Reconstructing the Earliest sīra Texts:
the Hiğra in the Corpus of ’Urwa b. al-Zubayr

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In his famous study “Ueber die Entwickelung des Ḥadīth”¹ I. Goldziher argued that the Islamic tradition (ḥadīt) could not be used as a historical source for the time of the Prophet and the Companions, but was only the result of theological, social and political tendencies of later times in which (as Goldziher assumed) these materials originated. This position laid the ground to a sceptical view which was further developed in Western Islamic Studies after Goldziher and which until today is still alive.² Its most famous adherents, J. Schacht,³ J. Wansbrough,⁴ M. Cook,⁵ P. Crone,⁶ and their followers argue,

1) that the corpus of the Islamic tradition originated in the second century AH or later,
2) that from this tradition no authentic information about the deeds and words of the Prophet, his companions and successors can be obtained and

¹) In: I. Goldziher, Muhammedanische Studien, II (Halle, 1890), 1–274.
3) that the chains of transmitters (asānīd, sg. isnād) are not reliable and do not indicate the real sources either.

It must be stressed that the above-named scholars hold this radically sceptical view to be valid not only for the legal hadīth, but also for the historical hadīth, especially the sīra tradition. Schacht explicitly argued to this effect in an article “On Mūsā ibn 'Uqba's Kitāb al-Maghāzī”. One basic principle of historical science seems to corroborate this sceptical approach, namely that one should base one’s research, whenever possible, on direct reports, i.e. on contemporary sources. However, the reports on the origins of Islam and on the first century AH are only available in writings that later generations recorded based on traditions. The time gap between the earliest surviving sources and the events is some 150 to 200 years or more. Moreover, the state of the tradition seems to corroborate the assumptions of the sceptical scholars, since it contains numerous contradictions, legendary reports etc. If the sceptical scholars were right, almost all of the time of Muḥammad and most of the following decades would defy any historical research.

Of course, this sceptical approach did not find unanimous approval in Western Islamic studies; needless to say, Muslim scholars harshly rejected it and tried to refute it. Scholars who do not subscribe to the sceptics’

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7) In: Acta Orientalia 21 (1953), 288–300. However, some sceptical scholars admit that the historical tradition is not as unreliable as the legal tradition (cf. Crone, Slaves, 1).


9) As Crone, Slaves, 59ff. rightly points out.

10) H. Motzki (Hadīth, xxi, note 32) recently pointed out that Goldziher already drew the conclusions and tried to use only the Koran as a secure source for his description of the life of Muḥammad (in his Vorlesungen über den Islam, reprint (Darmstadt, 1963), 1–29). The same is true for R. Blachère and his biography of Muḥammad (Le problème de Mahomet, Paris 1952). – The Koran, however, is of very restricted value for the historical research on the life of Muḥammad, as it usually only alludes to events but does not describe them.

11) Some names of scholars who rejected the sceptical view: J. Fück, N. Abbott, M. M. Azmi, F. Sezgin, J. van Ess, H. Motzki, G. Schoeler. – Goldziher’s theses, although at first widely accepted by Western scholars, were rejected by others, most notably J. Fück (cf. Motzki, “Introduction”, in: idem, Hadith, xxi). Schacht’s theses aroused both approval and rejection (cf. Motzki, “Introduction”, xxiv f.). The radical scepticism of Crone and Cook as presented in their book Hagarism (Cambridge, 1977) was mainly met with opposition and partly even with outrage by other scholars.
point of view of course do not deny that the Muslim tradition contains
lots of spurious and false material, something which already the Muslim
scholars in classical times recognized. However, they object to discarding
the tradition altogether.12

Yet, simply rejecting the theses of the sceptical scholars is not in any
way sufficient. Criteria have to be found that allow one to distinguish be-
tween genuine material on the one hand and spurious or false material on
the other hand. As those scholars who do not subscribe to the sceptics’
point of view assume that there are good and bad traditions,13 it is not
surprising that they all start with studying single traditions.

One method that was in principle used already by Johannes H. KRA-
MERS14 and J. VAN ES15 was further developed by H. MOTZKI,16
G. SCHOEKER,17 and A. GÖRKE18 in the last decade.19 It consists in exam-
ining whether the dependence of the hadīts as indicated by their isnāds is

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zur fruhislamischen Historiographie”, ZDMG 118 (1968), 274–96, especially 295.
14) “A Tradition of Manichaen Tendency (‘The She-Eater of Grass’)”, in:
H. MOTZKI (Ed.), Hadith, 245–57.
15) Zwischen Hadith und Theologie. Studien zum Entstehen prädestinatiani-
192–231; idem, “The Prophet and the Cat: on Dating Mālik’s Muwattā’ and Legal
Traditions”, JSAT 22 (1998), 18–83; idem, “The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq: on
the Origin and Reliability of some Maghāzi-Reports”, in: idem (Ed.), The Bi-
17) G. SCHOEKER, Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung
über das Leben Mohammeds (Berlin, New York, 1996); idem, “Mūsā b. ‘Uqba’s Ma-
18) A. GÖRKE, “The Historical Tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya: a Study of
‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr’s Account”, in: H. MOTZKI (Ed.), The Biography of Muham-
mad, 240–75 (an earlier German version was published in Der Islam 74 (1997),
193–237); idem, “History, Eschatology, and the Common Link”, in: H. BERG (Ed.),
Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins (Leiden, 2003), 179–208.
19) Another method shall briefly be mentioned at this point: J. FÜCK in his
article “Die Rolle des Traditionalismus im Islam”, ZDMG 93 (1939), 1–32 (English
translation: “The Role of Traditionalism in Islam”, in: H. MOTZKI (Ed.), Hadith,
15ff.), argued that there are a couple of traditions that present Muḥammad in a
very unfavourable light and that even the most sceptical scholars cannot doubt
the authenticity of some of these traditions. The story about the slander of ʿAīša
was not mentioned explicitly by FÜCK in this context but should be counted among
these traditions.
corroborated by their texts or not (\textit{isnād-cum-matn}-analysis). However, this method only provides information about whether a certain tradition is old, roughly speaking whether it was already circulated in the first century AH or not. If this kind of tradition does indeed go back to the Prophet or a companion is a different question.

This method was tested by G. Schoeler\textsuperscript{20} and A. Görke\textsuperscript{21} in four studies of \textit{sīra}-traditions that were traced back to ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (23/643–44–93/711–12)\textsuperscript{22} (the first revelation, the slander about ʿĀʾisha, Muhammad’s arrival in Medina after the \textit{hiǧra}, and the treaty of al-Hudaybiya). These studies showed – as the Islamic biographical literature always claimed – that ʿUrwa indeed collected these and other reports on the life of the Prophet in the first century AH and passed on this material to a number of students of his. It was possible to prove this because the traditions in question were not only transmitted by one of ʿUrwa’s students but by two or more, i.e. the traditions are known in several recensions. The comparison of the different recensions and versions of ʿUrwa’s reports was carried out similarly to the study of the dependency of manuscripts. More often than not it lead to the results

1) that the different recensions and versions were indeed independently transmitted. This becomes apparent through the differences, the “particular character” of each recension and version;

2) that the different recensions and versions go back to a common source. This becomes clear through the correspondence in contents – despite all differences – of the various versions. In some cases, especially in cases of direct speech, there sometimes even is a slight correspondence in the wording;

3) that the contents of what ʿUrwa taught can be reconstructed.\textsuperscript{23}

The positive results of these studies made it seem promising to collect ʿUrwa’s other \textit{sīra}-traditions as well and study them in the same way. The aim was to collect as complete as possible a corpus of these tradi-


\textsuperscript{22} G. Schoeler, “Urwa b. al-Zubayr”, in: \textit{EI²}, s.v.

tions and to reconstruct the contents of 'Urwa’s sīra reports on this basis. A project to this goal was granted by the Swiss National Science Foundation in 2002 and is currently being carried out by Tanja Duncker and Andreas Görke.

Meanwhile, the compilation of the corpus has been completed. The 'Urwa corpus turned out to comprise the basic framework to the whole sīra, i.e. it contains different long and detailed reports about the main events of Muḥammad’s life and his deeds. These are in particular:

1) The beginning of the revelation
2) The reaction of the Meccans – the emigration of some Muslims to Abyssinia – the meetings of al-'Aqaba – the hiğra to Medina
3) The battle of Badr
4) The battle of Uhud
5) The battle of the Ditch
6) The treaty of al-Hudaybiya
7) The slander about 'Ā'ishā
8) The conquest of Mecca

Most of these reports are well documented, i.e. they are reported by two or more transmitters from 'Urwa, his most important transmitters being his son Hišām (d. 146/763) and his master pupil al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742).

The traditions that Hišām, al-Zuhrī and others report on the authority of 'Urwa usually differ in wording and in some of their elements. They do, however, follow the same basic structure; in other words: they tell the same story. From this one can conclude that these traditions indeed go back to the same source, namely 'Urwa.

In contrast to this, longer traditions reported by his foster-child Abū l-Aswad (Yatīm 'Urwa) (d. 131/748, or some time later) from 'Urwa usually differ considerably from those reported by Hišām and al-Zuhrī.

24) Earlier attempts to compile as completely as possible the corpus of traditions according to 'Urwa are: J. von Stülpnagel, 'Urwa Ibn az-Zubair: Sein Leben und seine Bedeutung als Quelle frühiislamischer Überlieferung (Diss. Tübingen, 1956), 38 ff.; Salwā Mursī al-Ṭāhir, 'Bidāyat al-kitāba al-tārihiya 'inda l-'Arab (Beirut, 1995). – A compilation of the Abū l-Aswad-transmission of 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr is the book 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr: Mağāzi rasūl Allāh bi-riwāyat Abī l-Aswad ’anhu, ed. M. M. al-Āzami (Riyadh, 1981). – The corpora compiled by these researchers are however incomplete in light of current knowledge. In addition, none of the aforementioned authors examined the authenticity of the 'Urwa corpus critically according to the method that is here presented.
More often than not the Abū l-Aswad traditions are identical in wording or at least very close to traditions reported by Mūsā b.’Uqba (d. 141/758); in several cases traditions are reported with the combined isnād Abū l-Aswad ← ’Urwa and Mūsā b.’Uqba ← al-Zuhri.  

Other events of the sīra, in addition to numbers 1–8 above, must have been known to ’Urwa as well, although no long historical traditions about them are reported on his authority: he refers to these events in some of his legal traditions (e.g. to the conquest of Ḥaybar in the context of the division of Muḥammad’s heritage after his death).  

In the following, one of the longer reports – report number 2 (which tells the events leading to the hiḡra and the hiḡra itself) – will be studied in more detail. It is in fact a conglomerate, in which different events are concatenated to a single narrative. Apparently, it was already conceived as a whole by ’Urwa. In addition to this longer report, there are a number of shorter traditions about the hiḡra told on the authority of ’Urwa. Most of these short traditions only deal with a single aspect connected to the hiḡra in some regard (e.g. the fact, that the first child born after the hiḡra was ’Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr). We shall concentrate on the long report in the following.  

There are different recensions of this report, one of those going back to Hišām b. ’Urwa, the other one to al-Zuhri. The longest version of Hišām’s recension is recorded by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). Although split up in sev-

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25) For her PhD-thesis Tanja Duncker is currently studying these traditions that deviate from the main line of transmission.
26) E.g. al-Bayhaqī, al-Sunan al-kubrā (Beirut, 1406 AH), VI, 300; Muslim ibn al-Hāqāqī, Sahīh Muslim (Beirut, 1979), XI, 76ff., Abū ’Awāna, Musnad Abī ʿAwāna (Cairo, 1943), IV, 143ff.
27) E.g. al-Buḥārī, Sahīh al-Buḥārī (Beirut, Damaskus, 1990), V, 2081 (Kitāb al-ʿAqīqa, bāb 1, ḥadīt 5152); Ibn Abī Shayba, Muṣannaf (Bombay, 1979–83), V, 335; Ibn Ṭusṭākir, Taʿrīḥ madīnat Dimashq (Beirut, 1995), V, 225. Other short traditions deal with Qurʾān 5:83, said to have been revealed about the Negus: e.g. al-Ṭabarī, Taṣfīr (Beirut, 1992), V, 7; Ibn Abī Shayba, Muṣannaf (Bombay, 1979–83), XIV, 348f.; al-Nasāʾī, al-Sunan al-kubrā (Beirut, 2001), X, 84. The events dealt with in these and other short traditions are not mentioned in the different recensions of the long report and do not seem to be part of ’Urwa’s sīra tradition about the hiḡra.
28) Cf. figure 1 for an overview of some of the main lines of transmission of this report.
eral parts, these parts actually constitute a whole, namely a single tradition in the form of a letter by ʿUrwa sent to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65/685–86/705). That the parts recorded by al-Ṭabarî indeed belong together is very likely for several reasons: Some parts are split up in his Taʾrīḥ but form a single narrative in his Tafsīr. All parts have the same isnād: Ṭabarī ← ʿAbd al-Wārīṭ ← his father, ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ← Abān al-ʿAṭṭār ← Hishām b. ʿUrwa ← ʿUrwa. This isnād is only used by al-Ṭabarî when he quotes from the letters ʿUrwa sent to the caliph. It does not occur in any other instance and in almost every case when al-Ṭabarî quotes from ʿUrwa’s letters, this is the isnād he uses. One part of the tradition continues exactly where the one before stopped. In all but one of the parts it is explicitly mentioned that they refer to a letter of ʿUrwa’s to ʿAbd al-Malik.

Therefore, we may conclude that these parts originally were part of one and the same tradition. Al-Ṭabarî also claims to have heard the same tradition with only minor differences from Yūnus (b. ʿAbd al-Ālāʾ) ← (ʿAbdallāh) Ibn Wahb ← Ibn Abī l-Zinād ← Abū l-Zinād ← ʿUrwa.

Let us now turn to the contents of this recension. Hišām’s recension of ʿUrwa’s report, or letter, comprises a number of themes. The general outline of the events is as follows: The Meccans at first listen to Muḥammad’s preaching, but the situation worsens when he begins to speak against their gods. The Meccans put pressure on the Muslims and mistreat them. Some Muslims emigrate to Abyssinia and stay there for some years. In the meantime, more Meccans convert to Islam and the situation for the Muslims in Mecca improves. Many of the emigrants to Abyssinia return. When several people of the Anṣār in Medina convert to Islam, the situation in Mecca worsens again and the Meccans harass the Muslims. 70 of the Medinans meet Muḥammad during the ḥaḍrā in ʿAqaba and guarantee safety to him and any of the Muslims who come to Medina. Muhammad then advises the Muslims to emigrate to Medina. Many of them do, but Muḥammad asks Abū Bakr to wait with him in Mecca.

Usāma ← Hishām ibn ʿUrwa can be found in Ibn Saʿd, Tabaqāt (Leiden, 1904–28) III, 1, 122, and Ibn Hibbān, Šahih (Beirut, 1987–91) 14, 182–183 respectively. These versions do not have the form of a letter and only treat the hiǧra proper.

30) Compare al-Ṭabarî, Tafsīr, VI, 246f. with his Taʾrīḥ, I, 1180f. and 1224f.
31) In his Taʾrīḥ, al-Ṭabarî names a second transmitter, ʿAlī b. Naṣr, who is also said to have heard the report from ʿAbd al-Ṣamad.
32) al-Ṭabarî, Taʾrīḥ, I, 1234f. continues the story from I, 1224f.
33) The explicit reference to the letter is not found in Taʾrīḥ, I, 1234f.
34) al-Ṭabarî, Tafsīr, VI, 247.
Fig. 1: Lines of transmission
One day, Muḥammad comes to Abū Bakr’s house at an unusual time and Abū Bakr immediately knows that something has happened. The Prophet tells him that God gave him permission to emigrate. Muḥammad and Abū Bakr hide in a cave in the mountain Ṭawr for some days, where they are provided with food by ʿĀmir b. Fuhayra, a freedman of Abū Bakr. Abū Bakr’s son, ʿAbdallāh, provides them with news in the meantime. After a couple of days, when the talk about their disappearance calms down in Mecca, they march to Medina, together with ʿĀmir b. Fuhayra and a guide from the Banū ʿAbd b. Ṭādī. The route they take to Medina is given with some detail.

They arrive in Medina and stay with the Banū ʿAmr b. Ṭāfīf for two days or longer. Then they move on and Muḥammad chooses a place in the area where the Banū 1-Naḍīr settle (probably to build a mosque there).

The other long report goes back to al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742). Al-Zuhrī’s recension can be found in different versions. In contrast to Hisām’s recension, none of these versions is in the form of a letter. The longest al-Zuhrī versions are those recorded by ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827) ← Maʿmar ← al-Zuhrī ← ʿUrwa35 and by al-Buḥārī (d. 256/870) ← Yaḥyā b. Bukayr ← al-Layṭ ← ʿUqayl ← al-Zuhrī ← ʿUrwa.36 Shorter versions are recorded among others by al-Buḥārī ← Abū Ṣāliḥ ← ʿAbdallāḥ ← Yūnus ← al-Zuhrī ← ʿUrwa,37 and Ibn Ishāq ← al-Zuhrī ← ʿUrwa.38 These versions are quoted with minor variations at several places in the ḥadīṯ literature.

As Hisām, al-Zuhrī starts his narrative with the situation in Mecca. As this worsens for the Muslims, people start to emigrate to Abyssinia. Abū Bakr is among those emigrants. On his way (most versions give Bark al-Ǧimād as the place where this happened) he meets Ibn al-Duǧūnna (or Ibn al-Daǧūnna), who persuades him to stay, as someone of Abū Bakr’s standing should not be driven out. He offers him his protection. Abū Bakr accepts and returns to Mecca.

When Abū Bakr prays publicly in front of his house, this causes discontent and unrest among the Qurayš. They fear that other Meccans might join him. Ibn al-Duǧūnna asks him to stop praying publicly or to

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36) al-Buḥārī, Šaḥīḥ, III, 1418 ff. (Kitāb Faḍā’il al-ṣaḥāba, bāb 74, ḥadīṯ 3692/3694); al-Bayhaqī, Dalāʾīl al-nubuwwa (Beirut, 1985), II, 471 ff. gives a similar account on the authority of Ibn Ṣāliḥ ← al-Layṭ ← ʿUqayl ← al-Zuhrī ← ʿUrwa.
37) al-Buḥārī, Šaḥīḥ, II, 804 ff. (Kitāb al-Kafāla, bāb 4, ḥadīṯ 2175).
38) Ibn Hisām, al-Sīra al-nabawīyya (Cairo, 1955), I, 484 ff.; al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīḫ, I, 1237 ff.
release him from his obligation to protect Abū Bakr. Abū Bakr decides to release Ibn al-Duğonna from this obligation.

At that time, Muḥammad sees the place of migration in a dream. It is identified as Medina. Some people emigrate to Medina and most of those who previously had fled to Abyssinia also move on to Medina. Abū Bakr also prepares to leave but is asked to stay by Muḥammad.

One day, Muḥammad comes to Abū Bakr’s house at an unusual time and Abū Bakr immediately realizes that something has happened. Muḥammad declares that God granted him permission to emigrate and that Abū Bakr should accompany him.

They hide in a cave in the mountain of Ṭawr for three days. They take some food with them. Asmā’, Abū Bakr’s daughter, uses a piece from her belt to tie the bags. That is why she is called Dāt al-niṭaqayn (the one with the two belts).

Abū Bakr’s son ʿAbdallāh and his freedman ʿĀmir b. Fuhayra come to the cave every day and supply Muḥammad and Abū Bakr with food and information about what is going on in Mecca.

After three days, they leave for Medina with a guide from the Banū ʿAbd b. ʿAdi, whom they had hired before and whom they trusted, although he was an infidel. He guides them to Medina along the sea-shore.

The versions of the al-Zuhri recension differ in some details. While the long versions by Maʿmar ← al-Zuhri and ʿUqayl ← al-Zuhri are very close in wording (as is the shorter version by Yūnus ← al-Zuhri), the version recorded by Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) tells the same story, but in a completely different wording. There are some differences in the contents as well.

Ibn Ishāq only gives the first part of the story (which deals with Ibn al-Duğonna), on the authority of al-Zuhri ← ʿUrwa, while the second part (the story of the hiğra itself) is narrated by Ibn Ishāq either on the authority of “someone he does not mistrust” ← ʿUrwa (in Ibn Hiṣām) or Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abdallāh al-Ṭabari ← ʿUrwa (in al-Ṭabarī). Ibn Ishāq thus combines in his report a version of the al-Zuhri recension with a third recension we shall call the Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān recension.

As noted above, there are some distinctive features in Ibn Ishāq’s al-Zuhri versions. For instance, in the versions by Maʿmar, ʿUqayl and Yūnus ← al-Zuhri, the agreement between Ibn al-Duğonna and Abū Bakr explicitly includes that Abū Bakr may not pray publicly. His doing so therefore is a clear breach of the agreement. Ibn al-Duğonna asks Abū Bakr to either adhere to what they had agreed on or else release him from his obligation.
In Ibn Isḥāq’s versions there is no hint that the agreement included a clause that Abū Bakr should not pray publicly. When he begins to pray in public, Ibn al-Duǧunna only tells him that the Qurayṣ’s dislike the place he has chosen to pray. Abū Bakr then asks Ibn al-Duǧunna if he wanted to renounce the protection, and when Ibn al-Duǧunna says that he indeed does, Abū Bakr releases him from his obligation.

Although the different versions give a slightly different touch to the story, it is still clearly the same story. Apparently the versions going back to Maʿmar, ʿUqayl and Yūnus draw on a common (written) version, since the texts are almost identical in wording. It cannot be excluded that one or two of these versions were copied from the third.

Comparing the recensions by Hiṣām b. ʿUrwa, al-Zuhri, and Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān, we can see that they have a great deal in common, although they differ in numerous details. The recension according to Hiṣām concentrates on different points than the one according to al-Zuhri: While in Hiṣām’s recension, the emigration to Abyssinia is told in a very general manner, al-Zuhri’s recension focuses on the story of Abū Bakr and Ibn al-Duḡunna and in a way personalizes the story of this first ḥiǧra. And while in Hiṣām’s recension the meetings in al-ʿAqaba are mentioned and the route of the ḥiǧra is given in detail, these details cannot be found in al-Zuhri’s recensions, nor in the one by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān.

We may assume for good reason that the different recensions indeed go back to a common source, namely ʿUrwa, as we explained from the outset (i.e. we have different recensions going back to the same source, transmitted independently from each other).

It is difficult to tell whether the elements found in only one of the recensions go back to ʿUrwa or to a later transmitter, e.g. if the story of Ibn al-Duḡunna was already part of ʿUrwa’s report or if this story was introduced by al-Zuhri. It is possible that ʿUrwa sometimes told the story in a general manner (as transmitted by Hiṣām), and sometimes in a personalized manner (as transmitted by al-Zuhri). It is comprehensible that the general form is to be found in the letter sent to the caliph.

While this cannot be decided at this point, we must assume that the elements common to different recensions indeed do go back to ʿUrwa. We can therefore assume that ʿUrwa’s reports comprised at least the following elements:

1) The harassment of the Muslims in Mecca
2) The subsequent emigration of some Muslims to Abyssinia
3) The ongoing harassment of the Muslims in Mecca and the emigration of many of them to Medina
4) The emigration of the Prophet to Medina together with Abū Bakr and ʿĀmir b. Fuhayra.

These elements constitute what we may call the general outline of the events. In addition to this general outline, some of the details can also be shown to go back to ʿUrwa, e.g. the story of Abū Bakr and Muḥammad hiding in a cave in the mountain Tawr, their supply etc.

Concluding, we could show that the long traditions preserved in different recensions (i.e. that of Hišām ibn ʿUrwa as recorded by al-Ṭabarī and that of al-Zuhri as recorded by ʿAbd ar-Razzāq etc.) go back to ʿUrwa, and we were able to reconstruct the contents of what ʿUrwa taught on this subject.

The shorter traditions, which we have so far neglected, are of two kinds. The first kind consists of parts of the long tradition that have been transmitted with different isnāds and that corroborate the above findings.39 The other kind consists of traditions which deal with the hiğra in some regard, but which have no parallel in the long versions (e.g. the story of ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr, ʿUrwa’s brother, being the first child born after the hiğra).40 Although harking back to ʿUrwa, they most probably were not part of what constituted his teachings on the sīra in a narrower sense.

As to the historicity of this report, we of course should not take the traditions at face value. But ʿUrwa was a son of one of the earliest Muslims, al-Zubayr, and a nephew of the Prophet’s wife ʿĀ’ishā; he therefore was very close to the events and the persons involved therein. Even if his reports are by no means eyewitness reports and even though his materials were based on first-hand reports only for the last years of Muhammad’s life, there is no reason to doubt that they do reflect the general outline of the events correctly.

The conclusions from this study are radically opposed to the sceptical view presented in the beginning: Although some tampering with the asānīd may have taken place, the asānīd cannot generally be considered unreliable. At least part of the Islamic tradition apparently already originated in the first century, and from the tradition studied it is even possible to obtain, however scarce, information on the life of the Prophet. The study of the corpus of ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr’s traditions on the sīra thus provides us with new insights both on the development of the Islamic tradition in the first two centuries AH, and on the life of the Prophet Muḥammad.

39) Eg. al-Buḫārī, Ṣahīḥ, II, 751f. (Kitāb al-Buyūʿ, bāb 57, ḥadīth 2031); V, 2187f. (Kitāb al-Libās, bāb 15, ḥadīth 6570); al-Ṭabarī, Taafsīr, VI, 375. Cf. note 29. 40) Cf. note 27 above.