3:164, Q. 4:54, Q. 4:113, Q 5:110, and Q. 62:2. Once, in Q. 3:81, it also occurs in the indefinite form: *min kitābin wa-ḥikmatin*.

[33] Rippin, "Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās", p. 60.

[34] Versteegh, "The Name of the Ant", pp. 280-281.

[35] Rippin, "Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās", p. 69.

[36] Rippin, "Tafsir Ibn ʿAbbās", pp. 64-65.

[37] Rippin, "Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās", p. 61.

[38] Rippin, "Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās", pp. 61-62.

[39] Rippin, "Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās", p. 62.

provide additional evidence and corroborate the results gained otherwise, or whether they undermine these conclusions.

Are there other internal criteria that can be used to assess early traditions, criteria that go beyond those suggested by Rippin (i.e., direct or indirect references to events or doctrinal positions that can be dated externally, and traces of editorial intrusion in a tradition)? In the following I want to propose four additional criteria that may help to date early traditions or assess the reliability of their ascription to specific authorities, namely 1) early or independent attestations, 2) internal consistency, 3) originality, and 4) opposition to later views.

Early attestation

This criterion seems rather obvious at first sight, but in the case of Islamic exegesis proves to be more complicated than one may assume. A tradition that is recorded at an early stage cannot have been invented at a later time and likewise cannot have been the object of editorial changes. However, the situation is not that straightforward once we take a closer look. First of all, we need to distinguish three types of commentaries that allegedly contain early material from the first/seventh century. The first of these are authored works, composed by individual scholars, usually making use of earlier material. The commentaries of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and Yaḥyā b. Sallām (d. 200/815) as well as most of the later ones belong to this type. While one can assume that they were transmitted as complete works, it nevertheless is a matter of debate whether they may have been subject to alterations in the course of transmission, as none of these early works exists as an autograph.

Another type of putative works of the second century poses even more problems, as these are not authored works, but collections of traditions ascribed to a specific authority, compiled one or more generations after the authorities for which they are named. To this genre belong the commentaries ascribed to Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. c. 104/722) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778). In these cases it is very difficult to determine to what extent transmitters in each stage of the transmission may have modified or added traditions, but these 'works' at least seem to have been transmitted as independent compilations of traditions from roughly the end of the second or beginning of the third centuries (early or mid-ninth century CE) onwards.

A third type are modern compilations of traditions ascribed to a specific authority that are extracted from later commentaries. Some of these authorities are listed as authors of commentaries in the biographical and bibliographical literature, but their commentaries have not come down to us, and we have no way of knowing what they may have looked like and whether they were authored books covering the complete Qurʾān or only collections of individual traditions. Nevertheless, some of these collections have been published as 'works' of these 'authors'. To this category belong, for example, the commentaries published under the names of al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 105/723),[40] al-Suddī (d. 128/746),[41] Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/768),[42] or Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (d. 198/814).[43] As the traditions in these works are taken unsystematically from various later sources without a critical assessment of where they come from, how they are used in these works, when they may first have emerged, or how they

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[40] Al-Ḍaḥḥāk, *Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk*.
[41] Al-Suddī, *Tafsīr al-Suddī al-kabīr*.
[42] Ibn Jurayj, *Tafsīr Ibn Jurayj*.
[43] Ibn ʿUyayna, *Tafsīr*.

compare to similar traditions in other works, they are not particularly helpful for a study of early *tafsīr*, as they basically assume that the ascription to the named authorities is correct.

The third category of works should thus not be taken as evidence for early attestations without further scrutiny of the individual traditions included within them. If a tradition of, for example, al-Ḍaḥḥāk or al-Suddī is traced back to Ibn ʿAbbās, it is impossible to know whether al-Ḍaḥḥāk or al-Suddī indeed referred to Ibn ʿAbbās, when the tradition is in fact taken from a later commentary, such as al-Ṭabarī's. The *isnād* could as well have been extended to Ibn ʿAbbās in the course of transmission, or the whole tradition could have been invented and supplied with an *isnād* at any time before it was recorded in the later source.

With regard to the other two categories, an attestation of traditions in these types of works is more significant, but still needs to be assessed carefully. The attestation of a specific tradition ascribed to a specific authority in an allegedly early work cannot be considered a decisive proof that the tradition already existed during the lifetime of that authority in the form in which it is recorded in that work. It can at best be seen as an indication that the tradition was already linked with that authority when the work was composed. On the other hand, the lack of early attestations of a tradition in connection with a certain authority could indicate that a tradition was only later connected with this name. This would likewise not constitute a decisive proof of its late origin, however, as it is possible that the authors or compilers of early 'works' (of the first two categories) were not aware of a specific tradition or chose not to include it, or that a transmitter of these works deliberately omitted specific traditions. Nevertheless, even if the existence or non-existence of specific traditions in allegedly early works cannot completely resolve the issue, early attestations do at least provide some form of evidence that a tradition was already in circulation, while the absence of early attestations indicates that it is more likely to be of later origin.

It also seems safe to at least regard the quotation of traditions in allegedly early works as attestations that are most likely independent from each other. These works – either as authored works or as collections of traditions – were probably transmitted (or, from a more skeptical perspective, possibly composed) independently from each other. And while for each work later additions or alterations cannot be ruled out, it seems unlikely that these would have been the same in all later works. In other words, it is not conceivable that the respective transmitters (or editors or composers) of the commentaries of, for example, Muqātil b. Sulaymān and ʿAbd al-Razzāq would have independently included the same traditions traced back to the same authorities as Sufyān al-Thawrī or al-Ṭabarī, or that they all revised them in the same manner to conform to later positions, in particular if they were active in different geographical regions.

Internal Consistency

Another criterion to assess the authenticy of a corpus of traditions is its internal consistency or inconsistency. If a corpus of traditions attributed to a specific authority displayed significant contradictions, this would point to the later ascription of at least some of the views to the respective authority, or to the reference to this authority being a literary device. If traditions ascribed to an authority were authentic, they should not contain significant contradictions, as it is unlikely that a scholar held opposing views on the meaning of a specific word, the significance of a specific Qurʾānic verse, or the occasion of its revelation. This does not mean that they could not have *transmitted* differing views, but it is unlikely that they advanced them as their own views. The inconsistency of traditions ascribed to several of the early authorities such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, or al-Ḍaḥḥāk has

in fact been one of the main arguments advanced against the authenticity of these traditions.[44] While in such cases, it cannot be excluded that some of the views do indeed go back to these authorities, it is impossible to decide which views this would be. Arguments to the effect that a scholar may also have held different views or changed his view over the course of time, while of course possible, seem unpersuasive, at least if used to explain a large number of contradictions.

The consistency of a corpus, on the other hand, can be regarded as evidence in favour of its authenticity (in the sense that the ascription of a tradition to a specific authority seems to reflect a historical reality), in particular if the corpus is large and the traditions are recorded in several sources from different regions of the Islamic world. If traditions were randomly ascribed to a specific authority by various later figures, we would not expect a general agreement over the alleged positions of that authority. The consistency of a corpus thus would strengthen the case for its authenticity, and it would provide a strong argument against the use of the authority's name as a mere literary device. The consistency of the corpus alone, however, would not constitute proof of authenticity. It cannot be ruled out, for example, that a forger systematically ascribed specific views to an authority and spread these.

Originality

An important indicator of authenticity is the originality or uniqueness of a tradition and its ascription to a specific authority. While the criterion of internal consistency assesses the entire corpus of traditions ascribed to one authority, the criterion of originality compares these traditions to traditions on the same verse or topic related by other authorities. If a specific interpretation is consistently only credited to one and the same scholar, it seems very likely that this scholar is indeed responsible for this interpretation. If, on the other hand, an explanation is credited to various scholars, it is difficult to decide whether all these scholars indeed held the same view, or whether some of the ascriptions were just made to enhance the authority of this explanation. Of particular relevance in this case are traditions ascribed to both students and their teachers. While it is of course possible (and in fact not unlikely) that a student held the same view as his teacher but possibly did not credit him, it seems just as likely that the view of the student was ascribed – by himself or in later generations – to his teacher or even earlier generations to increase its authority. This is indeed what seems to have happened with scores of traditions which eventually became ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās or his main students.

Opposition to later views

Another aspect which may be seen as an indicator of the authenticity of a tradition in a specific source is its apparent opposition to the views of the author of this source. It is unlikely that an author who cites a tradition and then argues that it must be wrong actually invented the tradition. This does not mean that it necessarily goes back to the authority to which it is ascribed, but it indicates that it must be older than the source in which it is found. The criterion is vaguely related to the criterion of dissimilarity in historical-Jesus studies and to the dating against external grounds, discussed above in the examples of Rippin and Versteegh. In contrast to the dating against external grounds, which looks at anachronistic interpretations or use of terminology, the criterion of

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[44] See already Goldziher, *Richtungen*, pp. 80-83; Berg, "Isnād", p. 269-271; Rippin, review of *The Transmission and Dynamics*, p. 101; Powers, "On the Abrogation", p. 262.

opposition to later views is not dependent on assumptions regarding how terminology or dogma developed, as it only examines the way a tradition is dealt with in the work in which it is quoted. If, by contrast, a source quotes traditions from a specific authority only in support of its own views, it is possible that these are made up to enhance the credibility of a specific position.

It is obvious that none of these criteria alone will provide a decisive proof for or against the reliability of the ascription of traditions to a specific authority. As we have seen above, both 'sanguine' and 'skeptical' approaches can explain observations that do not seem to conform to their theories. However, with these criteria we at least have a more objective approach to assess early exegetical traditions than just assuming their authenticity or not, without having to rely on the evidence of *isnād*s.

The evidence of *isnād*s

The *isnād*s should, however, be analysed in addition to these criteria, to examine whether they corroborate or undermine the findings gained from the textual analysis. If there are several independent transmissions of the same tradition ascribed to the same authority, these would constitute good evidence that the tradition indeed goes back to this authority. The independence of the traditions, however, often will be difficult to establish, as there are only very few exegetical traditions that are long enough to show significant variants in wording, and that are transmitted widely enough to allow for an examination of the correlation between the wording and individual transmitters. When there are enough independent transmissions, an *isnād-cum-matn* analysis may indicate which elements of the tradition can be traced back to the original authority and who in the transmission process may be responsible for specific alterations.[45] In most instances, however, this will not be possible and the analysis will have to focus on *isnād*s alone. In these cases, the more transmissions there are of a given tradition, and the more students transmit the same tradition from the same authority, the more likely it is that this tradition indeed goes back to the authority to which it is ascribed. If, on the other hand, there is only one student who transmits traditions from a given authority, it cannot be ruled out that the student is in fact responsible for these traditions. In particular if the same position is said to have been held by the student and his alleged teacher, this could be an indication for a backward growth of the *isnād*.

If with these criteria it is possible to date at least a few of the traditions preserved in later Qur'ān commentaries to the first century AH and to link them to individual scholars, this will constitute an important step forward in the study of early Islamic exegesis. It will allow scholars to establish a pool of genuinely early traditions, which should necessarily form the basis of any study of the early development of the Islamic exegetical tradition. In particular, these traditions could be used to critically assess the form-critical chronology of the development of exegesis proposed by Wansbrough and either confirm it (by showing that presumably later forms of exegesis are indeed absent in early exegetical traditions), or refute it (by showing that allegedly later forms of exegesis do already occur in these early traditions).

A case study: the exegetical traditions of Abū Mijlaz Lāḥiq b. Ḥumayd

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[45] One such example, the interpretation of Q. 15:89-91, has been discussed in detail by Herbert Berg and Harald Motzki. See Berg, "Competing Paradigms", pp. 263-275; Motzki, "Origins", pp. 236-273, albeit with slightly different conclusions.

Minor figures – reducing the risk of wrong ascriptions

Now that we have developed criteria to assess the reliability of ascriptions of traditions to a specific authority, how can we best put them to the test? As I have argued elsewhere, focusing on minor figures in the development of exegesis may be particularly useful for this exercise, as it is less likely that traditions were deliberately ascribed to them.[46] We would thus expect traditions linked to minor figures to perform better with regard to the criteria of internal consistency and originality than those ascribed to the main authorities of *tafsīr*. Focusing on marginal figures also takes into account that *tafsīr* as an intellectual activity was not restricted to the iconic figures in the field who gained fame and produced works devoted to the topic. It thus helps us to understand *tafsīr* in a wider sense that is not limited to the literary genre alone.

To this end, it is necessary to identify figures who are not regarded as major authorities in the field (to reduce the likelihood of wrong ascriptions), but who are nevertheless credited with exegetical traditions. One such figure appears to be Abū Mijlaz Lāḥiq b. Ḥumayd, a Basran scholar of the late first/seventh century. As will be shown, he seems to have had a rather marginal role in exegesis, but there are a number of exegetical traditions linked with his name. These will be studied in detail below.

Abū Mijlaz in previous scholarship

Abū Mijlaz has received little attention in scholarship. While his name occasionally is mentioned, there are no detailed studies of the traditions transmitted in his name. Aloys Sprenger regarded him as a major source for the biography of Muḥammad: "His traditions are of greater importance for the life of Mohammad than those of any other authority. They are numerous, and there is every reason to suppose that they have been taken down in his lifetime."[47] Unlike most other major authorities in the biography of Muḥammad, Abū Mijlaz was not from Medina but from Basra. Sprenger thus considered him (with an assumed date of death in the year 106 [724-725 CE]) and his student Sulaymān al-Taymī (d. 143/761) as the best sources through whom to examine how the biography of Muḥammad was taught outside Medina.[48] Eduard Sachau likewise noted the important role of Abū Mijlaz for the historical tradition in the eastern part of the Islamic world.[49] There are indeed a number of historical accounts related on his authority, some of which are particularly interesting because they seem to reflect a very early stage of the tradition which appears to be little affected by later embellishments and whitewashing.[50] But while Abū Mijlaz is quoted occasionally in Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt*, al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* and other sources, and over 180 times in Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaf*, most of these traditions are not related to the biography of Muḥammad, but have legal or ritual content. Some traditions refer to companions rather than to Muḥammad, and there are also a few exegetical traditions related in his name. Claude Gilliot, in his overview of the beginnings of Qurʾānic

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[46] Görke, "Remnants", pp. 27, 41-42. On the problem of wrong ascriptions to major authorities in particular, see also Landau-Tasseron, "On the Reconstruction", p. 51: "…it must be borne in mind that the possibility of wrong ascriptions becomes even greater when the texts in question involve such respected authorities […], whose names are more likely than others to have been used by forgers." It is, of course, not impossible that later scholars ascribed traditions to less well known or obscure figures, as other scholars were less likely to have contradicting traditions from these figures. But ascribing traditions to figures who were not regarded as authorities in the field would not enhance the authority of these traditions.

[47] Sprenger, "Notes", pp. 219-200.

[48] Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammed*, vol. 3, p. LXIX.

[49] See his introduction to Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3/1, p. 14.

[50] Fück, "Die Rolle des Traditionalismus", p. 21.

exegesis, discusses Abū Mijlaz briefly, as he is listed as one of the ten Successors "who achieved fame in the science of exegesis" by the fifth-/eleventh-century author of the *Kitāb al-Mabānī*.[51] However, Gilliot observes: "We have found no mention of him, in relation to the *tafsīr*, other than in the *K. al-mabānī* […] He probably figures in this list, because, as a Baṣran, he knew great Companions such as Ibn ʿAbbās and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī."[52]

We can thus conclude that Western scholarship has not identified Abū Mijlaz as an authority in the *tafsīr*. To assess whether he was regarded as such in the Muslim tradition and by the commentators who included his traditions in their works, however, we have to examine what these scholars may have known about him.

Abū Mijlaz in Muslim historical and biographical sources

The scarce attention Abū Mijlaz received in scholarship is reflected in the small amount of information the historical and biographical sources record about him. According to these sources, his full name is Lāḥiq b. Ḥumayd b. Saʿīd (or Shuʿba[53]) b. Khālid b. Kathīr (or Bishr[54]) b. Ḥubaysh b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Sadūs,[55] but he is usually referred to by his *kunyā* Abū Mijlaz. The sources say nothing about his date of birth, but he is counted among the *tābiʿūn*, the generation of the Successors, having heard from a number of Companions of the Prophet. He was Basran[56] and later moved to Khurasan, where he seems to have settled in Marw.[57]

He is said to have arrived in Khurasan together with Qutayba b. Muslim,[58] which would take us into the year 86 (704-5). When Qutayba was killed in 96/715, Abū Mijlaz was briefly put in charge of affairs in Khurasan, before the new governor, Wakīʿ b. Abī Sūd, arrived.[59] At some point Abū Mijlaz also seems to have been in charge of the treasury (*bayt al-māl*) in Marw,[60] though no specific dates for this are recorded. The caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 99-101/717-720) is said to have summoned him to ask for advice regarding matters in Khurasan, and Abū Mijlaz suggested he put ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Nuʿaym in charge of affairs, which he did.[61]

The sources also relate some of his physical attributes, such as that he was one-eyed after an injury,[62] that he had white hair and a white beard,[63] and that he appears to have been rather small in stature.[64] He is said to have had Shīʿī sympathies, although some of the *ḥadīths* he transmitted

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[51] Gilliot, "The Beginnings", p. 8.
[52] Gilliot, "The Beginnings", p. 9.
[53] Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 31, p. 176; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 20.
[54] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 20.
[55] Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1, p. 499. Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām: ḥawādith wa-wafayāt 101-120 AH*, p. 299, and Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maʿārif*, p. 264, have abbreviated forms.
[56] While van Ess holds him to be Kufan, the sources seem unanimous that he was Basran. See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, p. 492.
[57] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl*, vol. 9, p. 124. His house seems to have been on the river Razīk, in an alley called the alley of Abū Mijlaz: Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, pp. 25, 26.
[58] Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, p. 831; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām: ḥawādith wa-wafayāt 101-120 AH*, p. 299; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 31, p. 176; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 27.
[59] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 26.
[60] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 7/2, p. 102, Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 27.
[61] Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 24, p. 84-85.
[62] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 25.
[63] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 27.
[64] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 27.

appeared to be rather in favour of ʿUthmān.[65] An anecdote relates that Abū Mijlaz was teaching *ḥadīth* when a man approached him and asked him to recite a sura instead, to which Abū Mijlaz allegedly replied that reciting a sura was not preferable to what they were currently doing.[66]

As is common with figures of this time, the sources differ with regard to his date of death. The date is variously given as during the caliphate of ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 99-101/717-720),[67] after the year 100 [i.e., 718-19],[68] in the year 100 or 101 [718-19 or 719-20],[69] in the year 101 [719-20],[70] during the governorship of ʿUmar b. Hubayra in Iraq (103-105/721-724),[71] in the year 106 [i.e., 724-25],[72] in the year 109 [727-28],[73] or shortly before the death of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728).[74]

We need not assume that all this information is necessarily historical, but it indicates what kind of information about Abū Mijlaz may have been available to those who transmitted his traditions (or invented them, or ascribed them to him). As we have seen, in the biographical or historical sources Abū Mijlaz was not considered an authority in exegesis. He is generally referred to as being a scholar (*ʿālim*),[75] or more specifically a jurist (*faqīh*),[76] but neither his exegetical activities nor his interest in the biography of the Prophet are indicated.

Abū Mijlaz also does not figure in Ibn al-Nadīm's (d. c. 380/990) *Fihrist*,[77] nor is he mentioned in the two classical works on the history of *tafsīr*, al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn,*[78] and al-Dāwūdī's (d. 945/1538) work of the same title.[79] As we would not expect Abū Mijlaz to have written a book on *tafsīr*, his absence in Ibn al-Nadīm's and al-Suyūṭī's works, which focus on written books and compilations, can easily be explained. Al-Dawūdī, on the other hand, also discusses early authorities in the field, such as Ibn ʿAbbās (d. c. 69/688),[80] and a number of his students,[81] as well as Abū Mijlaz's Basran contemporaries al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728)[82] and Qatāda b. Diʿāma (d. c. 118/736),[83] but he does not mention Abū Mijlaz.

[65] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, pp. 28, 29.

[66] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 3, p. 112; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 29.

[67] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 7/1, p. 157; vol. 7/2, p. 102. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl*, vol. 9, p. 124. Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 31, p. 179, quotes al-Haytham b. ʿAdī and al-Madāʾinī who date his death to the governorship of ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (in Medina, from 86/705 or 87/706 to 93/710-1), but this seems far too early.

[68] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 26.

[69] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 31.

[70] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 32.

[71] Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, p. 335.

[72] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-ʾl-wafayāt*, vol. 24, p. 392. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1, p. 499, has "during the governorship of Ibn Hubayra in the year 106", and Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 64, p. 22, likewise mentions this.

[73] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 4, p. 201. His earlier statement that Abū Mijlaz died in the year 86 [704-5] (vol. 4, p. 106), is obviously an error, probably based on the statements of al-Haitham b. ʿAdī and al-Madāʾinī (see above footnote 67).

[74] Al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, vol. 8, p. 137; al-Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 31, p. 179.

[75] Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām: ḥawādith wa-wafayāt 101-120 AH*, p. 299.

[76] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 3, p. 112.

[77] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Gustav Flügel, 2 vols. Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel, 1871-1872.

[78] Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, ed. Alī Muḥammad ʿUmar, Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1976.

[79] Al-Dawūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām ʿAbd al-Muʿīn, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2002.

[80] Al-Dawūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, p. 167.

[81] Al-Dawūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, p. 265 (ʿIkrima (d. c. 105/723)), pp. 504-506 (Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. c. 104/722)).

[82] Al-Dawūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, p. 106.

[83] Al-Dawūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn* pp. 332-333.

The only mention of Abū Mijlaz in connection with *tafsīr* that I am aware of is the introduction to the *Kitāb al-Mabānī* where he is listed as one of the authorities in exegesis among the *tābiʿūn*.[84] As we have seen, Gilliot assumes that Abū Mijlaz was included there to have a representative of Basra. But as the *Kitāb al-Mabānī* apparently was written in Khurasan, it might as well be that Abū Mijlaz features in the work because his memory was still alive to some degree in the region where he spent a large part of his life and must have gained some fame, if we assume that the historical and biographical works contain at least some grain of historical truth.

Whatever the reason for the inclusion of Abū Mijlaz in the *Kitāb al-Mabānī*, it seems safe to conclude from a study of the sources on his life and on the history of *tafsīr* that Abū Mijlaz was not particularly famous for his exegetical activities, and that his traditions may thus serve as a good object for our analysis. To assess the traditions ascribed to him, we would not necessarily have to assume that he was a historical figure. Even if we take a 'skeptical' view and approach the commentaries as literature rather than as repositories and collections of historical data, we would need to explain the inclusion of a figure like Abū Mijlaz, and to define his function in the literature.

The exegetical traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz

As we have mentioned, there are a number of exegetical traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz. Overall, traditions connected with his name are quoted with regard to about 60 verses of the Qurʾān. Most of the traditions in which he figures relate to his own position. Only in a few cases – 10 out of the 60 – does he appear as a transmitter of earlier material. His role or function in the literature thus appears to be more that of an authority in his own right rather than that of a mere transmitter. Of the traditions in which he functions as a transmitter, four are traced back to Ibn ʿAbbās, two to Ibn ʿUmar, and one each to Anas b. Mālik, Shurayḥ, ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd, and Qays b. ʿUbād. Most of the suras for which comments in his name are related are usually counted as either Medinan or Middle Meccan, and for most suras (24 altogether) only one or two comments from him are recorded, with the exception of suras 2, 4, 5, and 7, for which he is credited with comments on four to seven verses each. Thus while Abū Mijlaz' role appears to be that of an independent authority, there are very few exegetical statements ascribed to him.

How do these traditions perform with regard to the criteria we have developed above? After determining in which works traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz are recorded, we will first analyse them based on their content, applying the criteria we have developed. In a second step we will then examine whether the *isnād*s support the findings gained from that analysis.

Despite the minor role Abū Mijlaz played in Islamic exegesis, exegetical traditions ascribed to him are quoted in many works, amongst them some of the earliest works of *tafsīr*, including those of Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), Yaḥyā b. Sallām (d. 200/815), ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), Saʿīd b. Manṣūr (d. 227/842), ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd (d. 249/863), al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Ibn al-Mundhir (318/930), Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938), and al-Samarqandī (d. c. 373/983). They also feature in more specialised works such as Abū ʿUbayd's (d. 224/838) *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān* and his *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh* and in *ḥadīth* collections such as ʿAbd al-Razzāq's and Ibn Abī Shayba's (d. 235/848) *Muṣannaf* works and al-Bukhārī's (d. 256/870) *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Even if we allow for al-Thawrī's work being a later compilation (and thus not necessarily an independent witness) and acknowledge that the editions of some of these

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[84] *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, p. 196 (misspelled as Abū Makhlad Lāḥiq b. Ḥumayd).

works may be problematic,[85] it seems obvious that exegetical traditions linked to the name of Abū Mijlaz were circulating in the third/ninth and very likely already in the second/eighth century. The number of traditions that are attributed to Abū Mijlaz in the earliest works is small – five traditions in Sufyān al-Thawrī's and Saʿīd b. Manṣūr's works, and two each in the works of Yaḥyā b. Sallām, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, and in both Abū ʿUbayd's (d. 224/838) *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān* and his *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*. He does not feature in all early commentaries, and for example no traditions of his can be found in Muqātil b. Sulaymān's (d. 150/767) commentary. While most of the works listed above provide *isnāds* for the traditions they record, later works, such as the commentaries of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), or al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), just cite opinions or interpretations as those of Abū Mijlaz without giving any indication of their source of information. It is possible that they derive their information from the earlier commentaries, in particular those of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Abī Ḥātim (who cite Abū Mijlaz on several occasions), and do thus not constitute independent sources. One important later source, however, is al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) work *al-Durr al-manthūr*. Al-Suyūṭī references the works from which he extracted the traditions he cites, such as those of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn al-Mundhir and others, and the comparison with the extant works shows that he is accurate in his quotations. While he does not quote every instance where Abū Mijlaz is mentioned in these earlier works, and thus only presents a sample, all his references are correct as far as this can be ascertained. His work may therefore reasonably be used to infer which traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz were contained in now lost sources (such as the commentary of Abū l-Shaykh al-Iṣfahānī (d. 369/979)), or in commentaries of which only parts have come down to us (such the commentaries of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd and Ibn al-Mundhir).

References to external events and anachronisms

The traditions linked with the name of Abū Mijlaz do not contain any hidden or explicit references to figures or events that can be dated externally. They likewise do not contain any obvious anachronisms, such as references to dogmas not yet established at his time, or vocabulary that either only came into use in later times or that was already out of use in his alleged lifetime. This does not come as a surprise, as most of the traditions linked with his name are rather short, and neither references to events or figures nor apparent anachronisms are common in the exegetical literature in general.

Evidence of editorial intrusion

No evidence of editorial intrusion can be found in the traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz. This does not of course exclude the possibility of a later redaction of traditions that were circulated in his name, but there are no apparent traces of such activities. This is likewise not surprising; if we assumed that the ascriptions to Abū Mijlaz were correct, these traditions would have been transmitted orally for at least one or two generations, and any intended editorial changes would have rather resulted in a rephrasing of the tradition than in an editorial addition or explanation. If, on the other hand, these

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[85] This is, for example, the case with Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *Tafsīr*, of which only the sections covering suras 1-13 and 23-29 have survived, while for the remaining part the editor included quotations from later works. See Koç, "*Isnād*s and *Rijāl* Exptertise", p. 146. For our purpose, however, this not relevant as almost all statements of Abū Mijlaz in Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *Tafsīr* come from the surviving parts.

traditions were later inventions, we would not expect traces of editorial intrusion either, as it would make little sense to invent a tradition that needs further editorial elaboration.

Consistency

The traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz are extremely consistent. The information that is related on the authority of Abū Mijlaz with regard to a specific verse is always the same – there are no contradictions in the material circulated in his name. Not all traditions are widely spread, but even those that are recorded in several different sources always agree on the position of Abū Mijlaz. Let us have a look at a few examples.

One tradition that is often related on the authority of Abū Mijlaz is that the phrase "don't meet with them (i.e., widows) secretly" in Q. 2:235 refers to adultery ('"*wa-lākin lā tuwāʿidūhunna sirran" qāla "al-zinā"*'). This tradition is recorded in five lines of transmission in al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*,[86] but also in the works of Sufyān al-Thawrī,[87] Saʿīd b. Manṣūr,[88] and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.[89]

Another well-documented tradition often ascribed to Abū Mijlaz is that "do not follow the footsteps of Satan" (*lā tattabiʿū khuṭuwāt al-shayṭān*) refers to vows of disobedience (against God) (*al-nudhūr fī ʾl-maʿāṣī*). The phrase occurs in four verses of the Qurʾān, namely 2:168, 2:208, 6:142 and 24:21. Sufyān al-Thawrī,[90] Yaḥyā b. Sallām,[91] al-Samarqandī[92] and al-Māwardī[93] cite Abū Mijlaz' explanation for 24:21, while al-Ṭabarī cites it for 2:168,[94] and Ibn Abī Ḥātim for Q. 2:168, 6:142 and 24:21.[95] The statement is mostly given in the form above (*al-nudhūr fī ʾl-maʿāṣī*), but Sufyān has a variant in the singular *al-nadhr fī ʾl-maʿṣiya*, al-Samarqandī has *al-nudhūr fī maʿṣiyat Allāh taʿālā fīhi* and Ibn Abī Ḥātim in the last of the three traditions has *al-nudhūr fī ʾl-maʿāṣī aw bi-l-maʿāṣī*.

On Q. 4:19 "It is not lawful for you to inherit women through coercion…", Abū Mijlaz is said to have explained that this had been the practice among the Anṣār. His statement to this effect is recorded by al-Ṭabarī,[96] Sufyān al-Thawrī,[97] and Ibn al-Mundhir,[98] as well as in some later commentaries.

Another tradition commonly linked with the name of Abū Mijlaz is his interpretation of Q. 7:46. With regard to the passage "on the heights are men" (*ʿalā l-aʿrāf rijāl*) he is quoted for the position that the men referred to in this case are in fact angels (*hum al-malāʾika*). The interpretation can be found in seven versions in al-Ṭabarī's commentary[99] and is also recorded by Ibn Abī Ḥātim,[100] Saʿīd b.

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[86] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 522, 523.

[87] Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, p. 69.

[88] Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, *Sunan*, vol. 1, pp. 876-878.

[89] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 440.

[90] Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, p. 222.

[91] Yaḥyā b. Sallām, *Tafsīr*, vo. 1, p. 434.

[92] Al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, vol. 2, p. 433.

[93] Al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat*, vol. 4, p. 83.

[94] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 77.

[95] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 281; vol. 5, p. 1402; vol. 8, p. 2552.

[96] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 4, p. 305.

[97] Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, p. 92.

[98] Ibn al-Mundhir, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 612.

[99] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 8, pp. 193-194.

[100] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, p. 1486.

Manṣūr,[101] al-Samarqandī,[102] al-Māwardī,[103] and according to al-Suyūṭī was also recorded by ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn al-Anbārī, and Abū l-Shaykh.[104] It can also be found in several later sources.

The consistency in the statements ascribed to Abū Mijlaz applies not only to his own positions, but also to those traditions in which he figures as a transmitter. In these traditions, he is always presented as transmitting the same specific statement from the same source. There are no opposing statements in the traditions which he is said to have transmitted, and no other authorities are given as his source for these statements.

One example is the interpretation of Q. 22:19 ("These are two opponents who disagree about their Lord…" "*hādhāni khaṣmāni 'khtaṣamū fī rabbihim…*"). In all traditions on this verse in which Abū Mijlaz features, the explanation is the same – namely that this verse was revealed about specific people on the day of the Battle of Badr. The tradition is recorded by Sufyān al-Thawrī,[105] ʿAbd al-Razzāq,[106] Abū Nuʿaym,[107] by Ibn Abī Shayba in two versions,[108] by al-Ṭabarī in three,[109] and by al-Bukhārī in seven versions,[110] as well as by numerous other authors. And in all of these versions Abū Mijlaz is said to have heard the tradition from Qays b. ʿUbād. We will have a closer look at the tradition below.

Another such tradition is the commentary on the phrase *illā ʿābirī sabīlin* in Q. 4:43. The relevant passage reads: "… *lā taqrabū l-ṣalāta wa-antum sukārā ḥattā taʿlamū mā taqūlūna wa-lā junuban illā ʿābirī sabīlin ḥattā taghtasilū…*" ("…don't come near the prayer if you are drunk until you know what you are saying, nor in a state of ritual impurity – except for those passing through (or passing along) – until you have washed…"). Two interpretations of this verse are common, either that *ʿābirū sabīlin* refers to those who pass through the place of prayer, or that it denotes travellers. The traditions on that verse that are linked with the name of Abū Mijlaz always state that this refers to travellers, and this statement is always given as that of Ibn ʿAbbās. As such it is recorded by Ibn al-Mundhir in two lines of transmission,[111] by Ibn Abi Shayba,[112] and in two lines of transmission in al-Ṭabarī's commentary.[113]

Abū Mijlaz also features as a transmitter in the explanation of verse 5:96 ("*uḥilla lakum ṣayd ul-baḥri wa-ṭaʿāmuhu…*"). Some scholars understood the second part ("and its food") as fish caught at an earlier time and salted, others as anything caught from the sea. Abū Mijlaz transmits a statement from Ibn ʿAbbās to the effect that this refers to fish cast from the sea (and washed up dead on the shores) (*ṭaʿāmuhu – mā qudhifa*, or as a variant, *mā qudhifa bihi*). This statement is always traced

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[101] Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, *Sunan*, vol. 5, pp. 149-150.
[102] Al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, vol. 1, p. 543.
[103] Al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat*, vol. 2, p. 226.
[104] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 6, p. 408.
[105] Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, p. 209.
[106] ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 33-34.
[107] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 3, p. 113.
[108] Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 13, pp. 269, 283.
[109] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 17, p. 131.
[110] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, pp. 1458-1459 (*al-Maghāzī*, 6); pp. 1768-1769 (*Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 236).
[111] Ibn al-Mundhir, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 721.
[112] Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 1, p. 287.
[113] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 5, p. 97.

back to Ibn ʿAbbās in the traditions linked to Abū Mijlaz, and it is recorded by al-Ṭabarī (in three versions), as well as by Ibn Abī Ḥātim,[114] Ibn Abī Shayba,[115] and Saʿīd b. Manṣūr.[116]

In terms of consistency, the traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz perform extremely well both with regard to the content and with regard to his alleged sources when he features as a transmitter.

Originality

With regard to originality, there are a number of traditions that are exclusively reported as interpretations of Abū Mijlaz and never credited to someone else. His interpretation of 'men' as 'angels' in Q. 7:46, cited above, is probably the most significant and widespread of these traditions, but far from the only one. The interpretation of "the footsteps of Satan" (*khuṭuwāt al-shayṭān*) as vows of disobedience (*al-nudhūr fī 'l-maʿāṣī*) is likewise only recorded as a statement of Abū Mijlaz, not held by any other authority. The position that the "chaste or unattainable women" in Q. 4:24 refers to women of the people of the book (i.e., Jews and Christians) is another position that apparently only Abū Mijlaz held, although as far as I see al-Ṭabarī is the only one to record this. Of the thirteen views of Abū Mijlaz that al-Māwardī cites in his *Tafsīr*, seven seem to be exclusive to him.[117]

Not all of the views of Abū Mijlaz are unique, however. In several other cases, Abū Mijlaz is cited as representative of an opinion that was shared by other scholars. For example, the idea that 2:235 refers to adultery is said to have been the position of al-Suddī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, Qatāta, and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as well.[118] Another example is the interpretation of *nāshiʾat al-layl* in Q. 73:6. The verse was understood to refer to getting up (and praying) at night, but the question was when the night begins and when it ends. The position ascribed to Abū Mijlaz is that the term refers to the time after the Night Prayer (*al-ʿishāʾ*), but before the Morning Prayer (*al-ṣubḥ*).[119] Al-Ṭabarī quotes Abū Mijlaz amongst those who held that anything before the Night Prayer is not part of the *nāshiʾat al-layl*, a position for which he also cites Abū Rajāʾ and Qatāda.[120]

Opposition to later views

Most of the early commentators who included traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz in their works do not comment on them or indicate why they included them. His statements usually just feature as independent views or as evidence for a specific position. There are, however, some exceptions to this.

One such case concerns the possible implications of Q. 4:93 ("whoever kills a believer wilfully, his recompense is hell, abiding in it"), and in particular whether God can forgive the killing of a believer (which seems to be indicated in Q. 25:69-70 and Q. 39:53) or not. The position ascribed to Abū Mijlaz

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[114] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 1211.
[115] Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, p. 105.
[116] Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, *Sunan*, vol. 4, p. 1624.
[117] In addition to the two instances mentioned before (on Q. 7:46 and 24:21), see al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat*, vol. 2, p. 228 (on Q. 7:53), vol. 2, p. 231 (on Q. 7:55), vol. 3, p. 36 (on Q. 12:36), vol. 4, p. 311 (on Q. 30:28), and vol. 5, p. 232 (on Q. 43:56).
[118] Al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat*, vol. 1, p. 304.
[119] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 15, p. 47 (quoting ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd and Ibn Naṣr).
[120] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 29, p. 129.

was that God can indeed forgive in this case ("*huwa jazāʾuhu in shāʾa tajāwaza ʿanhu*").[121] The tradition is recorded in several sources, but of particular interest here is Abū ʿUbayd's *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*. Abū ʿUbayd mentions the position of Abū Mijlaz (in two different lines of transmission) together with a similar statement from Ibn ʿAbbās in his discussion of the repentance for killing, after having adduced several traditions that state that Q. 4:93 abrogates the earlier verses (and thus no forgiveness is possible). Abū ʿUbayd himself is firmly in support of the position that Q. 4:93 indeed abrogated earlier verses, and is thus in opposition to Abū Mijlaz.[122]

Apart from Abū ʿUbayd, the earliest commentator to critically assess most of the traditions he records is al-Ṭabarī, which allows us get an idea as to how traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz were regarded by others. Some of his positions appear to have been thoroughly within the mainstream, such as the interpretation of Q. 2:235 referring to adultery. In other cases, al-Ṭabarī does not agree with the interpretation ascribed to Abū Mijlaz. We have seen that al-Ṭabarī quotes Abū Mijlaz amongst those who held that anything before the Night Prayer is not part of the *nāshiʾat al-layl*. In contrast, al-Ṭabarī himself argued that *nāshiʾat al-layl* includes every hour of the night.[123] Al-Ṭabarī is also firmly opposed to the interpretation that the "men" in Q. 7:46 are actually angels. He cites Abū Mijlaz for this view in no less than seven lines of transmission, only to dismiss the interpretation afterwards (*mā qālahu Abū Mijlaz min annahum malāʾika qawl lā maʿnā lahu*).[124] The opposition to this interpretation appears to have begun much earlier, as in some of these traditions his position is challenged, to which Abū Mijlaz responds that angels are not female (and thus must be men). Al-Ṭabarī does not discuss the basis of his response, but this can be gained from a report cited by al-Samarqandī.[125] According to this tradition, Abū Mijlaz' contemporary Mujāhid b. Jabr, when he heard about his interpretation, accused him of lying, as the Qurʾān in Q. 7:46 clearly speaks of men. Abū Mijlaz is said to have responded with reference to Q. 43:19 ("And they [the unbelievers] have made the angels, who are servants of God, female…"), thus using the Qurʾān to support his argument that angels are not female.[126]

Summarising the examination of the contents of the traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz, we can observe that there are no apparent anachronisms or indications of editorial intrusions, that the traditions are consistent and unanimous about his views, and that there are several statements which are ascribed only to him and never to any other scholar. Some of his views are in opposition to later views while others are within the scope of interpretations deemed acceptable by later scholars. Nothing in the content of the traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz gives any indication of a later invention or wrong ascription of these traditions or of any editorial changes. Before we come to a final assessment of the traditions, however, we should examine the *isnād*s to determine whether they can provide further information about the origin of the traditions.

Independent attestation – the evidence of the isnāds

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[121] Abū ʿUbayd, *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, p. 272; see also Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, *Sunan*, vol. 4, p. 1346; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 5, p. 217; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 313; ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, *Qiṭʿa*, p. 111 – the text is corrupt here, but al-Suyūṭī confirms that this is the position of Abū Mijlaz according to al-Ṭabarī, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn al-Mundhir, Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, and al-Bayhaqī. See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 4, p. 602-603.
[122] Abū ʿUbayd, *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, pp. 265-273.
[123] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 29, p. 128.
[124] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 8, pp. 193-194.
[125] Al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, vol. 1, p. 543.
[126] On the argument, see also Hamza, "Temporary Hellfire Punishment", pp. 400-402.

Most traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz are recorded with an *isnād* in the earlier sources. In these *isnād*s at least eight names appear as transmitters from Abū Mijlaz. The two most important ones are Sulaymān al-Taymī (d. 143/761) and ʿImrān b. Ḥudayr (d. 147/764 or 149/766), who appear in more than 50 and 30 individual *isnād*s, respectively, which cover a large part of the exegetical traditions connected with Abū Mijlaz. Other alleged transmitters include Qatāda b. Diʿāma (d. 117/735 or 118/736), ʿĀṣim b. Sulaymān al-Aḥwal (d. between 141/758-59 and 143/760-1), ʿAbbād b. ʿAbbād (date of death unknown), ʿUmāra b. Abī Ḥafṣa (d. 132/749-50), Abū Hāshim al-Rummānī al-Wāṣiṭī (d. 122/740-1 or 145/762-3), and Ayyūb b. Abī l-ʿAwjāʾ (date of death unknown). They feature in fewer individual *isnād*s (between one and fifteen), and they are only adduced as transmitters from Abū Mijlaz in relation to one to three verses of the Qurʾān each. Two other names, Sufyān al-Thawrī and Ibn ʿUlayya, appear as direct transmitters from Abū Mijlaz, but in these cases it is likely that a transmitter was omitted by mistake.[127]

Most of the eight alleged transmitters from Abū Mijlaz are Basran. Three of them are well known, while the biographical literature does not contain much information about the other five. Sulaymān al-Taymī was the son of a Turkish father, who possibly was a prisoner of war. Sulaymān became an important *ḥadīth* scholar, who is also reported to have compiled a biography of the Prophet. He lived in Basra, where he is said to have been Imam for forty years. In the biographical literature, he is mostly remembered for his piety. He is said to have had Shīʿī sympathies and was opposed to the Qadarites. He died in Basra in 143/761.[128] His son Muʿtamir became an important transmitter of *ḥadīth* in Basra; he also features in the transmission of some of the exegetical traditions traced back to Abū Mijlaz both from his father and from ʿImrān b. Ḥudayr.

Qatāda b. Diʿāma was born in Basra around the year 60/680 and was blind from birth. In contrast to Sulaymān al-Taymī, he was a Qadarite. His fame lies mostly in his exegesis, and his exegetical traditions were collected and transmitted by different students of his. In a-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, he is one of the most important authorities and figures in more than 4,000 traditions.[129] Apart from his exegetical activities, Qatāda was also known as a legal scholar. He died of the plague in Wasit in 117/735 or 118/736, aged 56 or 57.[130]

ʿĀṣim b. Sulaymān al-Aḥwal hailed from Basra and later became market inspector (*muḥtasib*) in Kufa and al-Madaʾin, but no exact dates for these appointments are recorded. Sometime during the beginning of the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136/754-158/775), he was appointed *qāḍī* in al-Madaʾin. He died between 141/758-59 and 143/760-1.[131]

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[127] Unlike the other figures who appear as transmitters from Abū Mijlaz in the *isnād*s, Sufyān and Ibn ʿUlayya are never listed in the biographical literature amongst those who transmitted from Abū Mijlaz. Ibn ʿUlayya only appears as a direct transmitter in one case, while in ten lines of transmission he is said to have related the traditions from Abū Mijlaz via Sulaymān al-Taymī. Of the twenty lines of transmission that include Sufyān and Abū Mijlaz, only two are supposedly by direct transmission, while the other eighteen are transmitted via Abū Hāshim al-Rummānī, ʿĀṣim al-Aḥwal, or Sulaymān al-Taymī. In one case al-Ṭabarī records one *isnād* in which Sufyān transmits directly from Abū Mijlaz, while in another version the same statement is transmitted through Sulaymān al-Taymī, which is also the way it appears in Sufyān's own *Tafsīr*. The biographical information also speaks against a direct transmission in both cases: Ibn ʿUlayya is said to have been born in the year when al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī died (i.e. 110/728), which is shortly after the death of Abū Mijlaz. And Sufyān is said to have been born in Kūfa in 97/716, when Abū Mijlaz supposedly already was in Khurasān, and he would only have been a boy when Abū Mijlaz died.

[128] Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 12, pp. 5-12; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, pp. 367-370.

[129] Horst, "Zur Überlieferung", pp. 300-302.

[130] Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 23, pp. 498-517; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, pp. 135-146.

[131] Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 13, pp. 485-491.

Very little is known of the remaining transmitters. ʿImrān b. Ḥudayr was Basran. He is said to have claimed that he had not entered a bath for thirty years and had not greased his hair for thirty-five years. He died in 147/764 or 149/766.[132] ʿUmāra b. Abī Ḥafṣa is usually counted amongst the Basrans, although Ibn ʿAsākir quotes one tradition that claims he was from Khurasan.[133] He died in Basra in 132/749-50.[134] Almost no biographical details seem to be known about ʿAbbād b. ʿAbbād apart from him being from Basra.[135] Abū Hāshim al-Rummānī al-Wāṣitī received his *nisba* from the *Qaṣr al-Rummān* in Wasit, where he used to live. He died in d. 122/740-1 or 145/762-3.[136] For Ayyūb b. Abī l-ʿAwjāʾ it is only recorded that he was counted amongst the Khurasanians and that he transmitted from Abū Mijlaz that the "chaste or unattainable women" in Q. 4:24 refers to women of the people of the book.[137]

Of the roughly thirty people appearing in the *isnād*s in the following generation, many are likewise Basran, but there are also a number of alleged transmitters hailing from Kufa and Wasit as well as individual ones who were active in Yemen, Egypt, Khurasan, or the Hijaz.

Most of the traditions only appear in the sources as being transmitted by one student from Abū Mijlaz, but there are a few exceptions. One of the more widespread traditions traced back to Abū Mijlaz is his statement that the 'men' referred to in Q. 7:46 are in fact angels, not humans. At least five transmitters relate this via Sulaymān al-Taymī from Abū Mijlaz, and at least three via ʿImrān b. Ḥudayr. The statement that the phrase "don't meet with them (i.e., widows) secretly" in Q. 2:235 refers to adultery is likewise related by Sulaymān al-Taymī and ʿImrān b. Ḥudayr on the authority of Abū Mijlaz. While only one transmitter relates the tradition from ʿImrān, four people appear in the *isnād*s as transmitters from Sulaymān. And Qatāda and Sulaymān al-Taymī appear as transmitters from Abū Mijlaz for a tradition that is traced further back through Abū ʿUbayda to ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd on the compensation that is due for unintentionally killing a believer.

These traditions are very short and thus a comparison of the *matn*, the text of the traditions, cannot yield any relevant results. There is, however, at least one tradition the text of which is long enough for a comparison, and which is recorded with several different *isnād*s. It relates to the occasion of the revelation of Q. 22:19 ("These are two opponents who disagree about their Lord…" "*hādhāni khaṣmāni ʾkhtaṣamū fī rabbihim…*"). The tradition is related from Abū Mijlaz, who is said to have heard it from Qays b. ʿUbād. It states that the sura was revealed about ʿAlī, Ḥamza, ʿUbayda, ʿUtba, Shayba, and al-Walīd on the day of the Battle of Badr. These six had been the first individual fighters at Badr, fighting one against one; ʿAlī, Ḥamza, and ʿUbayda on the Muslim side, ʿUtba, Shayba, and al-Walīd on the Meccan side. Two transmitters relate this tradition from Abū Mijlaz, each with a number of students transmitting it further on: at least four students relate this tradition from Sulaymān al-Taymī <- Abū Mijlaz <- Qays, and at least three students relate it from Abū Hāshim al-Rummānī al-Wāsiṭī <- Abū Mijlaz <- Qays. In all versions in which Sulaymān al-Taymī figures in the *isnād*, Qays states that it was ʿAlī who said that the verse refers to the six of them. In contrast, in all versions in which Abū Hāshim relates the tradition, Qays says that it was Abū Dharr who swore by

[132] Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 22, p. 317.
[133] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 43, p. 329. The statement on the same page that Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ in his *Ṭabaqāt* lists him amongst the Kufans is wrong; he is in fact listed amongst the Basrans. See Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Ṭabaqāt*, pp. 216-217.
[134] Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, p. 404-405, and, following him, al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 21, p. 241, and Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 43, p. 331.
[135] Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 14, pp. 132-133.
[136] Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 34, p. 363.
[137] Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Thiqāt*, vol. 6, p. 56; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl*, vol. 2, p. 254.

God that this verse was revealed about the six. The consistent relation between the *matn* and the *isnād* in these traditions shows their independence from each other. And as both versions convey the same information, it seems safe to assume that this information goes back to Abū Mijlaz.[138]

The majority of traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz, however, are less well attested, and an *isnād* analysis cannot yield significant results in these cases. There are a number of traditions that are only recorded once or twice in the literature, and most other traditions, while related in different sources, only feature one direct transmitter from Abū Mijlaz. While in the case of the better-attested traditions the evidence points to their origin with Abū Mijlaz, the distribution of the *isnād*s in the other cases can at best establish the *terminus ad quem* for their spread before the date of death of the respective direct transmitters from Abū Mijlaz.

A study of the role of the figures that feature in the *isnād*s, however, provides some additional clues. Based on the distribution of the *isnād*s alone, it would be impossible to rule out that, for example, Sulaymān al-Taymī or ʿImrān b. Ḥudayr, the two most important transmitters of traditions from Abū Mijlaz, invented and attributed some of their traditions to Abū Mijlaz. While in theory this would be possible for all traditions that are only related by a single transmitter from Abū Mijlaz, this seems to be unlikely. Abū Mijlaz, as we have seen, was not a major figure in *tafsīr*, and linking a position with his name would not have increased the authority or credibility of the tradition compared to presenting it as a position of one's own. Sulaymān al-Taymī, for example, is himself credited with a number of exegetical statements.[139] Why would he (or someone else, for that matter) spread some traditions in his own name, and others in the name of Abū Mijlaz? That Sulaymān appears as a transmitter for many traditions from Abū Mijlaz but also with exegetical statements of his own does not seem to be due to mistakes in the transmission, such as for instance the name of Abū Mijlaz being dropped – or inserted – in the course of transmission. Sulaymān never appears as the authority for views also held by Abū Mijlaz, and no positions of Abū Mijlaz are recorded for the verses on which Sulaymān commented. Similar considerations apply to Qatāda, who was himself an important authority in *tafsīr* and is quoted with numerous positions of his own in the exegetical literature. Why would he invent a couple of traditions and claim that he heard them from Abū Mijlaz, who was much less of an authority than he himself was? With regard to the other transmitters, we would have to assume that they individually ascribed some, but only very few, exegetical statements to Abū Mijlaz. Moreover, these statements apparently never happened to contradict those that others had already ascribed to Abū Mijlaz. The invention and deliberate ascription of traditions to Abū Mijlaz by later generations, while not impossible, thus seems rather unlikely based on the comparably large number of people who appear as transmitters from Abū Mijlaz and the comparably low number of traditions each of these figures relates on his authority.

Conclusion

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[138] G.H.A Juynboll assumes that the wording of this tradition may go back to Sufyān al-Thawrī, and that Hushaym (b. Bashīr) simply copied it from him – both relate the tradition from Abū Hāshim. See Juynboll, *Encyclopedia*, p. 641. This view, however, is untenable given the large number of traditions that are traced back via Sulaymān al-Taymī, the number of students who transmit the tradition from either Sulaymān or Abū Hāshim, and the different character of these versions. With the larger number of variants taken into account for this study, the *isnād*s clearly indicate that the tradition was already in circulation at the time of Abū Mijlaz and that the specific wording of the tradition that Sufyān adduces likely goes back to Abū Hāshim.

[139] Al-Māwardī, for example, quotes him for the interpretation of Q. 17:76 and Q. 53:48. Al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, vol. 3, p. 261; vol. 5, p. 405.

Now that we have analysed both the contents of the traditions and their *isnād*s, how can we best explain the findings? The consistency of the corpus and the uniqueness of some of the positions speak against the use of the name of Abū Mijlaz as a purely literary device. It seems inconceivable that different authors of *tafsīr* works, who were active in different parts of the Islamic world, would come up with the same traditions and ascribe them to the same authority independently.

The early attestation of several of the traditions as well as the evidence of the *isnād*s indicate that the traditions must have circulated in Basra in the first part of the second/eighth century, but based on the *isnād*s alone it is impossible to establish for certain whether all of them indeed go back to Abū Mijlaz or not. For those traditions that are well attested, this seems to be the best and most likely explanation, but for less well attested traditions the *isnād*s alone do not allow for such a conclusion.

As we have seen above, nothing in the content of the traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz points to a later invention or wrong ascription of these traditions. In contrast, several of the criteria clearly speak in favour of at least some of the traditions being statements of Abū Mijlaz. Thus it seems difficult to explain that several traditions are only credited to Abū Mijlaz in any other way than by assuming that they are genuine positions he held. As we have seen, Abū Mijlaz does not seem to have figured as a projection screen for 'odd' traditions – while some of the positions ascribed to him are unique, other of his alleged views are common positions, shared with several other scholars. The fact that some of the views ascribed to him are in opposition to later views indicates that they withstood any tendencies to align them with later positions and thus also speaks in favour of their authenticity.

Taken on their own, none of the criteria developed above can provide undisputable proof for the authenticity of the traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz. Considering all the criteria, however, the most plausible explanation for the evidence gathered is that the statements transmitted on the authority of Abū Mijlaz are indeed authentic statements of his. This explanation would easily account for all the evidence – the absence of anachronisms and editorial intrusions, the consistency of the corpus, the early attestation of several of the traditions, the fact that some of the positions are only attributed to him and never to anybody else, and the opposition of some of his positions to later views.

The same applies for the analysis of the *isnād*s – in those cases in which there are enough lines of transmission that an *isnād* analysis can yield any meaningful results, the *isnād*s point to an origin of the traditions with Abū Mijlaz. In other cases, this still seems to be the most likely explanation based on the role of Abū Mijlaz and the persons figuring in the *isnād*s. The limited geographical spread of the traditions – the transmission of which seems to have mostly be confined to Basra for at least one or two generations – also corresponds well with the minor importance of Abū Mijlaz in exegesis. As he was not a major authority, we would not expect people travelling to Basra to hear exegetical traditions from him, while it is likely that as a local authority his views were remembered and considered worth mentioning amongst his students.

Our findings therefore clearly speak for an authenticity of the ascriptions to Abū Mijlaz, while there is absolutely nothing in the traditions that points to a later invention or wrong ascription of these traditions, nor to a use of Abū Mijlaz traditions as a literary device.

The *Qirāʾāt* attributed to Abū Mijlaz

In addition to the exegetical statements, there are also several variant readings of the Qurʾān recorded on the authority of Abū Mijlaz. Unlike the exegetical traditions, however, almost all of the variant readings are reported without an *isnād*. As far as I can see, the earliest work to record a variant reading of Abū Mijlaz – and the only one to provide an *isnād* – is Abū ʿUbayd's (d. 224/838) *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*. He refers to Abū Mijlaz with regard to Q. 18:79, which forms part of the Qurʾānic story of Moses and Khiḍr. Khiḍr, according to the story, had made a hole in the ship on which he and Moses had embarked, which outraged Moses. In Q. 18:79, Khiḍr then explains that he intended to damage the ship *because after them was a king who was seizing every ship by force* (*wa-kāna warāʾuhum malikun yaʾkhudhu kulla safīnatin ghaṣban*). Abū Ubayd, on the authority of Shuʿba from Abū Hāshim (al-Rummānī), relates that Abū Mijlaz instead read *every sound ship* (*kulla safīnatin ṣāliḥatin*) instead of *every ship*, which was also the reading of Ubayy b. Kaʿb.[140] This is apparently meant to clarify the idea that Khiḍr acted in order to save the ship, as otherwise it would have been seized by the king. This tradition is particularly relevant as it may constitute a case of Abū Mijlaz indicating that the Qurʾānic text is corrupt. It is a variant of a tradition traced back through Abū Mijlaz to Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī on the virtues of reciting Sūrat al-Kahf. Instead of only specifying the virtues for those who recite the sura (*man qaraʾa sūrat al-kahf…*), this tradition has the addition *in the way it was revealed* (*man qaraʾa sūrat al-kahf kamā unzilat…*). The following statement that Abū Mijlaz read the verse in the way stated above thus seems to indicate that he did not hold the ʿUthmānic text to be the original one.

Most of the variant readings attributed to Abū Mijlaz, however, do not appear in the earliest commentaries, but only in later works. The earliest of these are the *Kitāb al-Muḥtasab* of Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002) and the *Mukhtaṣar fī shawādhdh al-Qurʾān* of Ibn Khālawayh (d. 370/980), both of which rely to some extent on Ibn Mujāhid's (d. 324/936) *Kitāb al-Shawādhdh*. Except for Abū ʿUbayd's *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, other early works do not seem to ascribe any readings specifically to Abū Mijlaz.

This is particularly striking with regard to al-Ṭabarī, who otherwise shows a great interest in variant readings in his commentary, and while he cites a total of more than 60 exegetical traditions of Abū Mijlaz, he does not mention a single reading ascribed to him. He does mention a few readings that Abū Mijlaz is credited with elsewhere, but without explicitly linking them to him. Thus, for example, he cites the variant reading of Q. 18:79 discussed above, which, as we have seen, Abū ʿUbayd claimed to be the reading of Abū Mijlaz and Ubayy b. Kaʿb. Al-Ṭabarī likewise records this reading (*safīna ṣāliḥa*), but credits it to Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy, not mentioning Abū Mijlaz.[141] In a similar case, Ibn Khālawayh tells us that Abū Mijlaz read *fa-rujjālan* instead of *fa-rijālan* in Q. 2:239.[142] Al-Ṭabarī in his discussion of the verse mentions that it is related of some people that they read *fa-rujjālan* (and others *fa-rujālan*), without, however, giving further specifics. He holds both readings to be impermissible.

While it thus is not impossible that al-Ṭabarī was aware of some variant readings ascribed to Abū Mijlaz, it remains puzzling why he would not quote him. It is of course possible that he occasionally subsumes him under the Basrans, but it seems more likely that al-Ṭabarī was not aware of any readings attributed specifically to Abū Mijlaz, in particular as none of those which appear to be peculiar to Abū Mijlaz are recorded by him.

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[140] Abū ʿUbayd, *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, vol. 2, pp. 52-53.
[141] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 16, p. 2.
[142] Ibn Khālawayh, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 15.

In his *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān*, Arthur Jeffery lists some 45 variant readings which were supposedly held by Abū Mijlaz.[143] According to his findings, the readings of Abū Mijlaz mostly conformed to those of either Ibn Khuthaym (27 instances) or Ubayy (15 instances), with a number of readings also being held by others, such as Ibn Masʿūd, Ibn Qays, or Muʿādh. All these readings involve a *rasm* of the Qurʾānic text that differs from the ʿUthmānic codex. However, except for one, I have not been able to trace any of these alleged readings of Abū Mijlaz in the *Qirāʾāt* literature available to me, nor in the later commentaries that show greater interest in variant readings, such as Ibn al-Jawzī's *Zād al-masīr fī ʿilm al-tafsīr*, al-Shawkānī's *Fatḥ al-Qadīr* or al-Alūsī's *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*. Jeffery does not reference the individual readings. As I have not been able to consult all the works Jeffery lists as his sources, I cannot verify his information. It is therefore impossible to establish at what time the information about the readings of Abū Mijlaz was circulating.

More information about the variant readings of Abū Mijlaz can be found in the *qirāʾāt* works of Ibn Khālawayh, Ibn Mujāhid[144] and Ibn Jinnī, as well as in *tafsīr* works such as Ibn al-Jawzī's,[145] al-Qurṭubī's, al-Shawkānī's and al-Alūsī's. Altogether, there are at least 30 to 40 variant readings ascribed to Abū Mijlaz. Some of the readings are recorded by several authors. For instance, the statement that Abū Mijlaz read *īṣāl* instead of *aṣāl* in Q. 7:205 (and/or 13:15, 24:36) is mentioned amongst others by Ibn Mujāhid,[146] Ibn Khālawayh,[147] al-Qurṭubī,[148] al-Shawkānī,[149] and al-Alūsī.[150] It is also listed by Jeffery – the only instance in which I was able to find the reading given by Jeffery confirmed in other sources.[151] Abū Mijlaz's reading of Q. 46:29 as *fa-lammā qaḍā* instead of *fa-lammā quḍiya* is recorded by amongst others al-Qurṭubī,[152] al-Shawkānī,[153] and al-Alūsī.[154] And Ibn Khālawayh,[155] Ibn Mujāhid,[156] al-Qurṭubī,[157] al-Shawkānī,[158] and al-Alūsī[159] mention his reading of *yanziʿunnaka* instead of *yunāziʿunnaka* in Q. 22:67.

As with his exegetical statements, the readings recorded in his name are usually very consistent: there seems to be a general consensus about how he read specific passages in the Qurʾān. I am only aware of two instances where there is no unanimous agreement,[160] while otherwise the 30 to 40 variant readings attributed to Abū Mijlaz are consistent without any opposing statements.

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[143] Jeffery, *Materials*, see index.

[144] As quoted in Ibn Jinnī's *Muḥtasab*. See Bergsträßer, *Nichtkanonische Lesarten*, p. 19, for the distinction between the statements of Ibn Mujāhid and those of Ibn Jinnī.

[145] See e.g. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, vol. 1, pp. 14, 472, 477, 489, vol. 2, pp. 202, 280, 389 for instances in which Ibn al-Jawzī records variant readings of Abū Mijlaz.

[146] According to Bergsträßer, *Nichtkanonische Lesarten*, pp. 36, 43.

[147] Ibn Khālawayh, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 48.

[148] Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 7, p. 355.

[149] Al-Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, vol. 2, p. 320.

[150] Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, vol. 5, p. 144.

[151] Jeffery, *Materials*, p. 249.

[152] Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 16, p. 216.

[153] Al-Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, vol. 5, p. 31.

[154] Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, vol. 13, p. 187.

[155] Ibn Khālawayh, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 96.

[156] According to Bergsträßer, *Nichtkanonische Lesarten*, p. 52.

[157] Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 12, p. 94.

[158] Al-Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, vol. 3, p. 553.

[159] Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, vol. 9, p. 186.

[160] In one case, al-Shawkānī (*Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, vol. 5, p. 156) states that Abū Mijlaz read *nuhurin* instead of *naharin* in Q. 54:54, while Ibn Khalawayh (*Mukhtaṣar*, p. 148) gives his reading as *nahrin*. And while Ibn Mujāhid records that Abū Mijlaz read *rujālan* or *rujjālan* instead of *rijālan* in Q. 22:27 (Bergsträßer, *Nichtkanonische Lesarten*, p. 51), Ibn Khālawayh (*Mukhtaṣar*, p. 95) has *rijjālan*.

Similar to his exegetical traditions, some of Abū Mijlaz's alleged readings are unique to him, while others are readings that are shared with other authorities. Amongst the readings that are usually (but not always[161]) only attributed to Abū Mijlaz is his reading of *īṣāl* instead of *aṣāl* in Q. 7:205 (and/or 13:15, 24:36). His reading of *yakbidahum* instead of *yakbitahum* in Q. 3:127 also seems peculiar to Abū Mijlaz.[162] Most other readings ascribed to him are said to have been the readings of other authorities as well.

As indicated, many of his alleged readings are recorded by different authors. As we do not have any indication of how they were transmitted, it might be argued that the later authors simply rely on the earlier works and thus do not constitute independent evidence. This, however, seems unlikely, as the later works often only record some of Abū Mijlaz' *qirāʾāt* mentioned in earlier works, and include others, which are not found in earlier works. The transmission of the variant readings of Abū Mijlaz therefore remains unclear. Unlike his exegetical traditions, the variant readings ascribed to him do not perform well with regard to early attestation, and cannot be assessed with regard to the independence of the various attestations. They do well (although not as well as his exegetical traditions) with regard to consistency, and a number of them are original. Several of them also do not conform to the later tradition and are not canonical.

While our findings indicate that at least some of these variant readings very likely go back to Abū Mijlaz – those which are consistently and only ascribed to him can hardly be explained otherwise – it cannot be determined whether all ascriptions of variant readings to Abū Mijlaz are correct. The evidence suggests that Abū Mijlaz was not following any of the known readings, but we cannot establish whether his readings supported specific legal or theological positions. We will therefore largely disregard these readings for the following analysis.

The content of the traditions of Abū Mijlaz

As we have established that the exegetical traditions circulated in the name of Abū Mijlaz should be regarded as his interpretations, we can examine them further with regard to the topics in which he was interested and the exegetical devices he employed.

According to the exegetical statements of Abū Mijlaz that have come down to us, there are several aspects of exegesis in which he was particularly interested. One of these is the historical background of specific verses; others include the legal and theological implications of Qurʾānic verses, or the afterlife. The following shall provide a brief overview of the traditions of Abū Mijlaz.

Historical background of specific revelations

Statements relating to the background of verses can include the occasions for the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of specific verses, or the context in which a verse should be understood. With regard to the former, we have discussed above the occasion for the revelation of Q. 22:19 (the two opponents who disagree about their Lord), for which Abū Mijlaz relates a tradition from Qays b. ʿUbād to the effect that this refers to six individual fighters at Badr. While this is a tradition in which Abū Mijlaz only features as a transmitter, there is at least one case where he gives the occasion for a revelation

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[161] Jeffery, *Materials*, p. 249, also lists this as a reading by Saʿīd b. Jubayr, and Ibn Khālawayh, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 48, mentions Abū l-Dardāʾ in addition to Abū Mijlaz.
[162] See e.g. al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 4, p. 198.

himself, namely that of Q. 4:48 (see below in the discussion of theological statements). In general, however, Abū Mijlaz does not seem to have been particularly interested in the *asbāb al-nuzūl*.

Occasionally, Abū Mijlaz discusses Qurʾānic verses in light of their putative pre-Islamic Arabian background. We have seen this above in his comment on Q. 4:19 "It is not lawful for you to inherit women through coercion…", which Abū Mijlaz explained with reference to the practice of the Anṣār. Another example can be seen in his explanation of Q. 5:97 ("God has made the Kaʿba, the Sacred House, a support for mankind, and the sacred month and the offerings, and the garlands…"). Abū Mijlaz explains the garlands (*al-qalāʾid*) by commenting that in pre-Islamic times people wore a specific garland when they came to perform the pilgrimage and a different one when they finished it, so that they were protected during that time.[163]

A third category for what may be regarded as 'historical' background are stories of Christian or Jewish origin which Abū Mijlaz cites to elucidate Qurʾānic stories that have a parallel in biblical ones. Thus Abū Mijlaz adduces such a story to explain which food Israel (Jacob) had forbidden for himself (Q. 3:93). Obviously influenced by Gen. 32:22-32, where Jacob wrestles with God, Abū Mijlaz tells how Jacob wrestles with an angel. In both versions, Jacob is hit on the thigh (or a nerve or tendon at the hip), is subsequently given the name Israel, and forbids himself to eat the respective body part of any animal. ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd seems to have preserved the longest version of this tradition, while Ibn al-Mundhir focuses on the story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel (and only employs it to explain the name Israel), and al-Ṭabarī only mentions which food is prohibited according to Abū Mijlaz.[164] This tradition clearly indicates that Abū Mijlaz was aware of biblical stories and made use of these *isrāʾīliyyāt* to explain verses of the Qurʾān.

With regard to the story of Joseph interpreting the dreams of his fellow prisoners (Q. 12:36-42) – which parallels Gen. 40:1-23 – Abū Mijlaz explains that one of them was saved and the other crucified because one spoke the truth and the other lied.[165]

He does not, however, always interpret verses with parallels in the Bible in light of the biblical tradition. Q. 2:57 ("And we shaded you with clouds and sent Manna and quails down to you…") is part of the story of the Israelites in the desert, following their exodus from Egypt (Q. 2:49-61), which is also told in the Bible (Ex. 12-17). While in the Bible it is God who is present in the pillar of cloud and guides the Israelites, the Qurʾān speaks of the clouds providing shade. Some authorities nevertheless interpreted the clouds as harbouring God, but Abū Mijlaz as well as some other scholars held that they were providing the Israelites with shade in the desert.[166]

In some cases, the origin of the information Abū Mijlaz provides is not immediately apparent. Thus he explains the background of the Qurʾānic statement that Solomon did not disbelieve (Q. 2:102),[167] and that Joseph's brothers only learned that wolves eat humans when their father told them (commenting on Q. 12:13).[168] In a story that refers to Abraham but is certainly not of Jewish origin, Abū Mijlaz describes how Gabriel taught Abraham the rituals of the pilgrimage (in his comment on

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[163] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 5, pp. 543-544 (quoting Abū l-Shaykh).

[164] ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, *Qiṭʿa*, p. 40-41; Ibn al-Mundhir, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 289-290; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 4, p. 3-4; see also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 3, p. 668.

[165] Al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat*, vol. 3, p. 36; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 8, p. 257 (quoting Abū ʿUbayd, Ibn al-Mundhir and Abū l-Shaykh).

[166] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 113; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 1, p. 372 (quoting ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd).

[167] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 449; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 1, p. 502 (quoting Ibn al-Mundhir in addition to al-Ṭabarī).

[168] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, p. 2108.

Q. 2:127). After showing him the circumambulation around the Kaʿba and Ṣafā and Marwā, they encounter Satan one their way to ʿAqaba. Abraham follows Gabriel in throwing seven pebbles at him on three occasions, until Satan finally departs. Gabriel then shows him where people shave their heads and where they gather for prayer. Finally, he asks him whether he has understood ("*ʿarafta*?") which Abraham affirms. The tradition ends with the statement that this is why the place was henceforth called ʿArafāt.[169] The story is slightly odd, because it is usually understood that the running between Ṣafā and Marwā is commemorating Hagar's search for water and would thus not have been part of the rituals shown to Abraham.

Legal statements

There are a number of statements from Abū Mijlaz that paraphrase or explain specific words or parts of a verse. Most of these have legal or ritual implications. Examples for this are his explanation of the *khuṭuwāt al-shayṭān*, the explanation of *sirr* in 2:235 as referring to adultery, or his understanding of *nāshiʾat al-layl*, all discussed above.

Others of his legal statements are attempts to come up with concrete rulings where the Qurʾān is unspecific. Thus he comments on the obligation of the bequest (Q. 2:180), maintaining that this is only incumbent on those who leave some wealth.[170] On Q. 5:33, which prescribes the punishment for those "who wage war against God and his messenger or strive to spread corruption upon the land", namely "that they be killed or crucified, or their hands and feet cut off from opposite sides, or be banished from the land", he specifies which punishment is due in which circumstances.[171] With regard to Q 2:196, which prescribes a compensation of "fasting, charity, or sacrifice" for those who cannot fulfil the pilgrimage, Abū Mijlaz stipulates that this amounts to fasting three days, feeding six poor people, or sacrificing one sheep.[172]

We have seen above that Abū Mijlaz transmitted a tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās on the question of what food from the sea was allowed. But the permission of "game of the sea" and the prohibition of "game of the land" in the same verse (Q. 5:96) left the question unresolved of how animals that lived on both the land and in the sea should be treated. With regard to these, Abū Mijlaz held the view that only animals that live exclusively in the sea were allowed, while those living partly in the sea and partly on land were forbidden.[173]

Abū Mijlaz also discusses when dawn begins (which is relevant for fasting) in his comment on Q 2:187[174] and what is meant by not showing pity or compassion for the adulterers (Q. 24:2).[175] He also transmits a tradition from Ibn Masʿūd with regard to the compensation that is due for the unintentional killing of a believer (Q. 4:92).[176]

Theological statements

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[169] Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 5, p. 482-483; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 1, p. 712-713.
[170] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 116; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 2, p. 162 (quoting ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd).
[171] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 6, p. 212.
[172] Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 5, p. 316.
[173] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 7, p. 75; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 1213; Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 5, p. 688; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 5, p. 535 (quoting Abū l-Shaykh in addition to the three mentioned here).
[174] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 172.
[175] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 28, p. 67; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 10, p. 634 (quoting ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd and Ibn al-Mundhir in addition to al-Ṭabarī).
[176] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 5, p. 211.

Some statements relate to theological implications arising from specific Qurʾānic verses. Abū Mijlaz seems to have been particularly interested in the question of repentance and sins that cannot be forgiven. One example is the question of whether God can forgive those who have killed a believer intentionally (Q. 4:93), discussed above in the context of traditions in opposition to later views.

Another case is Q. 4:17, which states that God only accepts the repentance from those who do evil out of ignorance and *then repent soon afterwards* (*thumma yatūbūna min qarībin*). The question of how soon this has to be done has preoccupied the scholars, and Abū Mijlaz advanced the position that *soon afterwards* means before the encounter with the angel of death.[177]

A further example relates to Q. 39:53 ("…do not despair of God's mercy; verily, God forgives all sins…" "…*lā taqnaṭū min raḥmati ʿllāh inna ʿllāh yaghfir al-dhunūb jamīʿan*…"). Abū Mijlaz adduces an anecdote that addresses the difficulties of the verse. According to this story, Muḥammad one day recited the verse from the pulpit, when a man approached him and asked about the worship of anything besides God (*…wa-l-shirk bi-llāh*?). When the Prophet did not respond, he kept asking him, twice or three times, and then Q. 4:48 was revealed ("Verily, God does not forgive that any partner is associated with him, but he forgives anything short of that for whom he wills…"). This story combines a theological question with a narrative elaboration that also includes an occasion for the revelation of Q. 4:48, and tries to reconcile the two verses. The story is recorded by Ibn al-Mundhir with regard to Q. 4:48,[178] and by ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd with regard to Q. 39:53.[179]

The afterlife – paradise and hell

To some degree connected to the theological statements are traditions referring to the afterlife, and a number of such traditions are recorded on the authority of Abū Mijlaz. For example, he explains Q. 56:54 ("You will drink from a boiling liquid") as "you will suck in water like a weak (or ill) camel, but it will not satisfy your thirst" (*ka-l-ibli l-amrāḍ tamaṣṣu l-māʾ maṣṣan wa-lā tarwā*).[180] He also quotes the Prophet, who is said to have described the pavilions in which the maidens of paradise are secluded (Q. 55:72) as hollow pearls (*durr mujawwaf*).[181] We have already discussed his understanding of 'men' in Q. 7:46 as angels. In the next verse "…and when their eyes turn towards the inhabitants of the Fire…" 'their eyes' is usually understood as referring to the 'men' on the heights. Abū Mijlaz by contrast paraphrases "…when the eyes *of the inhabitants of the Garden* (*ahl al-janna*) turn towards the inhabitants of the Fire."[182] Other comments of his refer to uniting parents and their offspring in the afterlife (Q. 13:24 and 52:21),[183] the piercing flame (Q. 37:10),[184] or the recompense for those who squandered their good things on earth (Q. 46:20).[185]

Polemics against Jews or Christians

[177] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 4, p. 301; al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat*, vol. 1, p. 464.
[178] Ibn al-Mundhir, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 739.
[179] According to al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 12, pp. 680-681.
[180] Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, *Sunan*, vol. 8, p. 16. See also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 14, p. 212, who quotes Ibn al-Mundhir in addition to Saʿīd b. Manṣūr. Al-Suyūṭī has *mirāḍ* instead of *amrāḍ*, which makes better sense.
[181] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 27, p. 162; Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, p. 372.
[182] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 6, p. 411 (quoting ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd).
[183] Discussed by Ibn al-Mundhir in his discussion of Q. 52:21 and by Ibn Abī Ḥātim with regard to Q. 13:24 (according to al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 8, pp. 429-430; vol. 13, p. 704)
[184] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 10, p. 3205; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 12, p. 389 (quoting Ibn Abī Shayba, Ibn al-Mundhir and ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd in addition to Ibn Abī Ḥātim).
[185] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 13, p. 332 (quoting ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd).

Polemical positions against Jews or Christians are less common in the traditions of Abū Mijlaz, but at least two statements of his touch upon this issue. In a tradition that explains the circumstances of the revelation of Q. 50:38 ("Verily, we created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six days, and no fatigue touched us"), al-ʿAwwām b. Ḥawshab is said to have asked Abū Mijlaz with regard to a man who sat with one leg across the other, and Abū Mijlaz explained that this is fine. Only the Jews disliked sitting in this way because they said that when God rested on the Sabbath, this is how he sat. But then God revealed Q. 50:38.[186]

Another tradition discusses who is meant by "those who do not judge according to what God has sent down", who are described in the Qurʾān as disbelievers, wrongdoers, and lawbreakers (Q. 5:44, 5:45, and 5:47). Abū Mijlaz holds that this refers to the Jews and Christians (and possibly also to the idolaters).[187]

Miscellaneous traditions

Some of the explanations of Abū Mijlaz do not appear to be connected to the above topics. Thus he explains what is meant by the animals not carrying their own provision (Q. 29:60),[188] or identifies the unnamed man who comes to support the messengers in Sura Yāsīn (Q. 36:20) as Ḥabīb b. Murrā.[189]

Abrogation

We have seen above that Abū ʿUbayd uses a tradition of Abū Mijlaz in his discussion about abrogation with regard to Q. 4:93. However, unlike several other traditions Abū ʿUbayd adduces on the topic, the one by Abū Mijlaz neither refers to abrogation (*naskh*) explicitly, nor includes any statement about when the verse was revealed, and no such statements are found in any of the traditions of Abū Mijlaz. On the contrary, when Abū Mijlaz discusses the revelation of Q. 4:48 as response to the difficulties raised with regard to Q. 39:53 (namely whether all sins can be forgiven), he makes clear that one verse does not abrogate the other. His position on Q. 2:180 (that a bequest is only due to those who leave behind property) likewise is one that favours specification (*takhṣīṣ*) rather than abrogation, and that holds that Q. 2:180 was not abrogated as other scholars argued.[190] Despite this, he is said to have held the view that there is abrogation within the *ḥadīth* just as there is within the Qurʾān.[191]

Deviations from the ʿUthmānic text

The only variant reading of Abū Mijlaz that is attested early (the one recorded by Abū ʿUbayd) implies an addition to the ʿUthmānic text, while others, which likely also go back to him, require a slightly different *rasm* text. There is at least one other tradition which also indicates that Abū Mijlaz considered the ʿUthmānic text to be corrupt. He states that after Q. 10:24 it was written "and if man had two valleys of wealth, he would desire a third valley, and nothing sates him but dust. And God forgives those who repent," which was then removed.[192]

Summary

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[186] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 13, p. 655 (quoting al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī).
[187] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 6, pp. 202-253.
[188] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 21, p. 11; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 11, p. 570 (quoting Ibn al-Mundhir in addition to al-Ṭabarī).
[189] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 22, p. 158.
[190] See Powers, "On the Abrogation", pp. 259-264.
[191] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 3, p. 112.
[192] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 7, p. 648 (quoting Ibn al-Mundhir and Abū l-Shaykh).

The traditions discussed above provide a good overview of the scope of the exegetical interests of Abū Mijlaz, although the list is not comprehensive. It appears that some of the traditions belong together and may have originally been part of a longer explanation. This is, for example, the case for Q. 7:46 and 7:47, where Abū Mijlaz interprets the 'heights' and the 'men', but also comments on who is glancing at whom. Similarly, his discussion of what kind of food from the sea is allowed (Q. 5:96), for which he quotes Ibn ʿAbbās for one aspect and comments on another himself, is transmitted in two separate traditions, which may originally have been combined in a more comprehensive interpretation of the verse. And in separate statements he discusses the compensation imposed on those who killed a believer unintentionally (Q 4:92) and the question whether God can forgive those who have done so intentionally (Q 4:93). It cannot, however, be substantiated whether these traditions were originally connected. In any case, the traditions of Abū Mijlaz are clearly oral comments made with regard to specific verses and were not part of any longer commentary, as can easily be seen from the variants in wording in several of the traditions and the small number of verses for which statements of his have been preserved.

Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. On a methodological level, it has been argued that the impasse in the study of the beginnings of Islamic exegesis as asserted by Berg can be overcome. It is indeed possible to define criteria for the assessment of whether ascriptions to an authority are actually based on historical fact or not, criteria which are based neither on the assumption that the lines of transmission (*isnād*s) are in general reliable, nor on the assumption that specific forms of exegesis developed in a particular order and therefore allow for a dating of traditions. Instead, it is possible to assess the reliability of ascription to a specific authority based on internal criteria applied to the whole corpus of traditions ascribed to that authority. In particular the criteria of early attestation, consistency of the corpus, originality of traditions, and relation of the traditions to the works in which they are included allow for a critical assessment of traditions, which can result in the confirmation or rejection of the ascriptions. Additional criteria that can be used include the existence or absence of anachronisms or editorial intrusions and the correspondence or not of the results gained by these criteria to the evidence of the *isnād*s. Unlike the approaches outlined by Berg, using an approach that relies on verifiable criteria does not lead to results that are per se immune to criticism. The criteria outlined in this study can be applied to figures of any period. They are also not confined to the study of allegedly written texts but can be applied to originally oral traditions as well. This is particularly important for a study of the origins of exegesis, as for roughly the first two to three generations, or the first century or century and a half, we would not expect any written works to have been produced.

In order to establish reliably early traditions against which one can assess other traditions, it is useful to focus on marginal figures rather than on the major authorities in the field, as it is less likely that traditions were intentionally ascribed to these figures to enhance their reliability and authority. It is thus not surprising that most studies that have focused on the main authorities of *tafsīr* have revealed some degree of internal inconsistency within these traditions. In contrast, this study showed that the traditions ascribed to a marginal figure can indeed be completely consistent without displaying any internal contradictions. The criteria outlined above as well as the focus on marginal figures are not confined to the study of early Islamic exegesis but can be applied to other fields as well.

In a case study using these criteria, it has been possible to show that the traditions attributed to the Basran scholar Abū Mijlaz do indeed go back to him and that it is possible to gain an idea of his teaching and his exegetical positions. Most of the criteria developed above, when applied to the corpus of exegetical traditions ascribed to Abū Mijlaz, clearly speak in favour of the ascriptions being correct, while there is nothing that speaks against the authenticity of these ascriptions. This is likely also true for the variant readings that are attributed to him, as they are consistent, to some degree original and to some degree controversial, but most of these are not attested early, and there is no indication of how they were transmitted. Further study is therefore necessary regarding the transmission of variant readings, before their possible implications for the exegetical positions of Abū Mijlaz and the relevance and diversity of variant readings in the first century can be properly assessed.

The study of the *isnād*s of the traditions of Abū Mijlaz supported the findings gained through the assessment based on internal criteria. In well-attested traditions, the *isnād*s point to Abū Mijlaz as the source of information, and nothing in the *isnād*s suggests a later invention or redaction of the traditions. While this does not allow for a general conclusion with regard to the reliability of isnads – in particular the contradictory statements ascribed to some of the main authorities in *tafsīr* indicate that they cannot generally be regarded as reliable – it nevertheless shows that they should not be disregarded outright and are not simply a literary device. The study of the variants of a single tradition and the study of the role of individual figures in the transmission of these traditions is therefore likely to yield at least some results. In the case of Abū Mijlaz, we can observe that almost all of his students are Basran. As Abū Mijlaz most likely left Basra in the year 86/704-5, we may assume that he taught these traditions in Basra and that they therefore circulated before 86/704-5. This would make them older than, for example, the traditions of Mujāhid b. Jabr or Sufyān al-Thawrī, the latter of whom in fact quotes Abū Mijlaz in five instances.

The exegetical statements of Abū Mijlaz belong to the oldest layer of exegetical traditions. While there may be some older exegetical traditions and Abū Mijlaz certainly was not the first person to engage in exegetical activities, several of his statements seem to be original and not derived from earlier positions. In several instances, he seems to be the only one to have held a specific opinion, the brevity of most of his traditions indicates that they were not elaborated on, and the fact that later generations rejected some of his positions shows that they were not adapted to accommodate a later consensus.

The detailed analysis of the traditions of Abū Mijlaz illustrated what his main interests in exegesis were and which exegetical devices he employed. It revealed that his main interests apparently lay in the legal and theological implications of Qurʾānic statements. Regarding the theological implications, he seems to have been particularly preoccupied with the question of divine forgiveness. He was also interested in the background of particular verses and in stories derived from Jewish or Christian sources that served to explain allusions to Biblical stories. In addition to that, he also engaged in the identification of unnamed figures in the Qurʾān and explained a number of ambiguous terms. At least two traditions indicate that he believed that the ʿUthmānic text was corrupt at places. These fields of interest apparently were of some significance in the first century.

It could be shown that Abū Mijlaz used several exegetical devices in his explanations. We can find examples of paraphrase, narrative elaboration, the use of non-Muslim sources to explain the Qurʾān, the adducing of prophetic traditions, as well as legal and theological derivations and variant readings (although the scope of the latter could not be assessed within this study). We can also see that explanations and elaborations were not confined to individual verses, but that he used other Qurʾānic verses to support the interpretation of certain passages, and that he was aware of

problems that apparently contradictory verses in the Qurʾān caused. While some of his traditions imply a specific stance towards the abrogation of individual verses, and he is said to have acknowledged abrogation in the Qurʾān as well as in the Ḥadīth, there is no explicit mention of abrogation within his exegetical traditions.

These exegetical devices can thus be established to have been known and used in the first century. We do not find in the traditions of Abū Mijlaz any discussion of grammar or foreign words in the Qurʾān, nor are there clearly metaphorical interpretations, or the citation of poetry to explain verses. Given the overall small number of traditions recorded on his authority, this does not exclude the possibility that these devices were employed by others, but there is no evidence to support this in the traditions of Abū Mijlaz. The content of the traditions indicates that in the first/seventh century there were rather vivid and controversial discussions about the meaning of the Qurʾānic text and its legal and theological implications as well as the form and exact wording of the text itself. These discussions were not limited to a few experts in exegesis but included a wider field of scholars.

We can compare the results gathered here with those derived from a study of the exegetical traditions of a Medinan contemporary of Abū Mijlaz, ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (d. ca. 93/712). In the traditions transmitted on his authority, which likewise in all probability indeed go back to him, the use of similar exegetical devices could be observed: in the case of ʿUrwa, these include lexical glosses, circumstances of revelation, variant readings, and identification of references – all of which techniques can also be seen in the traditions of Abū Mijlaz. In the traditions of ʿUrwa, we can also see grammatical explanations, which do not feature in Abū Mijlaz' statements (although some of the variant readings ascribed to him have implications with regard to the grammar), while theological implications of Qurʾānic verses are discussed by Abū Mijlaz but not by ʿUrwa.[193]

The exegetical traditions of Abū Mijlaz cannot tell us anything about the real meaning of the Qurʾānic text, and they do not tell us much, if anything, about the first generation of Muslims or the Prophet himself. They do, however, tell us a lot about exegesis in the first century. The fact that many of the exegetical devices that permeate the classical commentaries can be shown to have already been employed in the first century shows that the chronological order of the development of specific types of exegesis as proposed by Wansbrough is not only hypothetical but is untenable in light of the evidence.

This study has shown that it is possible to unearth authentic exegetical traditions from the first century and to link them to specific figures. Traditions such as these can and should be used as a point of reference for the assessment of other allegedly early traditions, and they must be taken into consideration for theories about the origins and early development of Islamic exegesis.

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[193] See Görke, "Remnants", pp. 29-32, 42.

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