A Ḥadīth Fragment on Papyrus

Sijpesteijn, P.M.

Petra M. Sijpesteijn*

A *Ḥadīth* Fragment on Papyrus

Abstract: A small fragment of papyrus contains a tradition ascribed to ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) also known from literary sources, albeit with some variations in the text and transmission history. Written on the re-used back of an official text, it will be used to discuss how such traditions might have functioned in the written culture of the early Abbasid Empire.

Keywords: Egypt; Hadith; papyrology; textual transmission.

This small fragment of papyrus contains a tradition ascribed to ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), an early companion of the prophet Muḥammad and his second successor as leader of the Muslim community. Written on the re-used back of an official text, it offers some revealing insights into how such traditions might have functioned in the written culture of the early Abbasid Empire.

The text that concerns us here is written on a piece of papyrus cut from an earlier written document. The other side of the papyrus, which was written first, now contains only three letters written in a very large, monumental script, presumably belonging to an official document. The date of this text, based on the paleography, can be placed in the first two Islamic centuries (7th–8th centuries C.E.). The letters visible on it can be read as *ʿayn-nūn-dāl* followed by a vertical slightly oblique line partially broken off, presumably belonging to a free-standing *kāf*, forming the words *ʿindaka*.[1] The text is written perpendicular to the fibers (*transversa charta*) on the smoother inside part of the papyrus roll, which was the usual way papyri were written from the Byzantine period onwards. This practice was continued in papyrus texts produced under the Arabs, in Arabic and other languages.

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1 As the dot over the second letter is not certain, the word can also be read *ʿabduka*. The final letter might possibly also be read as an obliquely written *alif*, so that the letters might also form the first half of a name, ʿAbd a[l-. Despite the large format and the fact that caliphs, under whose rule a papyrus roll was produced, are always also described as "ʿAbd Allāh," the traces are not likely to form part of a protocol text, as we would then have expected other traces of writing. See the examples in Grohmann, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri* III, Part 2.

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*Corresponding author: Petra M. Sijpesteijn: Leiden University, p.m.sijpesteijn@hum.leidenuniv.nl

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The second text, on the other side of the papyrus, is written in a clear, literary – albeit somewhat uncertain – hand, containing some features of an earlier writing style, especially in the use of the subscript dot in the *fāʾ* (l. 4 *inṣarafa*), the horizontally elongated *ṣād* (l. 4 *ṣallā*) and *ṭāʾ* (l. 4 *al-khaṭṭāb*), the extension of the *alif* below the line (l. 4 *fīhā*), the hairpin shaped *kāf* (l. 5 *kayfa, kāna*), and the triangular shaped *ʿayn* and *ghayn* (l. 3 *al-ʿazīz, saʿīd*; l. 4 *maghrib*).[2] The text is written parallel to the fibers in the same direction as the text on the other side. There is only one diacritical dot used and no vowels are indicated.

The papyrus is presently kept in the Austrian National Library Papyrus Collection. It was acquired in Egypt, but there is no exact information about its origin.[3] Joseph KARABACEK already identified the text as containing a tradition in his descriptive catalogue of selected pieces from the collection.[4]

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2 For a description of the features of the script used in papyri from the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries versus that of a later period, see KHAN, *Khalili,* 27–39.

3 The papyri in the Austrian National Library were purchased in several installments in the late nineteenth century and all stem from Egypt (LOEBENSTEIN "Vom "Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer" zur Papyrussammlung," 3–7. The history of the Arabic pieces in the collection appears on pages 25–30 of the same article).

4 KARABACEK, *Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*, 192–3. KARABACEK identified only five lines of text, ignoring the traces of letters in the other two lines. He dated the text to the ninth century.

Before turning to a discussion of the contents of the papyrus and its use, I first present the edition of the short text.
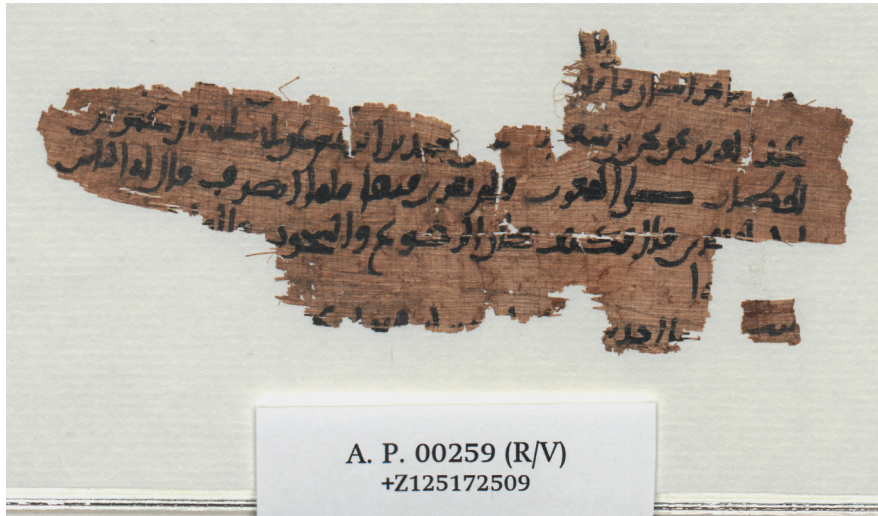
AP 259 verso. © Photo: Austrian National Library, Vienna, Austria.

AP 259 verso[5]   4.5 × 12 cm   2nd-3rd/8th–9th c.

Description: Middle brown papyrus of good quality, written in black ink with a medium thick pen perpendicular to the fibers. There are seven complete and partially preserved lines. The papyrus is broken off on the top and bottom sides, and the top and bottom left corners are missing as well. The papyrus fibers are split in several spots with little damage to the text. The right and left margins are partially preserved. There is a half-centimeter-wide blank margin preceding the text on the right side. A blank part of a line separates different sections of the text. There is one diacritical dot written under the *fā'* (l. 4 *inṣarafa*).

1) ....].... [....

2) سويد بن]   عبد

3) عبد العزيز عن يحي بن سعيد عن محمد بن ابرهيم عن ابي سلمة ان عمر بن

4) الخطاب صلى المغرب ولم يقرى فيها فلما انصرف قال له الناس

5) انك لم تقرى قال فكيف كان الركوع والسجود قالوا [حسنا قال فلا

6) باس ا[ذا

7) حدثنا فلان] قال حدث[نا فلان ...

1)

2) ....[..Suwayd ibn

3) ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz on the authority of Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd on the authority of Muḥam-
    mad ibn Ibrāhīm on the authority of Abū Salama that ʿUmar ibn

4) al-Khaṭṭāb prayed the evening prayer without reciting. And when he left, the
    people said to him:

5) "You did not do the recitations." He replied: "And what about the bowing and
    the prostrating?" They said:["It was good." He replied: "Then there is thus no

6) ha]rm in it."

7) So-and-so related to us:] He said: "[so-and-so] reported to us...

Commentary

2) This line should have contained the introduction to the tradition in the form of
ḥaddathanā or *ḥaddathanī*, presumably followed by *qāla* as it does at the begin-
ning of the second account. At the end of the line the first name of the transmitter
whose patronymic, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, is preserved on the next line, would have been
written.[6] None of the other authorities known from *isnād*s accompanying this
ḥadīth in other sources (see below in the commentary to line 5) fit this partially
preserved name. Suwayd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 167/783–4 or 194/809–10) is the only
ḥadīth transmitter whose name and dates fit the context of the papyrus *and* who
is reported in the biographical dictionaries to have transmitted on the authority
of Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd who precedes him in this *isnād* as well.[7] Suwayd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz
transmitted at least two *ḥadīth*s on the authority of Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, although the
one he is associated with in the papyrus does not appear amongst these.[8] Simi-

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6 Karabacek identified the first transmitter as ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (*Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*, 192).
7 For Suwayd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz in general, see al-Mizzī, *Tahdīb al-kamāl*, 12: 255–62 and for him
transmitting from Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, p. 257.
8 Cited in al-Ṭabaranī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr* and al-Bayḥaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*.

larly, Yazīd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz appears at least two times in an *isnād* after Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, albeit not with the *ḥadīth* of our papyrus.[9] Much less is known about Yazīd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz in the tadition. Of these two individuals, Suwayd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz seems to fit best and his name can be completed at the end of line 2. Of Syrian (or Iraqi) descent, Suwayd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was a well-known scholar of the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* who was appointed *qāḍī* in Baʿlbak.[10]

3) Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Anṣarī (d. 143/760–1) was a famous jurist and transmitter, a student of the "seven leading jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) of Medina."[11] He held the post of judge (*qāḍī*) of Medina under the Umayyads and later served in the same function in al-Hāshimiyya in Iraq under the first two Abbasid caliphs.[12] Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Taymī (d. 120/738) is a well-known Medinan *ḥadīth* transmitter. Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd transmitted from him.[13] Abū Salama ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 94/713–4 or 104/722–3) was counted amongst the "ten *fuqahāʾ* of Medīna."[14] He allegedly recorded his own *ḥadīth* collection and transmitted materials to others.[15] Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm is known to have transmitted *ḥadīth*s on his authority.[16] This part of the *isnād* parallels those found in other sources with this *ḥadīth* (see below in the commentary to line 5). Ibrāhim is written without *alif*.[17]

4) ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb was the second caliph of the Muslim community who ruled in Medina from 13/634 to his death in 23/644. He is a well-known example for Muslim practice and opinions.[18] *Yaqraʾ* is written with *yāʾ* instead of *alif*.[19] The word is written in the same way in line 5.

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9 Al-Mizzī does not mention a death date, nor does he list Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd under the authorities from whom Yazīd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz transmitted (*Tahdīb al-kamāl*, 32: 193–5). For the *isnād*s where Yazīd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz transmits on the authority of Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, see al-Ṭabaranī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr* and al-Shaybānī, *al-Āḥad*.
10 al-Mizzī, *Tahdīb al-kamāl*, 12: 255; 261.
11 al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 5: 468.
12 al-Dhahabī, *Tadhhīb tahdhīb*, 9: 446. In general on Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, see JUYNBOLL, *Encyclopedia,* 668 ff; ABBOTT, *Arabic Literary Papyri II*, 187, 193–5; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb,* 11: 221–4; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 5: 468–81; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhhīb tahdhīb*, 9: 445–8.
13 For Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd as a transmitter of his *ḥadīth*s, see Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb,* 11: 221; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhhīb tahdhīb*, 8: 7; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 5: 294. In general on Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm, see ABBOTT, *Arabic Literary Papyri II*, 187; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb,* 9: 5–7; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhhīb tahdhīb,* 8: 6–7; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 5: 294.
14 al-Dhahabī, *Tadhhīb al-tahdhīb*, 10: 281.
15 In general on Abū Salama, see ABBOTT, *Arabic Literary Papyri II*, 250–1; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb,* 5: 292; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhhīb al-tahdhīb,* 10: 279–82; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 33: 112–16.
16 al-Dhahabī, *Tadhhīb al-tahdhīb*, 10: 280.
17 For this phenomenon, see HOPKINS, Grammar, 9.c.
18 BONNER and LEVI DELLA VIDA, "ʿUmar (I) b. al-<u>Kh</u>aṭṭāb", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.
19 For this phenomenon, see HOPKINS, *Grammar*, 80 (§ 79.a)

5) This tradition is preserved in al-Shāfiʿī's (d. 204/820) *Kitāb al-Umm*,[20] in Ibn Abī Shayba's (d. 235/849) *al-Muṣannaf*,[21] and in al-Bayhaqī's (d. 458/1066), *al-Sunan al-kubrā*.[22] The account transmitted in *Kitāb al-Umm* reads: *anna ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ṣallā bi-l-nās al-mahgrib fa-lam yaqraʾ fīhā fa-lammā inṣarafa qīla lahu mā qaraʾta qāla fa-kayfa kāna al-rukūʿ wa-l-sujūd qālū ḥasanan qāla fa-lā baʾs*. In al-Bayhaqī the verb *ṣallā* is replaced by *kāna yuṣallī*. The version in Ibn Abī Shayba's *al-Muṣannaf* has an additional: *tāmm huwa* after *sujūd*, but the traces at the end of this line do not allow for such a restoration. Instead, the line continues directly with the reply of the people: *qālū*, of which the upper half is still visible above the lacuna. The *kāf* in *rukūʿ* does not resemble how this letter is written elsewhere in the text (e.g. l. 6 *kāna*), but the word cannot be read differently.

6) ʿUmar's reply has to be much shorter than the one recorded in Ibn Abī Shayba's *al-Muṣannaf* (*lā baʾs innī ḥaddathtu nafsī baʿīr jahaztuhā bi-aqtābihā wa-ḥaqāʾibihā*), but the remaining space and the traces of letters on line 6 do not seem to fit the version preserved in the *Kitāb al-Umm* either. The version preserved in al-Bayhaqī allows us, however, to restore this line. In the *Sunan, idhā* (*fa-lā baʾs idhā*) is added at the end of the *ḥadīth*, which fits the shape of the letters in the papyrus well. Only a *dāl* and *alif* are visible after the lacuna. The rest of this line is left blank, indicating that the account was finished here.

7) A new account started on this line introduced by the well-known phrases introducing the *isnād*. Only traces remain of the names of the transmitters.

Transmission and use

This papyrus records an exchange between the caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and some people who criticized him for having omitted the recitation of Qurʾānic verses after the usual praising of God (*takbīr*) in the *maghrib* prayer. This *ḥadīth* figures in the discussion whether the prayer in which such recitation is forgotten is still valid or should be repeated to be effective.[23] Eventually, it became clear,

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20 *Kitāb ikhtilāf Mālik wa-l-Shāfiʿī. Kitāb al-ʿItq. Bāb fī l-ṣalāt*. 6/7: 220.

21 *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt. Nasā an yaqraʾa ḥattā ṣalā*.

22 *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt. Bāb man qāla tusqiṭu al-qirāʾa ʿamman nasā wa-man qāla lā tusqiṭu. al-Sunan al-kubrā* 2: 381. The *ḥadīth* is also quoted in *Kanz al-ʿummāl* of al-Mutaqqī al-Hindī with a shortened *isnād* (8: 133, no. 22256).

23 I did not find KARABACEK's explanation that the controversy discussed here (*al-qirāʾa fī l-maghrib*) concerns the question whether one should add Qurʾānic Chapters 1 and 112 after the praising of God (*takbīr*) in the *maghrib* prayer in the narrative sources where the *ḥadīth* is discussed (*Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*, 193).

prayer should always contain *some* Qurʾān recitation. Muslims are free to choose the Qurʾānic verses they recite during the prayer. In fact, many *ḥadīth*s record the prophet Muḥammad reciting different parts of the Qurʾān during the *maghrib* prayer.[24] But the account in the papyrus records even more fundamental insecurities about the basic conceptions of some Muslim practices. The context of its use in early Abbasid Egypt, as will become clear below, suggests that primary Muslim religious rituals were still being discussed at this early period.

The topic of the *ḥadīth*, namely the correct manner to execute the daily ritual prayer touches upon a fundamental element of Muslim religion as experienced by believers. Participation in rituals is perceived by many believers to be one of the most important manners to express one's adherence to Islam. The right execution of such rituals in this view is therefore crucial. It is striking that many of the *ḥadīth* fragments preserved on papyrus, especially those that, based on their informal and note-book format, suggest having been circulated informally rather than having participated in sophisticated scholarly debates, deal with the basic elements and rituals of the religion. Prayer figures prominently in these texts.[25] They reflect an environment in which believers were unsure about how to execute the most basic religious obligations either because these were still being discussed, or because they were new to the religion. Either explanation fits of course the second-third/eighth-ninth-century environment of our papyrus very well.[26]

The account is recorded in al-Shāfiʿī's *Kitāb al-Umm*, in Ibn Abī Shayba's *al-Muṣannaf* and in al-Bayḥaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā* with some small variations and with partially different *isnād*s. The *isnād* accompanying the account in the *Kitāb al-Umm* follows the one in the papyrus, only replacing the last name, Suwayd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, with that of the famous Medinese jurist and *muḥaddith* Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), which is also the one preserved in al-Bayḥaqī.[27] In Ibn Abī Shayba's version, the *isnād* has Abū Salama transmitting the account to Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm as in the papyrus, but then it continues with ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿUmar (d. 147/764) who passed it on to ʿUbayd Allāh b. Numayr (d. 199/814). As discussed above (in the commentary to line 5), the *matn* shows also slightly different wordings, but these do not significantly alter the meaning of the *ḥadīth*.

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24 See for example in Mālik b. Anas, *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, 27–28 (Section 3.5).

25 MALCZYCKI, "Instructions." See also the unpublished material in the Vienna Papyrus collection currently being edited by Ursula Bsees – I am grateful to Ursula for pointing these examples out to me.

26 HAWTING, "Introduction"; RUBIN, "Morning and Evening Prayers."

27 Extending the *isnād* from Mālik in two versions. He also offers an alternative *isnād* via 'a man' on the authority of Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad (d. 148/756) from Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 115/733).

The account has thus come down to us in three slightly different versions in four different sources, but it does not appear anywhere in the canonical collections. This despite the reputation and standing of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb about whom it relates.[28] Al-Shāfiʿī already had to explain, with some agitation it seems, to his listeners that the account transmitted about such a figure, which was accepted by the earliest Muslim *anṣār* and *muhājirūn*, was indeed authoritative.[29] Despite the diminishing presence of companions' *ḥadīth*s in collections of traditions over the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, they continue to appear in legal texts, but our papyrus does not seem to fall into this genre.[30]

This papyrus containing a *ḥadīth* pertaining to an action by the caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb in Medina and transmitted by prominent Medinan (and one Syrian) transmitters was found in Egypt. Accounts about the earliest companions were highly sought after, being passed around the whole Muslim empire, which might explain how this record ended up in Egypt in oral or written form (i.e. in the form of the papyrus itself). Egyptian companions, in fact, were known to have preserved many important *ḥadīth*s, which attracted for example Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767) when he was looking for material to include in his biography of the prophet Muḥammad.[31]

The papyrus can roughly be dated to the second/eighth-early third/ninth century on the basis of the script used on both sides of the papyrus[32] and the form in which the account is presented.[33] Most literary fragments of *ḥadīth*s and other literary texts preserved on papyrus edited by Nabia Abbott were dated by her to the early third/ninth century.[34] These all formed part of codices. The third/ninth century is also the date given by the editors to the two complete *ḥadīth* collections preserved in a papyrus codex and a scroll.[35] The text discussed here differs

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28 See Nabia Abbott's remark on the basis of her edition of *ḥadīth* fragments preserved on papyrus, many of which contained (a majority) of companion *ḥadīth*s not preserved in the canonical collections, that very few companion *ḥadīth*s survive in the canonical collections (*Literary Papyri II*, 195).

29 *Kitāb ikhtilāf Mālik wa-l-Shāfiʿī. Kitāb al-ʿItq. Bāb fī l-ṣalāt*. 6/7: 220. But see EL SHAMSY 2013, 80 who quotes al-Shāfiʿī stating that he does not consider companion *ḥadīth*s authoritative. I would like to thank Christopher Melchert for pointing me towards this reference.

30 I would like to thank Christopher Melchert for pointing this out to me.

31 JENKINS, *Creation*, 296.

32 See above, n. 2.

33 *Isnād*s seem to have started to be used after the second *fitna* (61–73/680–92) (JUYNBOLL, *Muslim Tradition*, 17 ff.). The use of *ḥaddathanā … qāla* points to a date later than the second/eighth century (ABBOTT, *Literary Papyri II*, 121–2).

34 ABBOTT, *Literary Papyri I, II, III*.

35 The codex contains the *Jāmiʿ* of Ibn Wahb (d. 197/813) edited by Jean DAVID-WEILL. The scroll

profoundly from those published so far. The fact that it appears on the back of a reused document precludes the possibility that it formed part of a codex or scroll containing a full or fuller collection of *ḥadīth*s. Moreover, the writing, although pointing immediately to a literary – as opposed to a documentary – text, does not show the regularity and straight lines that a professional scribe copying a full text usually would have displayed.[36] Instead the letters differ in size and length, and some letters are written in different ways (e.g. *kāf* in: l. 5 *fa-kayfa, kāna* versus *al-rukūʿ*; *ṣād* in: l. 4 *ṣallā* versus *inṣarafa*; *ʿayn* in l. 3: *al-ʿazīz* versus l. 4: *al-magh-rib*). Only one diacritical dot appears, and there are no vowels written in contrast to other literary fragments stemming from complete, or larger, *ḥadīth* fragments.

Instead what we seem to be dealing with here is an informal recording of some *ḥadīth*s for personal or educational use. The sources discuss how such personal notes with whole or partial *ḥadīth*s were used by transmitters as aide-mémoires and for training purposes, despite a general prejudice against using such writings in the transmission process itself.[37] In other words, *ḥadīth*s were written down on the basis of oral reports and such writings were then used to memorize the accounts, but it was controversial to copy from a written text without involving an oral transmission and memorization. In fact in some ways the writing down of the *ḥadīth*s for this purpose was essential to transfer the accounts accurately from one generation to the next.[38] Preceding the age of the compilation of the *ḥadīth* collections in book form, this papyrus might come from the pocket of a practicing *muḥaddith* who simply had no other way of keeping track of the traditions passed on to him or her. The fragment definitely fulfills the condition that it does not resemble a permanent written text, let alone a *muṣḥaf* of the Qurʾān, but would only serve a temporary purpose.[39] But even when *muḥaddithūn* started to make use of written texts on a regular basis from the late second/eighth century onwards in Egypt, scholars and students would have noted down single or groups of *ḥadīth*s for their personal use.[40] Similarly, after the famous *ḥadīth* compilations

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contains *ḥadīth*s transmitted by ʿAbd Allāh b. Lahīʿa (d. 174/790) and is edited by Raif Georges Khoury.

36 Contrast the examples in Abbott, *Literary Papyri II*, Khoury, *ʿAbd Allāh b. Lahīʿa* and David-Weill, *Ibn Wahb*.

37 Schoeler, *The Oral and Written*, (2006), Chapter 5, 111–41; Cook, "Opponents."

38 Thus Ibn Hajar reports that al-Zanjī (d. 179/795–6) failed to write down what he had heard in the days of Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767–8), therefore his *ḥadīth* became weak (*Tahdhīb* 10:129). I would like to thank Christopher Melchert for this reference (and many more related to this question not cited here).

39 Schoeler, *The Oral and Written*, (2006) 113, 116–7

40 Schoeler argues that *ḥadīth* recitation exclusively based on memory was abandoned when

could be consulted, there would have been countless occasions on which selections or individual accounts were recorded on a piece of papyrus such as this one. Whatever its context, the papyrus gives us a glimpse of the diverse ways and combinations in which this material was used and circulated beyond the manuscript versions mostly known to us. As one of the many unpublished papyri and paper documents from Egypt containing *ḥadīth* fragments, it tells us also that these texts were used widely, especially in simpler, reduced forms.[41]

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Baghdad became the centre of *ḥadīth* scholarship in the early third/ninth century, a practice already common elsewhere in the Muslim world (*The Oral and the Written*, 116).

41 See also the third/ninth-century introductory instructional astronomical text that I am preparing for publication. It is a very basic short text providing information needed to draw up horoscopes. It is nevertheless the earliest Arabic astronomical text known to us. Copied on the back of a Coptic instruction on how to make an amulet, it is evidence for a need for easy translations of complicated literary texts.

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