A Modern Matn Criticism on the Tradition on ‘Ā’īsha's Age of Marriage: Translation and Analysis

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Introduction

In public criticisms on the Prophet Muhammad among non-Muslims in the West two main issues are focused on; that he fought battles, which according to many makes him a barbarian warlord, and that he married a young girl, making him a pedophile according to modern standards.¹ These two issues are used to criticize Islam as a backward and violent religion, but also to portray Muslims as naïve, backwards, or even potential suspects because they adhere to the teachings of such a man. Much has been written on Muhammad's actions and ideas of war of which many show that the Qur'an teachings on war and Muhammad's actions are very ethical and even in line with modern international law.² But there has been a common acceptance of Muhammad's marriage contract to 'A'isha while she being six years old, and her joining his household and consummating the marriage at the age of nine, as these ages are stated clearly in several historical sources.³ Thus, the historical truth of her age is rarely challenged, but how to understand this within today's modern ethical framework has generated several responses which can be typified as:

I. Approvalism: What the Qur'an says and Prophet says or does (his Sunna) is always exemplary and never sinful or unethical (theological voluntarism), even if we think it is. Contracting marriages to six year old girls is accepted by God, thus making it ethical and allowable by law. The consummation is by the majority linked to attaining puberty, meaning the girl her menstruation cycle has started, but there is also a minority allowing

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¹ These two issues are frequent in both liberal public discourse as in open Islamophobic discourse. One of the more known Islamophobic lobbyist, Robert Spencer, also keeps using these two main subjects as proof that Islam is the opposite of liberal modernity: http://www.jihadwatch.org/2006/11/finding-out-the-truth-about-muhammad (accessed on 26-01-2015). For a discussion on the term Islamophobia, see: http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/defining-islamophobia (accessed on 26-01-2015).

² One of the most complete works on Islam and war which discusses the Islamic sources and jurisprudence and the criticisms is Ahmed al-Dawoody's The Islamic Law of War: Justifications and Regulations (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

³ There are several Aḥadīth reported which go back to 'A'isha with almost the same wordings: (تزوّجني النبي وأنا ابنة ست، وبي نبي وأنا ابنة تسعة) — They married me off to the Prophet and I was a girl of six, and he consummated with me, and I was a girl of nine), which can be found in the Aḥadīth collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad, and al-Nisā'i [Muhammad al-Shawkānī, Nayl al-'Awtār (Egypt: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1993), 6:224-225. ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, Fatḥ al-Bāārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1379 AH), 7:224-225]. In this paper I will label these traditions as the Aisha-age-traditions.
it apart from puberty. This approach mostly rejects the idea that the Prophet worked within a historic-cultural context and universalizes his Sunna into absolute norms.

II. Cultural-contextualistic apologism: In the 7th century Arab context of the Prophet, this was normal and thus ethical in his time. Ideas of puberty, maturity and family law are influenced by culture and thus are not directly universal. Many proponents of this approach point out that ‘Ā’ishah's age was never an issue before the 20th century, as pre-or early pubescent marriages were common in most societies around the world. This approach seemingly separates certain elements of the Sunna into historic-cultural and ahistoric-universal, whereby historical oddities are accepted as historical facts but not directly as ethical norms (moral relativism), but rarely it is stated as such in clear terms.

III. Modern projectionist apologism: This approach views the Prophet in an almost similar fashion as (I.) but with the major difference that it takes modern ethics as the universal norm which is projected (truthfully or falsely) on the Prophet and the Qur'an. It thus

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6 Nasr Abu Zayd (d. 2010) and Abdullah Saeed are scholars clearly professing the dichotomy between historical-cultural and ahistorical-universal elements of the Qur’an and Sunna in their works. See their works: Nasr Abu Zayd, Mathum al-Naṣṣ: dirasah fi ’ulūm al-Qur'ān (1994, al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-‘Arabi). Abdullah Saeed, Interpreting the Qur’an: Towards a Contemporary Approach (2005, Routledge). Fathi Osman (d. 2010) is an example of a scholar being unclear how much he viewed elements of the Qur’an and Sunna as being contextualized by culture, and if so, if these are abrogated by modern cultural changes. See his Concepts of the Quran (Multimedia Vera International, 1999).
reinterprets Qur'anic verses deemed problematic in its classical meaning\(^7\), and reinterprets or even rejects historical sources when they contradict modern norms. This reinterpretation or rejection is mostly justified through source argumentations based on classical or modern methodologies. (III.) also accepts and applies hermeneutical elements of (II.), but uses modern ethics as its default position\(^8\) to distinguish between true and false sources and in general rejects the concept that elements of true prophetic revelation can become "outdated".\(^9\) Thus sources and interpretations presenting underaged marriage as acceptable are rejected as they are seen as misogynic, patriarchic, and abusive.

As Kecia Ali remarks\(^{10}\):

> *Muslim discussions of the Prophet's personal conduct in general, and his marriage to Aishah in particular, provide a lens through which to view changed attitudes toward sex and marriage, and unresolved concerns about the appropriateness of applying medieval standards in modern life. There are dangers in both historical anachronism and unchecked moral relativism, and in analyzing Muslim reflections on Muhammad's marriage to Aishah, several questions emerge about both the accuracy and relevance of historical information.*

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\(^7\) Edip Yuksel's *Quran: A Reformist Translation* (Brainbow Press, 2007) is a radical example of this as he has a Quranist-structuralist approach to the text, whereby traditional interpretations are generally deemed as false and barbaric. See especially his introduction where he provides a long list of classical interpretations which he views problematic. It can be downloaded here: [http://www.studyquran.org/resources/Quran_Reformist_Translation.pdf](http://www.studyquran.org/resources/Quran_Reformist_Translation.pdf)

\(^8\) In general modern human rights discourse is embraced, especially when it comes to human equality which revolves around gender equality and inclusivist or universalist approaches to non-Muslims, but on LHBT-identities a mostly conservatist stance is taken.


The Qur'an itself doesn't provide a specific age limit, but mental and physical criteria. There are some traditions (athār) discussing underaged marriage among the companions of Muḥammad, but the main focus next to the Qur'an is of course the prophetic Sunna. In the last two decades there appeared several articles written by Muslims that focused on refuting the traditions discussing the marriage age of ‘Ā’isha. The majority of these were written in English by Muslims that have no special training in classical Islamic sciences or modern academic Islamic studies. And for the majority they use the same arguments whereby it has become difficult to trace who copied from whom.

Their handling of the Arabic sources included:

11 Verse 4:6 says marriageable age (balaghūā al-Nikāḥ) is determined by mental maturity (rushd) and verse 6:152 adds bodily maturity (shudd), the majority of Fiqh scholars accepts these criteria as referring to a recommended age of 15 or 18 years, whereby some mention that founding imams as imam Malik and Abū Hanifa mentioned ages 21 and 25 [Mullājīyun al-Hanaff, Taṣārīt al-Aḥmadiyya fi Bayān al-Ayāt al-Sharīyyah (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ilmiyyah, 2010), 211-212. al-Māturīdī, Tāwilāt Ahl al-Sunna (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ilmiyyah, 2005), 4:316. Qāḍī Ibn al-‘Arabī, Ahkām al-Qur’ān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ilmiyyah, 1996), 1:418]. Although their preferred ages are very similar to ours today, the majority didn't see these as a form of minimal age and thus didn't forbid child marriage as they viewed that arranged underaged marriages could serve the wellbeing of the child (maslaḥa al-Walad) as long as compatibility (kafa') between the two prospective spouses is upheld. But their emphasize on both preferred ages and the match serving wellbeing does show an awareness of the possible problems surrounding underaged marriage. Scholars also used verse 65:4 to scriptualize underaged marriage whereby the divorced non-menstruating women (lam yahidna) was understood as referring to women being too old (kabīr) or too young (ṣaghir) for it. [Mullājīyun, ibid, 700. al-Zuḥaylī, ibid, 7:184]. For a further discussion on these Qur'anic criteria, see my upcoming paper with the working title: Ibn ‘Āshūr’s Maqāsid commentary on Qur’anic stipulations of marriageable age (2015).

Classically the scholars differed between contracting the marriage, and consummating it, they focused on the former while the latter was mostly linked to when the female is deemed bodily mature for it. al-Zuḥaylī emphasizes that there are no texts that forbid setting a legal minimum age for contracting the marriage, it is rather the opposite, the Qur'an links marriage to mental and bodily maturity and the majority of scholars preferred a marriageable age of 15+, compatibility (kafa'), and the acquisition of wellbeing (maslaḥa), which in today's society structures with modern education points to a preferred minimum age of 18 years. If anyone younger wants to marry, a judge can review the request as judges have inherited the guardianship of the fathers in this age. [al-Zuḥaylī, ibid, 7:188-189].


13 Kecia Ali, ibid, 138-143.

14 Ibid, 144.
shows that the majority doesn't know Arabic or how these sources are classified in Islamic methodologies. The two oldest references to this discussion is by Maulana Muhammad Ali (d. 1951) in 1948\textsuperscript{15} and by T.O. Shanavas in 1999, who both had access to Arabic sources.\textsuperscript{16} But the later articles show also an increase in sources, thus showing a development after Shanavas, whereby the interaction between the Islamawareness and Islamic-awakening websites are likely contributors due to them providing the sources also in Arabic and being older articles.\textsuperscript{17} The article by Shanavas copies Maulana Muhammad Ali's comparative sources discussion but adds an important element by questioning one of the narrators (Hishām ibn ‘Urwah) within the chain of transmission (isnād) of the Aḥādīth involved as being the source of mistakes in textual contents (matn). Thus Muhammad Ali applied textual contradiction to discredit the Aisha-age-traditions (matn criticism), and Shanavas added a reason why these mistakes could have ended up in these traditions in the first place (isnād criticism). The source comparison uses weaker sources (mostly from general history works without isnād, or lesser Aḥādīth collections) to discredit the contents of Aḥādīth belonging to the most authentic collections (ṣaḥīḥ), and raises only doubt about their content (matn). To question a narrator attacks the ṣaḥīḥ status of the isnād.\textsuperscript{18} The arguments found in these articles to discredit the Aisha-age-traditions can be summarized as:

A. Was ‘Ā’ishah born before or after Muḥammad started his prophetic mission?

B. Can her age before and around her betrothal and marriage to Muḥammad be determined by events she remembered or how she is described by others?

C. Can her age be determined by comparing it to her siblings?


\textsuperscript{16} [http://www.ilaam.net/articles/eyesha.html](http://www.ilaam.net/articles/eyesha.html) (accessed on 27-01-2015), see added as Appendix II.

\textsuperscript{17} [http://www.islamawareness.net/FAQ/what_was_ayesha.html](http://www.islamawareness.net/FAQ/what_was_ayesha.html) and [http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Polemics/aishah.html](http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Polemics/aishah.html) (accessed on 27-01-2015).

\textsuperscript{18} Kecia Ali, ibid, 139-140. This argument has been refuted as insufficient as there are other traditions mentioning the same age for ‘Ā’ishah where Hishām ibn ‘Urwah wasn't part of the isnād, see: [http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/21031](http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/21031) (accessed on 26-01-2015). Also al-‘idlibi’s analysis states that this idea is incorrect, see the translation below on p. 14.
D. Did the Arabs use a different understanding of numbers in relation to age as for example counting not from birth but from her first menstruation, or was there a misunderstanding between the pre-Islamic and Hijra calendar?

E. Do the differences between these other historical sources and between the Aisha-age-traditions themselves discredit their textual reliability?

F. Are the narrators of these traditions really reliable?

These apologetic discussions first or mostly occurred in English and has in the last decade crossed over into other languages, and also (returned) in Arabic, showing the concern on this issue isn't just a response to criticism within Western discourse, but has become part internal Muslim discourse through the increase of human rights awareness in the Muslim world. One of the major differences with the Western-Islamic discourse is that the Arabic discourse is held by professionals in Islamic sciences, but they retain or have come to most of the arguments already given in the English articles. One article I will discuss here is by a Syrian Ḥadīth scholar who applies a (III.) approach and uses all the arguments given above excepting (D.), but with one major difference: he uses classical 'ilm al-Ḥadīth terminology.

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-ʿidlibī, a contemporary Muḥaddith

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ibn Aḥmad al-ʿidlibī was born in 1948 in the Syrian city of Idlib. He is Shāfiʿī in lineage, and got a PhD in Islamic sciences with a speciality in Ḥadīth from the Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ḥassāniyah in Morocco in 1980. He has taught Ḥadīth sciences at several Arab universities, including the Kulliyah al-Darāssāt al-ʿislāmiyah wa al-ʿArabiyyah in Abu Dhabi and the Kulliyah al-Shariʿah in the United Arab Emirates. He has a website where his publications

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19 See a discussion on this in Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Misquoting Muḥammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet’s Legacy* (London: Oneworld, 2014), 145-148. Early 20th century Orientalist writing caused some discussions on this among higher classes and some intellectuals in Egypt, but it is the post-1990 era when this discussion seemed to have returned in Arabic, in far more Arab countries among the larger population, and by scholars trained in Islamic sciences.

20 See for example a lecture by the well known preacher Dr. Adnan Ibrahim: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8Nz2LpiYVs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8Nz2LpiYVs) (accessed on 26-01-2015).

21 Personal communication from his students at these universities.
and media appearances are posted.\textsuperscript{22} He is famous for writing a detailed response\textsuperscript{23} to a Salafi critique against the 'Āsh'arī theological school.\textsuperscript{24} His first publication (probably a rework of his PhD thesis) is a detailed research that tries to prove that textual (matn) criticism of prophetic Ḥadīth has been part of Islam since its beginnings.\textsuperscript{25} The Aisha-age-traditions are not discussed in it, but he provides many examples of famous Ḥadīth that are found in the Šahīḥ collections, which has been criticized by many foundational scholars, including ‘Ā’īsha who was famous for criticizing traditions that spoke in a denigrating manner about women or traditions with anthropomorphic contents.\textsuperscript{26} This book in my eyes shows the key element in al-‘idlibī’s approach to the Ḥadīth corpus whereby traditions are determined firstly by contents, and not just by isnād. Although scholars of Fiqh have always applied textual criticism, over the centuries the authenticity level of the isnād became more and more decisive in accepting a tradition and increased the reluctance to reject it.\textsuperscript{27} Al-‘idlibī on the other hand points out that to declare an isnād authentic (šahīḥ) it needs to comply to five conditions, while there are numerous reasons for a text (matn) to contain a mistake (‘ashbāb al-Wahm kathīrah). Only a tradition which is deemed both šahīḥ in isnād and matn can overcome it's probable truth factor (ghalab ‘alā al-Ẓanīn) but it still isn't multiple transmitted (lā yatawātar) and thus doesn't gain the certain truth factor (maquṭū’a) of a multiple

\textsuperscript{22} www.salahsafa.blogspot.com

\textsuperscript{23} Šalāḥ al-Dīn al-‘idlibī, ‘Aqā’īd al-‘Āshā’irah fī Hiwār hādī ma’ Shubhāt al-Munāwi’in (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2010).

\textsuperscript{24} Safar ibn ‘Abd Raḥmān al-Ḥawālī, Minhaj al-‘Āshā’irah fī al-‘Aqīdah (Riyadh: Dār al-Taybāt al-Kudharā, n.dt.).


\textsuperscript{26} For example, a famous tradition transmitted by Abū Hurayrah claims that the prayer is nullified when a donkey, dog or woman passes in front of the praying men, ‘Ā’īsha scolded Abū Hurayrah for this. Another famous saying by her is that "anyone claiming Muhammad saw Allah is lying, as God cannot be seen by human eyes", whereby she refuted the still dominant belief that Muḥammad’s night journey to heaven was in a bodily form.

\textsuperscript{27} Wael B. Hallaq, "The Authenticity of Prophetic Ḥadīth: A Pseudo-Problem", Studia Islamica, No. 89 (1999), 75-90.
transmitted tradition (al-Mutawātir).\(^{28}\) When a tradition has an authentic isnād but deviant contents (‘isnād ṣaḥīḥ wa matnahu shādīḥ) it is classified as weak and deficient (daʿīf) and can be rejected.\(^{29}\) Al-ʿidlibī thus clearly presents an ‘usūlī method in judging and classifying traditions\(^{30}\), although he never references his methodology to any ‘usūlī scholar. Jonathan Brown calls this approach 'Late Sunni Traditionalism', which is a revival of the ‘Ahl al-Rāʾy juristic methodology whereby "jurists, not hadith scholars, with the ultimate authority in determining the authenticity and implication of a hadith‘, making jurists "responsible for content criticism".\(^{31}\) Al-ʿidlibī is clearly influenced by, or follows a similar vision as, the lateʿAzharī scholar Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1996 CE) who saw a Ḥadīth only as truly ṣaḥīḥ if it didn't contain a hidden flaw (ʿillā) or contradict more reliable evidence.\(^{32}\) It is this methodology which we will also find in his discussion on the Aisha-age-traditions.

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\(^{28}\) A Mutawātir is a Ḥadīth or saying (khabar) which is transmitted in every stage of the stages of the sanad by multiple transmitters (general agreed upon requirement is 10 transmitters), whereby it can be rationally be concluded that these transmitters could not have agreed upon a fabrication (ʿikhtilāq). A Mutawātir provides necessary knowledge (al-ʿilm al-Ḍarūriyya). Any ṣaḥīḥ tradition that doesn't confirm to these criteria, but has an authentic isnād, is of the status of Aḥād (singular transmission) only provides conditional knowledge (al-ʿilm al-Mutawaqqīf), which needs further investigation. Maḥmūd al-Ṭahhān, Ṭaysir Muṣṭaḥār al-Ḥadīth (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Maʿārif li-lNushr wa al-Tawziʿa, 1425 AH), 23-25, 27.

\(^{29}\) al-ʿidlibī, ibid, 33.

\(^{30}\) For the difference between ‘usūlī and ʿathārī methodology, see: Hallaq, ibid, 79-85. For a classical ‘usūlī exposition, see: Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī, al-Muwāfiqāt fī ʿusūl al-Sharīʿah (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyyah, n.d.t.), 4:3-21.


\(^{32}\) Brown, ibid, 263. See the first two chapters in al-Ghazālī’s The Sunna of the Prophet between the People of the Fiqh and the People of the Ḥadīth (al-Sunnah al-Nubuwiyyah bayna ʾAḥl al-Fiqh wa ʾAḥl al-Ḥadīth) (translated by Aisha Bewley, Istanbul: Dar al-Taqwa, 2009).
Al-ʾidlibī’s analysis on the age of marriage of ‘Āʾishah

Although I was acquainted with English works on the age of ‘Āʾishah, and knew there were already Arabic discussions on this matter from the 1950’s, I hadn’t come across any work in Arabic until I saw a blogpost by professor Mohammed Fadel (University of Toronto) where he recounted his meeting with al-ʾidlibī and had posted a link to al-ʾidlibī’s essay. While reading I noticed he used many similar sources and arguments as the English works, but because he used classical terminology it didn’t feel apologetic. That he wrote a specific essay on it shows that the age presented in the traditions were probably disconcerting to him, but by applying his methodology and terminology this apologetic element isn’t present. In the essay he points out that because the Aisha-age-traditions are of ṣaḥīḥ status, there is no avoiding in studying it. If we take his ʿusūlī methodology in mind, it means that the ṣaḥīḥ status of the isnād demands that the matn must also be checked for an error (wahm), so that its probability status (zann) can be judged. Secondly, he says he came across some articles on this subject by some scholars, and he wanted to write about it to "sharpen some scientific thoughts in the condoning indifference on the positions of [source] weakness”. Meaning, he wants to point out to people that they remain to much indifferent on possible weaknesses in historical sources. Thus according to him, his objective is not to simply discredit the Aisha-age-traditions because he rejects the possibility of the Prophet marrying an underaged girl, but to use it as an example how people easily overlook mistakes in generally accepted sources. Just as his book on matn criticism tries to prove the classical practice of it, and thus its authenticity level as an Islamic methodology, this essay tries to show the necessity and usefulness of such criticism.

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33 See footnote 19 above. Brown also points out that other known 'Late Sunni Traditionalist' scholars as ‘Alī Goma’a also have written arguments against the Aisha-age-traditions, I hope to compare these in a later writing.

In his analysis he tries to determine ‘Ā’isha's age by determining:

1. The age difference and the birth-year of her older sister ’Asmā’
2. The possibility she experienced and narrated events at a certain age
3. The words used to describe her
4. When she converted to Islam
5. When her father married her mother
6. The way she was proposed as a possible spouse for the Prophet

He does this by using both graded and ungraded narrations, thus collecting as much evidence to prove there is a conflict between the gathered evidences and the original narration under question. Part of his argument is also based on the idea that it is unreasonable that she was four or younger at certain events (2.) and when she was proposed to the Prophet (6.), which uses assumptions about a child's capability and the way seventh century culture discussed possible spouses. It thus not simply an argument based on clear textual and linguistic comparison, but also involves the idea of what is reasonable. All this taken together is enough proof for al-’idlibī to declare the Aisha-age-traditions as containing an error (wahm), and thus being defective (ma’lūl).
Translation of al-‘idlibī’s essay

The transmitted Ḥadīth in the estimated age of the honorable ‘Ā’isha on the day of marriage contract and marriage

In the name of God most merciful ever merciful.

Praise to God numerous good blessed praising such as loving and pleasing our Lord, and praise to God whom by His blessings completes the righteous, the Lord completes through the good, and seals for us through the good, through Your beneficence and grace and honor, O Honored of the honored.

A Ḥadīth is transmitted about the Prophet, salutations of God upon him and peace, that he marriage-contracted (‘aqada) honorable ‘Ā’isha, God's pleasure upon her, and her years were six years and he married her [when she was] nine years. And is this Ḥadīth authentic in transmission chain (isnād) and textual contents (matn)?? [There] is no avoiding from its study.

I came across an article about this important subject written by some researcher in [source-]weakening (taḍā ‘īf) that Ḥadīth regarding transmission chain and textual contents, and I found that one [can get] possible gain (al-Mumkin al-Istifādah) from it in the sharpening

35 I have transliterated important words between brackets (), my additions to the text to amplify readability between [], and I stay as close to the Arabic sentence structures as possible by retaining the long sentences as much as possible. al-‘idlibī refers to several sources without precise references (he doesn't use footnotes in this essay), when I could trace the exact citations in the mentioned works I have added them in footnotes. I have added dates of death of the mentioned historians to show the period they were working in (which was mostly centuries after the compilers of Ḥadīth).

36 Translation of ṣalā Allah ‘alayhi wa salam, in the rest of the translation abbreviated as: (ṣA‘ws)

37 The contracting of a marriage refers to the agreement between the guardians and/or prospected spouses on the wish to get married and on the amount of dowry. The rootword ‘aqada literally means making a knot (thus the English expression on marriage as "tying the knot" comes very close) and is used for contracts, agreements etc. It can be used to refer to the contracting of the marriage and the existing marriage itself as a form of contract. In classical Shari‘ah constructs, betrothal (khitbah), contracting the marriage (‘aqd) and consummating it are separate acts whereby the first is an unofficial agreement between parties, the second an officializing agreement between parties with dowry, while the latter is generally when the female is deemed physically ready. [al-Zuḥaylī, ibid, 7:23-26, 43-65. Brown, Misquoting Muhammad, 143]

38 Translation of raḍī Allah ‘anhā, in the rest of the translation abbreviated as: (rA‘)
(al-Taqāṭ) of some scientific thoughts in the condoning (al-Taghāḍī) on the positions of [source] weakness (nuqāṭ al-Ḍuʿf), for the leaving [of this condoning] (al-Khurūj) through constituent result (bi natījah muʿassisah) on evidence (al-ʿAdilah) and conductive indications (al-Qarāʿīn al-Muwaṣṣilah) towards the rational correct expression, by God's authority.

And for necessary clarification (li ḏarūrah tajliyah) of the aspect of the rational correct (wajh al-Ṣawāb) in this important issue from the issues of the noble Prophetic biography and the reported tradition so this research supported through evidence in the history of the birth of honorable ‘Āʾīsha (rA’), and in estimation of her age (miqdār ‘umrahā) at the time the marriage-contract [was placed] upon her from the Messenger of God (ṣA’ws) and her age at the time of her wedding. And in this [there are] two said issues:

The first saying is well known (al-Mashūr): Is that he marriage-contracted her and she was a girl of six years and he married her and she was a girl of nine. They take through what is established on it from her saying in ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and others, which means that she's born after the Prophetic mission (baʿada al-Baʿthah al-Nabawiyah)39 by four years.

The second saying: Is that he marriage-contracted her and she was a girl of fourteen years and he married her and she was a girl of eighteen years, which means that she was born before (qabla) the mission by four years.

The evidence of the first saying:

Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others reported from Ṭariq on Hishām bin ‘Arwah on his father on ‘Āʾīsha that the Prophet (ṣA’ws) married her and she was a girl of six years, and he consummated with her and she was a girl of nine years. And Muslim's transmission is from Ṭariq Muʿammār on al-Zuhrī on ‘Arwah on ‘Āʾīsha. [End page 1]

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39 Throughout most of the essay al-ʿidlibī uses only al-Baʿath, the mission, to refer to the advent of the Prophetic mission. Although I will sometimes add 'prophetic' between brackets, I mostly just translate it literally with 'the mission', but it is best read as 'advent to the Prophetic mission'. It is generally accepted that the Prophet received his first revelation in 610 CE, thirteen years before the Hijrah.
And Ibn Ḥanbal and Muslim's transmission is from Ṭārīq al-ʿAswad bin Yazīd al-Nakhaʿī on ʿĀʾishah. And the wording "he married her (tazawwajahā)" is intended with the meaning of marriage-contract (al-ʿAqd), and this is the objective (al-Maqṣūd) here.

And the Ḥadīth it's transmission chain (sanad) is ṣaḥīḥ. And it's certainly incorrect (ʾakḥtā) as opinion (ẓann) that Hishām bin ʿArwah is isolated (tafarrada) in its transmission and that it is from his imagination (ʾawhāmah).  

The evidence of the second saying:

1 - ʿĀʾishah is younger than her sister ʿAsmāʾ (rAʾ) with 10 years, and ʿAsmāʾ was born before the Hijrah by twenty seven years, meaning before the Prophet mission by fourteen years, and this means that ʿĀʾishah was born before the Hijrah by four years.

Ibn ʿAsākir reported in the "Ṭārīkh Damashqī" through its sanad on ʿAbī al-Zanād that he said: "ʿAsmāʾ the daughter of ʿAbū Bakr was older than ʿĀʾishah by ten years."

And ʿAbū Naʿīm said in the "Maʿrifah al-Ṣaḥābah" in the biography (tarjamah) of ʿAsmāʾ: "She was born before the history by twenty seven years, and she died seventy three years later in Makkah after her son killed ʿAbd Allah bin al-Zubayr in [those] days, and she was a hundred years."

And [that] which confirms this report in the knowing the year of birth of ʿAsmāʾ is what ʿAbū Naʿīm reported such about her that she said: "I saw Zayd bin ʿAmrū bin Nafīl and supporting himself on the wall of the Kaʿbah, he said: O community of Quraysh, none of you today is

40 See footnote 3 above.
41 Here al-ʿidlibī dismisses the attempts by some apologists to try to find a weakness in the transmission chains of the Aisha-age-traditions to discredit them. See footnote 18 above.
42 Abū al-Qāsim ibn al-ʿAsākir (d. 571 AH), Ṭārīkh Damashqī (Dār al-Fikr al-Ṭabāʾi wa al-Nushr wa al-Tawziyaʾ, 1995), 69:8. The isnād is not graded, thus its authenticity compared to the Aisha-age-traditions is unknown.
43 The history here means the Hijrah in 623 CE, when the Meccan Muslims migrated to Medina, which soon after was turned into the starting point of the Islamic calendar, and thus, history.
44 Abū Naʿīm al-ʿAṣbīhānī (d. 430 AH), Maʿrifah al-Ṣaḥābah (Riyadh: Dār al-ʿAṭība wa al-Nushr, 1998), 6:3253. See also ibn al-ʿAsākir, ibid, 69:9. Again the isnād is not graded, thus its authenticity compared to the Aisha-age-traditions is unknown.
on the religion of Abraham other than I." Zayd had passed away and the Quraysh was building the Ka'abah before He [God] send down revelation on the Messenger of God by five years. Such was reported by Ibn Sa‘ad in the "al-Ṭabaqät" on Sa‘yd bin al-Musayb, meaning [this] was before the Hijrah by eighteen years, thus her age was nine years [when] she heard this as that time. And this is logical (ma‘aqūl), because anyone recollecting what was heard from him (ya‘dbut mithl hadhā al-Samā’ minhu) cannot be anything other than predominantly nine (tisa‘a fi al-Ghālib).

And ibn al-‘Atīr in the "'Asad al-Ghābah": 'Abū Na‘īm said: "She was born before history by twenty seven years." And ibn ‘Abd al-Birr said in "al-ʾistī‘āb": "And 'Asmā’ passed away in Makkah in Jumādī al-‘Awwal year seventy three [after Hijrah], and at her death she had reached a hundred years."

2 - Al-Bukhārī reported on ʿĀʾisha (rA’) that she said: "Indeed He sent in Makkah on Muḥammad (ṣA’ws), while I proceeded playing (li-jāriyah ‘ala’abu), {But surely the Hour is their appointed time, and the Hour is calamitous and bitter} and what was sent down of chapter al-Baqarah and al-Nisā’ except what was already with him." [End page 2]

Al-Qurṭubī says in his commentary (tafsīr): Ibn ‘Abbās said: "Between the sending down of this verse and between [the battle of] Badr were 7 years". And when it is as such, this means that it was sent down before the Hijrah by five years and after the [Prophetic] mission by eight.

45 al-ʾAṣbihānī, ibid, tradition 2843, 3:1134. Ungraded isnād.
49 Qur’ān 54:46.
50 al-ʾAsqalānī, ibid, 7:290. Isnād graded šahīḥ.
And ibn Sayd said in the "al-Muḥkām"\textsuperscript{52} and ibn Manẓūr in "Lisān al-ʿArab"\textsuperscript{53}: "al-Ǧāriyah: The youthful from the women (al-Fatiyyah min al-Nisāʾ)." And al-Fatiyyah is the juvenile woman (al-Shābbah). And they applied (yuṭaliqūn...ʿalā) the word "al-Ǧāriyah" for the girl in her adolescence (futāʾihā) and juvenileness (shabābahā) until the appearance of coming and going [of her menstrual period].\textsuperscript{54}

So how much is the age of ʿĀʾishā with the sending down of the Exalted His saying {But surely the Hour is their appointed time, and the Hour is calamitous and bitter} which was sent down after the [Prophetic] mission by eight years?!

Concerning the first saying her age is four years and a girl of four isn't called jāriyah as the first saying outlines. As for the second saying, her age is placed with the sending down of the verse estimating (thantī) ten years and thus is harmonious (al-Mansajim) with the meaning of al-Ǧāriyah.

3 - al-Bukhārī transmitted on ʿĀʾishā (rA') that she said: "I didn't understand my parents except that they professed the religion [of Islam], and no day would pass except with the visit of the messenger of God (ṣAʿws) at the morning daylight and night. So when the Muslims were tested [by being persecuted] Abū Bakr went out migrating towards Ethiopia, and when he reached al-Ghimād early he was met by Ibn al-Daghnah…" [till the end of the] tradition.

The aspect of interference from this narration are two issues:

First of the two is that a child cannot know the custom (al-ʿĀddah) professed by the majority of the people from its religious conversion and its religiosity (tadayyun) and its condition (alḍīhu) by the religion of others at four years, and if ʿĀʾishā was born four years after the [Prophetic] mission, and her first awareness (ʾayahā) of her surroundings in the 8th year [of the Prophetic mission] then her statement "I didn't understand my parents except that they professed the religion [of Islam]" is a result without use, because Abū Bakr was known to

\textsuperscript{52} Bin Sayd al-Mursī, \textit{al-Muḥkām wa al-Muḥīṭ al-ʿAzīm} (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʾilmiyyah, 2000), 7:625-626 (under the heading al-Shīn wa al-Bāʾ, the root of al-Ǧāriyah is jarā).

\textsuperscript{53} ibn Manẓūr al-ʿAnṣārī, \textit{Lisān al-ʿArab} (Beirut: Dār Ṣādr, 1414 AH), 7:81.

\textsuperscript{54} I interfere that it refers to the coming and going of her menstrual period, although by my knowledge it is unusual to use it for such.
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have been one of the earliest converts to Islam, and [his wife] 'Umm Rūmān became Muslim in Mecca in early times, as Ibn Sa'ad said.

However if she was born before the mission by four years, and her first awareness of her surroundings in the first year of the mission, that statement is useful. And is that - it explains she begins to become aware of her surroundings - she sees the condition of both of them professing the religion of Islam, and not only one condition.

And this proves that she was born before the mission with approximately four years, and this is proven in other evidences.

Second of the two is that her statement "So when the Muslims were tested [by being persecuted] Abū Bakr went out migrating towards Ethiopia“ is a turning point (Ma’tūfā) on her realization of her parents and they two professed the religion is so candid in that when she was [End page 3] was aware to this event (al-Huduth) and the departure of the companions from Mecca for the migration to Ethiopia was in the middle of the fifth year from the mission, and their migration second for her in the last of the fifth or beginning of the sixth.

And if ‘Ā‘īsha was born four years after the mission it was possible for her to be aware of that event in the beginning of the sixth year, and because she was born before the mission with four years, thus this means the possibility of her awareness for that with clarity (bi-wuḍūḥ).

4 - Muḥammad bin 'īshāq said in the Prophetic biography in mentioning 'Asmā’ as one of the first who became Muslim: "Then people from the Arab tribes submitted, from them Sa‘īd bin Zayd bin ‘Amr bin Nafīl and his wife Faṭimah bint al-Khaṭāb, and 'Asmā’ bint Abū Bakr, and ‘Ā‘īsha bint Abū Bakr and she was young (ṣaghīrah)....then God the Exalted commanded His messenger (ṣA‘ws) that he proclaim (yasda’) with what came with him. And that he announces through His command to mankind, and call towards God the Exalted, and maybe he concealed something and hide through it that command with its appearance, so it was broadcasted years after the mission, then God the Exalted said {So proclaim what you have been commanded, and turn away from the idolaters}.55

55 Qur‘ān 15:94
And Ibn Kathîr transmitted some of this text with the meaning as said: "Ibn 'îsâq said: Then God commanded His messenger (ṣA‘ws) after three years after the mission through that he proclaimed with what he was commanded, and that he endured on whom are idolaters."\(^{56}\)

And Ibn 'îsâq's statement means here that 'Ā‘îsha became Muslim during the time of the secret call [to Islam] (fitrah al-Da‘wah al-Siriyah) after the mission, and that she was young, and if that fitrah time period was 3 years, 'Ā‘îsha may have been brought in to some of the gatherings of the Muslims in the end of the fitrah. And on the statement that she was born after the mission by four years, this cannot be right in principle because she wasn't born after. In regards to the second statement, her age would be six years or seven. Perhaps ibn 'îsâq mentioned her as being amongst the first Muslims in spite of her young years as a respect for her father Abû Bakr (rA’), and consisted the turning point (Ma‘tūfah)\(^{57}\) of her sister 'Asmâ’ who was older than her by ten years.

5 - al-Ṭabarî says in his "Târikh": "Abû Bakr married in the pre-Islamic times (al-Jâhiliyyah) Qutilah ibnah ‘Abd al-‘Uzza and she fathered for him ‘Abd Allah and ‘Asmâ’, and he also married in the pre-Islamic times 'Umm Rûmân bint ‘Amir and she fathered for him ‘Abd al-Râhman and ‘Ā‘îsha, so all these four children were born from his two wives whom their [marriage] oaths were taken in the pre-Islamic times.\(^{58}\)

So these historical texts are candidly obvious in that ‘Ā‘îsha (rA’) was born before the Prophetic mission. [End page 4]

6 - Ibn Abî ‘Āṣam transmitted in the first and second, and al-Ṭabarânî in the "al-Mu‘jam al-Kabîr” and al-Ḥâkim in the "al-Mustadarak" on ‘Ā‘îsha (rA’) that Khawlah bint Ḥâkim, the wife of ‘Uthmân bin Muẓa‘ûn (rA’), said in Mecca to the messenger of God (ṣA‘ws): "In other words the messenger of God desists from marrying? He said: And who [do you suggest]? She said: Do you want a young woman (bakrā) or an old woman (thayibā)? He


\(^{57}\) Meaning here the conversion of ‘Asmâ’.

said: So who is the young woman? She said: The daughter of the most beloved of Allah’s
creation to you, ‘Ā’isha bint Abī Bakr. And he said: Who is the older woman? She said:
Sawdah bint Zama’ah. He said: So go and mention me to both of them.  

The context (al-Siyāq) proves that Khawlah (rA‘) wanted to speak to the messenger of God
(ṣA‘ws) after the passing of the honorable Khadijah, because from that moment he had no
wife, and in the purpose (Ghāyah) is improbable that she speaks to him in this case about her
who is of the age of six years!! However when she is a girl of fourteen years then this is
reasonable (ma‘qūl), and seems that this is correct (al-Ṣaḥīh).  

- And there is no doubt that together these proofs and external indications on the statement in
that the Prophet (ṣA‘ws) married ‘Ā’isha and her age being eighteen years is proven by strong
proof that this is correct.  

And in regards to what is established about ‘Ā’isha from that the messenger of God married
her and she was of nine years, and it is unavoidable that this is an error (wahmā). And she
(rA‘) lived - [based] on the deciding statement here - a seventy five years. So perhaps she was
afflicted (‘aṣābahā) by forgetfulness (al-Nisayān) in this matter, thus its narration is
erroneous (al-Tawahhum).  

And the error of the narrated statement (tawahhīm al-Qawl al-Murawī) about ‘Ā’isha (rA‘)
doesn't escape it, and that from the gathered evidences and indications which presents its
conflict (khilāfāh).  

- The summary of the research:  

Based on the gathered of evidences and indications that the honorable ‘Ā’isha (rA‘) was born
before the mission by four years, and she was marriage-contracted (‘aqada ‘alayhā) by the
messenger of God (ṣA‘ws) in the tenth year of the mission and her age was fourteen years,

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59 Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr (Cairo: Maktabah ibn Taymiyah, 1994),
23:23. Nu‘im bin al-Hākim al-Naysābūrī, al-Mustadarak ‘alā al-Saḥīhayn (Beirut: Dār al-

60 Wahm is a technical indication within the classical Hadith sciences: "When an error
(wahm) is discovered through external indications (al-Qarā‘īn) and the gathered the paths [of
transmission], then it is defective (al-Mu‘allah)", al-ʿAsqalānī, Nukhabah al-Fikr fī Muṣṭalaḥ Ahl
al-Athār (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1997), 8.
before the Hijrah by three years. And married her in the end of the first year after the Hijrah and her age was eighteen years.

The mentioned tradition in specifying the age of ‘Ā‘īsha by six years on the day of the marriage-contracting and nine years on the day of marriage are authentic in the chain of transmission (ṣaḥīḥ al-‘isnād), however it conflicts with the researched texts and historical indications. Thus it is defective (ma‘lūl) because it is from those that are erroneous (al-‘Awhām). [End page 4]

The imams (rA) stated that the narration when its contents (matn) conflicts with what is stronger evidence from reliable history, it is thus rejected (yuradd), because it is proven that it is in some way unsound (al-Khalal) through an occurring cause of error (al-Wahm) in the single narration.

And God knows best.

And praise be God, Lord of the worlds.

[End of essay]
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الحديث الوارد في مقدار عمر السيدة عائشة

يوم العقد ويوم الزواج

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله حمداً كثيراً طيباً مباركاً فيه كما يحب ربي ويرضي، والحمد لله الذي
بنعمته تتم الصالحات، رب تأم بالخير، واختتم لنا بالخير، بفضلك ومنك وكرمرك يا
أكرم الأكرمين.

ورد حديث عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه عقد على السيدة عائشة رضي الله عنها وسنها ست سنوات وتزوجها وسنها تسع سنوات، فهل صح هذا الحديث
سندًا ومتنًا؟ لا بد من الدراسة.

كنت قد وقفت على مقالة حول هذا الموضوع الهام كتبها أحد الباحثين في
تضعيف ذلك الحديث من حيث السند والمتن، ووجدت أن من الممكن الاستفادة منها
في النقاط بعض الأفكار العقلية مع التغاضى عن نقط الضعف، للخروج بنتيجة
مؤسسة على الأدلة والقرائن الموصلة إلى القول الصواب بإذن الله.

ولضرورة تجلية وجه الصواب في هذه المسألة الهامة من مسائل السيرة
النبيّة الشريفة والروایات الحديثة فهذا بحث مدفوع بالأدلة في تاريخ ولادة السيدة
عائشة رضي الله عنها، وفي مقدار عمرها وقت العقد عليها من رسول الله صلى الله
عليه وسلم ومصرحها وقت زفافها، وفي هذه المسألة قوله:

القول الأول المشهور: هو أنه عقد عليها وهي بنت ست سنين وتزوجها وهي
بنت تسع، أخذًا بما ثبت عنها من قولها في صحيح البخاري وغيره، مما يعني أنها
ولدت بعد البعثة النبوية بأربع سنين.

القول الثاني: هو أنه عقد عليها وهي ابنة أربع عشرة وتزوجها وهي ابنة
ثمانية عشرة، مما يعني أنها ولدت قبل البعثة بأربع سنين.

دليل القول الأول:

روى البخاري ومسلم وغيرهما من طريق عن هشام بن عروة عن أبيه عن
عائشة أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم تزوجها وهي بنت ست سنين وبنى بها وهي
بنت تسع سنين. ورواه مسلم من طريق معمر عن الزهري عن عروة عن عائشة.
ورواه ابن حنبل ومسلم من طريق الأسود بن يزيد النخعي عن عائشة. وكلمة "تزوجها" قد ترد بمعنى العقد، وهذا هو المقصود هنا.

فالحدث سنده صحيح، وقد أخطأ من ظن أن هشام بن عروة تفرد بروايته وأنه من أوهامه.

ادلة القول الثاني:

1 - عائشة أصغر من أختها أسماء رضي الله عنهما بعشر سنين، وقد ولدت أسماء قبل الهجرة بسبع وعشرين سنة، أي قبل البعثة النبوية بثمان سنوات، وهذا يعني أن عائشة ولدت قبل البعثة نبوي بسبع سنوات.

روى ابن عساكر في تاريخ دمشق بسنده عن ابن أبي الزناد أنه قال: كانت أسماء بنت أبي بكر أكبر من عائشة بعشر سنين.

وقال أبو نعيم في معرفة الصحابة في ترجمة أسماء: "ولدت قبل التاريخ بسبع وعشرين سنة، وتوفيت سنة ثلاث وسبعين بعدها بعد قتل ابنها عبد الله بن الزبير بأيام، ولها سنة مئة.

ومما يؤكد هذه الرواية في معرفة سنة ولادة أسماء ما روى أبو نعيم كذلك عنها أنها قالت: "رأيت زيد بن عمرو بن نفيل وهو مسن ظهره إلى الكعبة يقول: يا ماهر قريش، ما منكم اليوم أحد على دين إبراهيم غيري. وقد توفي زيد وقريش بنو اليمان بن سعيد بن المغيرة بن قريش بن بكر بن قريش بن كلثوم بن عبد المطلب بن قريش بن قبيلة. وفي البيت عن سعيد بن المغيرة، أي قيل الهجرة بثمانية عشر عاماً، فيكون عمرها وقت سماعها إياه تسع سنين، وهذا معقول، لأن من يضبط مثل هذا السماع منه لا يكون دون تسع في الغالب.


2 - روى البخاري عن عائشة رضي الله عنها أنها قالت: لقد نزل بعدها لئلاً سورة البقرية 112 في البقرة والإنس، وسورة البقرة 112 في البقرة، وما نزلت سورة البقرة إلا و أنا عنده.
قال القرطبي في تفسيره: "كان بين نزول هذه الآية وبين بدر سبع سنين" وإذا كان ذلك كذلك فهذا يعني أنها نزلت قبل الهجرة بخمس سنين وبعد البعثة بثمان.

وقال ابن سيده في المحكم وابن منظور في لسان العرب: الجارية: الفتى من النساء. والفتية هي الشابة. وكانهم يطلقون لفظة الجارية على البنت في أول فتراتها وشبابها حيث تجري جيئة وذهابا.

فكم كان عمر عائشة عند نزول قوله تعالى {فبموعدهم والساعة أدهى و أمر} الذي نزل بعد البعثة بثمان سنين؟!

أما على القول الأول فكون عمرها أربع سنوات، وبنت الأربع لا يقال لها جارية، فالقول الأول خطأ، وأما على القول الثاني فيكون عمرها وقت نزول الآية ثنتي عشرة سنة، وهذا هو المنسجم مع معنى الجارية.

وجه الدلالة من هذه الرواية أمران:

أولهما أن الطفل لا يدرك في العادة تدْيَن أكثر الناس من حوله بدين وتدين والديه بدين مغاير قبل سن الرابعة، ولو كانت عائشة قد ولدت في السنة الرابعة من البعثة وكان أول وعيها بما حولها في السنة الثامنة منها لكان قولها "لم أعقل أبوتي قط إلا وهو يدين الدين، ولم يمر علينا يوم إلا يأتينا فيه رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم طرف النهار بكرة وعشية، فلما ابتل المسلمون خرج أبو بكر مهاجرا قبل الحبشة، حتى إذا بلغ برك الغماد لقيه ابن الدغنة..." الحديث.

ولكن إذا كانت قد ولدت قبل البعثة بأربع سنوات وكان أول وعيها بما حولها في السنة الأولى من البعثة فكون لهذا القول فائدة، وهي أنها - أول ما بدأت تعي ما حولها - رأت والديها كليهما يدينان بدين الإسلام، وليس والدها فقط.

وهذا دليل على أن ولادتها كانت قبل البعثة بنحو أربع سنوات، وهذا ما دلت عليه القروان الأخرى.

وثانيهما أن قولهما "فلم يبتل المسلمون خرج أبو بكر مهاجرا قبل الحبشة" معطوفا على إدراكها لأبويها وهما يدينان الدين هو كالصريح في أنها كانت إذ ذلك.
واعية لهذا الحدث، وخروج الصحابة من مكة للهجرة قبل الحبشة كان في أواسط السنة الخامسة من البعثة، وهرجتهم الثانية إليها في أواخر الخامسة أو أوائل السادسة.

ولو كانت عائشة قد ولدت في السنة الرابعة من البعثة لما كان ممكنا لها أن تدرك ما حدث في أوائل السادسة، ولكن إذا كانت قد ولدت قبل البعثة بأربع سنوات.

هذا يعني إمكان إدراكها لذلك بوضوح.

ـ قال محمد بن إسحاق في السيرة النبوية في ذكر أسماء أوائل من أسلموا:

"ثم أسلم ناس من قبائل العرب، منهم سعيد بن زيد بن عمرو بن نفيل، وامرأته فاطمة بنت الخطاب، وأسماء بنت أبي بكر، وعائشة بنت أبي بكر وهي صغيرة، ... ثم إن الله تعالى أمر رسوله صلى الله عليه وسلم أن يصدع بما جاء به، وأن ينادي الناس بأمره، وأن يدعو إلى الله تعالى، وكان ربما أخى الشيء واستمر به إلى أن أمر بإظهاره، فلبث سنين من مبتعده، ثم قال الله تعالى (فاصدع بما تؤمر وأعرض عن المشورين)".

ونقل ابن كثير بعض هذا النص بالمعنى فقال: قال ابن إسحاق: ثم أمر الله رسوله صلى الله عليه وسلم بعد ثلاث سنين من البعثة بأن يصدع بما أمر، وأن يصبر على أذى المشورين.

وكلام ابن إسحاق يعني أن عائشة أسملت في فترة الدعوة السرية بعد البعثة، وأنها كانت صغيرة، وإذا كانت تلك الفترة قد دامت ثلاث سنوات فعلى عائشة قد أحضرت إلى بعض تلك المجالس في أوائل الفترة، وعلى القول بأنها ولدت بعد البعثة بأربع سنين فهذا لا ينطبق أصلا، إذ ما كانت قد ولدت بعد، وأما على القول الثاني فيكون عمرها ست سنوات أو سبع سنوات، ولعل ابن إسحاق ذكرها في المسلمين الأولين رغم صغر سنها لمقام والدها أبي بكر رضوان الله عليه، ولتكون مطغية على أختها أسماء التي هي أكبر منها بعشر سنوات.

ـ قال الطبري في تاريخه: "تزوج أبو بكر في الجاهلية ابنتا عبد العزيز فولدت له عبد الله وأسماء، وتزوج أيضا في الجاهلية أم رومان بنت عامر فولدت له عبد الرحمن وعائشة، فكل هؤلاء الأربعة من أولاده ولدوا من زوجتهه اللتين سميئهما في الجاهلية".

هذا نص تاريخي واضح صريح في أن عائشة رضي الله عنها ولدت قبل البعثة النبوية.

يبدل السياق على أن خولة رضي الله عنها أرادت أن تخطب لرسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم بعد وفاة السيدة خديجة، لأنه أصبح بلا زوجة، وفي غاية البعد أن تخطب له في هذه الحال من لها من العمر ست سنوات!! لكن إذا كانت بنت أربع عشرة سنة فهذا معقول، ويبدو أن هذا هو الصحيح.

ولا شك في أن اجتماع هذه الأدلة والقائن على القول بأن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم تزوج عائشة وعمرها ثمانية عشر عاما يدل دلالة قوية على أن هذا هو الصحيح.

وأما ما ثبت عن عائشة من أن رسول الله تزوجها وهي ابنة تسعة سنين فلا بد أن يكون وهم، وقد عاشت رضي الله عنها - على القول المرجح هنا - خمسة وسبعين عاما، فلعلها قد أصابها شيء من النسيان في هذا الأمر. فروده على التوهم.

وتوضيح القول المروي عن عائشة رضي الله عنها لا مناص عنه، وذلك لا اجتماع الأدلة والقرائن التي تقوم ذكرها على خلافه.

- خلاصة البحث:

ترجح من اجتماع عدد من الأدلة والقرائن أن السيدة عائشة رضي الله عنها ولدت قبل البعثة بأربع سنوات، وعقد عليها رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في السنة العاشرة من البعثة وعمرها أربعة عشر عاما، قبل الهجرة بثلاث سنوات، وتزوجها في أواخر السنة الأولى بعد الهجرة وعمرها ثمانية عشر عاما.

الحديث الوارد في تحديد عمر عائشة بست سنوات يوم العقد وبست سنوات يوم الزواج صحيح الإسناد، ولكنه مخالف للنصوص والقرائن التاريخية الثابتة، فهو معلول، لأنه من الأوهام.
وقد ذكر الأئمة رحمهم الله أن الحديث إذا خالف متنه ما هو أقوى ثبوتا منه من ثوابت التاريخ فإنه يرد، لأن ذلك يدل على أنه قد تطرق إليه الخلل بسبب وقوع أحد رواته في الهم. والله أعلم.

والحمد لله رب العالمين.
Was Ayesha A Six-Year-Old Bride?

The Ancient Myth Exposed

by T.O. Shanavas

A Christian friend asked me once, “Will you marry your seven year old daughter to a fifty year old man?” I kept my silence. He continued, “If you would not, how can you approve the marriage of an innocent seven year old, Ayesha, with your Prophet?” I told him, “I don’t have an answer to your question at this time.” My friend smiled and left me with a thorn in the heart of my faith. Most Muslims answer that such marriages were accepted in those days. Otherwise, people would have objected to Prophet’s marriage with Ayesha.

However, such an explanation would be gullible only for those who are naive enough to believe it. But unfortunately, I was not satisfied with the answer.

The Prophet was an exemplary man. All his actions were most virtuous so that we, Muslims, can emulate them. However, most people in our Islamic Center of Toledo, including me, would not think of betrothing our seven years daughter to a fifty-two year-old man. If a parent agrees to such a wedding, most people, if not all, would look down upon the father and the old husband.

In 1923, registrars of marriage in Egypt were instructed not to register and issue official certificates of marriage for brides less than sixteen and grooms less than eighteen years of age. Eight years later, the Law of the Organization and Procedure of Sheriah courts of 1931 consolidated the above provision by not hearing the marriage disputes involving brides less than sixteen and grooms less than eighteen years old. (Women in Muslim Family Law, John Esposito, 1982). It shows that even in the Muslim majority country of Egypt the child marriages are unacceptable.

So, I believed, without solid evidence other than my reverence to my Prophet, that the stories of the marriage of seven-year-old Ayesha to 50-year-old Prophet are only myths. However, my long pursuit in search of the truth on this matter proved my intuition correct. My Prophet was a gentleman. And he did not marry an innocent seven or nine year old girl.
The age of Ayesha has been erroneously reported in the hadith literature. Furthermore, I think that the narratives reporting this event are highly unreliable. Some of the hadith (traditions of the Prophet) regarding Ayesha’s age at the time of her wedding with prophet are problematic. I present the following evidences against the acceptance of the fictitious story by Hisham ibn `Urwah and to clear the name of my Prophet as an irresponsible old man preying on an innocent little girl.

EVIDENCE #1: Reliability of Source

Most of the narratives printed in the books of hadith are reported only by Hisham ibn `Urwah, who was reporting on the authority of his father. First of all, more people than just one, two or three should logically have reported. It is strange that no one from Medina, where Hisham ibn `Urwah lived the first 71 years of his life narrated the event, despite the fact that his Medinan pupils included the well-respected Malik ibn Anas. The origins of the report of the narratives of this event are people from Iraq, where Hisham is reported to have shifted after living in Medina for most of his life.

*Tezhib*’ul-Tezhib, one of the most well known books on the life and reliability of the narrators of the traditions of the Prophet, reports that according to Yaqub ibn Shaibah: “He [Hisham] is highly reliable, his narratives are acceptable, except what he narrated after moving over to Iraq” (Tezhib’ul-tezhib’ib, Ibn Hajar Al-`asqala’ni, Dar Ihya al-turath al-Islami, 15th century. Vol 11, p. 50).

It further states that Malik ibn Anas objected on those narratives of Hisham which were reported through people in Iraq: “I have been told that Malik objected on those narratives of Hisham which were reported through people of Iraq” (Tehzib u’l-tezhib, Ibn Hajar Al-`asqala’ni, Dar Ihya al-turath al-Islami, Vol.11, p. 50).

*Mizan*I’al’tidal, another book on the life sketches of the narrators of the traditions of the Prophet reports: “When he was old, Hisham’s memory suffered quite badly” (Mizan*I’al’tidal, Al-Zahbi, Al-Maktabatu’l-athriyyah, Sheikhupura, Pakistan, Vol. 4, p. 301).

CONCLUSION: Based on these references, Hisham’s memory was failing and his narratives while in Iraq were unreliable. So, his narrative of Ayesha’s marriage and age are unreliable.

CHRONOLOGY: It is vital also to keep in mind some of the pertinent dates in the history of Islam:

- pre-610 CE: Jahiliya (pre-Islamic age) before revelation
- 610 CE: First revelation
- 610 CE: AbuBakr accepts Islam
- 613 CE: Prophet Muhammad begins preaching publicly.
- 615 CE: Emigration to Abyssinia
- 616 CE: Umar bin al Khattab accepts Islam
- 620 CE: Generally accepted betrothal of Ayesha to the Prophet
- 622 CE: Hijrah (emigration to Yathrib, later renamed Medina)
- 623/624 CE: Generally accepted year of Ayesha living with the Prophet

**EVIDENCE #2: The Betrothal**

According to Tabari (also according to Hisham ibn ‘Urwah, Ibn Hunbal and Ibn Sad), Ayesha was betrothed at seven years of age and began to cohabit with the Prophet at the age of nine years.

However, in another work, Al-Tabari says: “All four of his [Abu Bakr’s] children were born of his two wives during the pre-Islamic period” (*Tarikhu’l-umam wa’l-mamlu’k*, Al-Tabari (died 922), Vol. 4, p. 50, Arabic, Dara’il-fikr, Beirut, 1979).

If Ayesha was betrothed in 620 CE (at the age of seven) and started to live with the Prophet in 624 CE (at the age of nine), that would indicate that she was born in 613 CE and was nine when she began living with the Prophet. Therefore, based on one account of Al-Tabari, the numbers show that Ayesha must have born in 613 CE, three years after the beginning of revelation (610 CE). Tabari also states that Ayesha was born in the pre-Islamic era (in Jahiliya). If she was born before 610 CE, she would have been at least 14 years old when she began living with the Prophet. Essentially, Tabari contradicts himself.

**CONCLUSION: Al-Tabari is unreliable in the matter of determining Ayesha’s age.**

**EVIDENCE #3: The Age of Ayesha in Relation to the Age of Fatima**

According to Ibn Hajar, “Fatima was born at the time the Ka`bah was rebuilt, when the Prophet was 35 years old... she was five years older that Ayesha” (*Al-isabah fi tamyizi’l-sahabah*, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Vol. 4, p. 377, Maktabatu’l-Riyadh al-haditha, al-Riyadh, 1978).

If Ibn Hajar’s statement is factual, Ayesha was born when the Prophet was 40 years old. If Ayesha was married to the Prophet when he was 52 years old, Ayesha’s age at marriage would be 12 years.

**CONCLUSION: Ibn Hajar, Tabari an Ibn Hisham and Ibn Humbal contradict each other. So, the marriage of Ayesha at seven years of age is a myth.**

**EVIDENCE #4: Ayesha’s Age in relation to Asma’s Age**


According to Ibn Kathir: “She [Asma] was elder to her sister [Ayesha] by 10
According to Ibn Kathir: “She [Asma] saw the killing of her son during that year [73 AH], as we have already mentioned, and five days later she herself died. According to other narratives, she died not after five days but 10 or 20, or a few days over 20, or 100 days later. The most well known narrative is that of 100 days later. At the time of her death, she was 100 years old.” (Al-Bidayah wa'l-nihayah, Ibn Kathir, Vol. 8, p. 372, Dar al-fikr al-`arabi, Al-jizah, 1933)

According to Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani: “She [Asma] lived a hundred years and died in 73 or 74 AH.” (Taqribu’l-tehzib, Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani, p. 654, Arabic, Bab fi'l-nisa’, al-harfu'l-alif, Lucknow).

According to almost all the historians, Asma, the elder sister of Ayesha was 10 years older than Ayesha. If Asma was 100 years old in 73 AH, she should have been 27 or 28 years old at the time of the hijrah.

If Asma was 27 or 28 years old at the time of hijrah, Ayesha should have been 17 or 18 years old. Thus, Ayesha, being 17 or 18 years of the time of Hijra, she started to cohabit with the Prophet between at either 19 to 20 years of age.

Based on Hajar, Ibn Katir, and Abda’l-Rahman ibn abi zanna’d, Ayesha’s age at the time she began living with the Prophet would be 19 or 20. In Evidence # 3, Ibn Hajar suggests that Ayesha was 12 years old and in Evidence #4 he contradicts himself with a 17 or 18-year-old Ayesha. What is the correct age, twelve or eighteen?

CONCLUSION: Ibn Hajar is an unreliable source for Ayesha’s age.

EVIDENCE #5: The Battles of Badr and Uhud

A narrative regarding Ayesha’s participation in Badr is given in the hadith of Muslim, (Kitabu’l-jihad wa’l-siyar, Bab karahiyati’il-isti’anah fi’l-ghazwi bikafir). Ayesha, while narrating the journey to Badr and one of the important events that took place in that journey, says: “when we reached Shajarah”. Obviously, Ayesha was with the group travelling towards Badr. A narrative regarding Ayesha’s participation in the Battle of Uhud is given in Bukhari (Kitabu’l-jihad wa’l-siyar, Bab Ghazwi’il-nisa’ wa qitalihinna ma’a’l’irjal): “Anas reports that on the day of Uhud, people could not stand their ground around the Prophet. [On that day,] I saw Ayesha and Umm-i-Sulaim, they had pulled their dress up from their feet [to avoid any hindrance in their movement].” Again, this indicates that Ayesha was present in the Battles of Uhud and Badr.

It is narrated in Bukhari (Kitabu’l-maghazi, Bab Ghazwati’il-khandaq wa hiya’il-ahza’b): “Ibn `Umar states that the Prophet did not permit me to participate in Uhud, as at that time, I was 14 years old. But on the day of
Khandaq, when I was 15 years old, the Prophet permitted my participation.”

Based on the above narratives, (a) the children below 15 years were sent back and were not allowed to participate in the Battle of Uhud, and (b) Ayesha participated in the Battles of Badr and Uhud.

CONCLUSION: Ayesha’s participation in the Battles of Badr and Uhud clearly indicates that she was not nine years old but at least 15 years old. After all, women used to accompany men to the battlefields to help them, not to be a burden on them. This account is another contradiction regarding Ayesha’s age.

EVIDENCE #6: Surat al-Qamar (The Moon)

According to the generally accepted tradition, Ayesha was born about eight years before hijrah. But according to another narrative in Bukhari, Ayesha is reported to have said: “I was a young girl (jariyah in Arabic)” when Surah Al-Qamar was revealed (Sahih Bukhari, kitabu’l-tafsir, Bab Qaulihi Bal al-sa`atu Maw`iduhum wa`l-sa`atu adha’ wa amarr).

Chapter 54 of the Quran was revealed eight years before hijrah (The Bounteous Koran, M.M. Khatib, 1985), indicating that it was revealed in 614 CE. If Ayesha started living with the Prophet at the age of nine in 623 CE or 624 CE, she was a newborn infant (sibyah in Arabic) at the time that Surah Al-Qamar (The Moon) was revealed. According to the above tradition, Ayesha was actually a young girl, not an infant in the year of revelation of Al-Qamar. Jariyah means young playful girl (Lane’s Arabic English Lexicon). So, Ayesha, being a jariyah not a sibyah (infant), must be somewhere between 6-13 years old at the time of revelation of Al-Qamar, and therefore must have been 14-21 years at the time she married the Prophet.

CONCLUSION: This tradition also contradicts the marriage of Ayesha at the age of nine.

EVIDENCE #7: Arabic Terminology

According to a narrative reported by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, after the death of the Prophet’s first wife Khadijah, when Khaulah came to the Prophet advising him to marry again, the Prophet asked her regarding the choices she had in mind. Khaulah said: “You can marry a virgin (bikr) or a woman who has already been married (thayyib)”. When the Prophet asked the identity of the bikr (virgin), Khaulah mentioned Ayesha’s name.

All those who know the Arabic language are aware that the word bikr in the Arabic language is not used for an immature nine-year-old girl. The correct word for a young playful girl, as stated earlier, is jariyah. Bikr on the other hand, is used for an unmarried lady without conjugal experience prior to marriage, as we understand the word “virgin” in English. Therefore,
obviously a nine-year-old girl is not a “lady” (*bikr*) (Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Vol. 6, p. 210, Arabic, Dar Ihya al-turath al-`arabi, Beirut).

CONCLUSION: The literal meaning of the word, *bikr* (virgin), in the above hadith is “adult woman with no sexual experience prior to marriage.” Therefore, Ayesha was an adult woman at the time of her marriage.

EVIDENCE #8. The Qur’anic Text

All Muslims agree that the Quran is the book of guidance. So, we need to seek the guidance from the Quran to clear the smoke and confusion created by the eminent men of the classical period of Islam in the matter of Ayesha’s age at her marriage. Does the Quran allow or disallow marriage of an immature child of seven years of age?

There are no verses that explicitly allow such marriage. There is a verse, however, that guides Muslims in their duty to raise an orphaned child. The Quran’s guidance on the topic of raising orphans is also valid in the case of our own children. The verse states: “And make not over your property (property of the orphan), which Allah had made a (means of) support for you, to the weak of understanding, and maintain them out of it, clothe them and give them good education. And test them until they reach the age of marriage. Then if you find them maturity of intellect, make over them their property...” (Quran, 4:5-6).

In the matter of children who have lost a parent, a Muslim is ordered to (a) feed them, (b) clothe them, (c) educate them, and (d) test them for maturity “until the age of marriage” before entrusting them with management of finances.

Here the Quranic verse demands meticulous proof of their intellectual and physical maturity by objective test results before the age of marriage in order to entrust their property to them.

In light of the above verses, no responsible Muslim would hand over financial management to a seven- or nine-year-old immature girl. If we cannot trust a seven-year-old to manage financial matters, she cannot be intellectually or physically fit for marriage. Ibn Hambal (Musnad Ahmad ibn Hambal, vol.6, p. 33 and 99) claims that nine-year-old Ayesha was rather more interested in playing with toy-horses than taking up the responsible task of a wife. It is difficult to believe, therefore, that AbuBakr, a great believer among Muslims, would betroth his immature seven-year-old daughter to the 50-year-old Prophet. Equally difficult to imagine is that the Prophet would marry an immature seven-year-old girl.

Another important duty demanded from the guardian of a child is to educate them. Let us ask the question, “How many of us believe that we can educate our children satisfactorily before they reach the age of seven or nine years?” The answer is none. Logically, it is an impossible task to educate a child satisfactorily before the child attains the age of seven. Then, how can
we believe that Ayesha was educated satisfactorily at the claimed age of seven at the time of her marriage?

AbuBakr was a more judicious man than all of us. So, he definitely would have judged that Ayesha was a child at heart and was not satisfactorily educated as demanded by the Quran. He would not have married her to anyone. If a proposal of marrying the immature and yet to be educated seven-year-old Ayesha came to the Prophet, he would have rejected it outright because neither the Prophet nor AbuBakr would violate any clause in the Quran.

CONCLUSION: The marriage of Ayesha at the age of seven years would violate the maturity clause or requirement of the Quran. Therefore, the story of the marriage of the seven-year-old immature Ayesha is a myth.

EVIDENCE #9: Consent in Marriage

A women must be consulted and must agree in order to make a marriage valid (Mishakat al Masabiah, translation by James Robson, Vol. I, p. 665). Islamically, credible permission from women is a prerequisite for a marriage to be valid.

By any stretch of the imagination, the permission given by an immature seven-year-old girl cannot be valid authorization for marriage.

It is inconceivable that AbuBakr, an intelligent man, would take seriously the permission of a seven-year-old girl to marry a 50-year-old man.

Similarly, the Prophet would not have accepted the permission given by a girl who, according to the hadith of Muslim, took her toys with her when she went live with Prophet.

CONCLUSION: The Prophet did not marry a seven-year-old Ayesha because it would have violated the requirement of the valid permission clause of the Islamic Marriage Decree. Therefore, the Prophet married an intellectually and physically mature lady Ayesha.

SUMMARY:

It was neither an Arab tradition to give away girls in marriage at an age as young as seven or nine years, nor did the Prophet marry Ayesha at such a young age. The people of Arabia did not object to this marriage because it never happened in the manner it has been narrated.

Obviously, the narrative of the marriage of nine-year-old Ayesha by Hisham ibn `Urwah cannot be held true when it is contradicted by many other reported narratives. Moreover, there is absolutely no reason to accept the narrative of Hisham ibn `Urwah as true when other scholars, including Malik ibn Anas, view his narrative while in Iraq, as unreliable. The quotations from Tabari, Bukhari and Muslim show they contradict each other regarding
Ayesha’s age. Furthermore, many of these scholars contradict themselves in their own records. Thus, the narrative of Ayesha’s age at the time of the marriage is not reliable due to the clear contradictions seen in the works of classical scholars of Islam.

Therefore, there is absolutely no reason to believe that the information on Ayesha’s age is accepted as true when there are adequate grounds to reject it as myth. Moreover, the Quran rejects the marriage of immature girls and boys as well as entrusting them with responsibilities.

T.O. Shanavas is a physician based in Michigan. This article first appeared in The Minaret in March 1999.

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E-mail your comments to amirali@ilaam.net
I was reading the article related to Hadhrat Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā about her marriage with our Nabī Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam. In this article, the author has given some facts to prove that she was not nine when she got married.

Kindly tell me your views in detail. Hereunder is the article:

IT is said that Hazrat Aisha was six years old when her nikah was performed with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Makkah, and nine years old when she moved in to live with her husband in Madina after Hijra.

This piece of misinformation has led to the wrong view that child marriage has the sanction of Islam. It must be noted that establishing the authenticity of hadiths, the narrators' circumstances and the conditions at that time have to be correlated with historical facts. There is only one hadith by Hisham which suggests the age of Hazrat Aisha as being nine when she came to live with her husband.

Many authentic hadiths also show that Hisham's narration is incongruous with several historical facts about the Prophet's life, on which there is consensus. With reference to scholars such as Umar Ahmed Usmani, Hakim Niaz Ahmed and Habibur Rehman Kandhulvi, I would like to present some arguments in favour of the fact that Hazrat Aisha was at least 18 years old when her nikah was performed and at least 21 when she moved into the Prophet's house to live with him.

According to Umar Ahmed Usmani, in Surah Al-Nisa, it is said that the guardian of the orphans should keep testing them, until they reach the age of marriage, before returning their property (4:6). From this scholars have concluded that the Quran sets a minimum age of marriage which is at least puberty. Since the approval of the girl has a legal standing, she cannot be a minor.

Hisham bin Urwah is the main narrator of this hadith. His life is divided into two periods: in 131A.H. the Madani period ended, and the Iraqi period started, when Hisham was 71 years old. Hafiz Zehbi has spoken about Hisham's loss of memory in his later period. His students in Madina, Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifah, do not mention this hadith. Imam Malik and the people of Madina criticised him for his Iraqi hadiths.

All the narrators of this hadith are Iraqis who had heard it from Hisham. Allama Kandhulvi says that the words spoken in connection with Hazrat Aisha's age were tissa ashara, meaning 19, when Hisham only heard (or remembered), tissa, meaning nine. Maulana Usmani thinks this change was purposely and maliciously made later.

Historian Ibn Ishaq in his Sirat Rasul Allah has given a list of the people who accepted Islam in the first year of the proclamation of Islam, in which Hazrat Aisha's name is mentioned as Abu Bakr's “little daughter Aisha”. If we accept Hisham's calculations, she was not even born at that time.

Some scholars think that Hazrat Aisha was married off so early because in Arabia girls mature at an early age. But this was not a common custom of the Arabs at that time. According to Allama Kandhulvi, there is no such case on record either before or after Islam. Neither has this ever been promoted as a Sunnah of the Prophet. The Prophet married off his daughters Fatima at 21 and Ruqayya at 23. Besides, Hazrat Abu Bakr, Aisha's father, married off his eldest daughter Asma at the age of 26.

Hazrat Aisha narrates that she was present on the battlefield at the Battle of Badar (Muslim). This leads one to conclude that Hazrat Aisha's name is mentioned as Abu Bakr's “little daughter Aisha”. If we accept Hisham's calculations, she was not even born at that time.

In 2 A.H, the Prophet refused to take boys of less than 15 years of age to the battle of Uhud. Would he have allowed a 10-year-old girl to accompany him? But Anas reported that he saw Aisha and Umme Sulaim carrying goatskins full of water and serving it to the soldiers (Bukhari). Umme Sulaim and Umme Ammara, the other women present at Uhud, were both strong, mature women whose duties were the lifting of the dead and injured, treating their wounds, carrying water in heavy goatskins, supplying ammunition and even taking up the sword.

Hazrat Aisha used the kunniat, the title derived from the name of a child, of Umme Abdullah after her nephew and adopted
If she was six when her nikah was performed, she would have been only eight years his senior, hardly making him eligible for adoption. Also, a little girl could not have given up on ever having her own child and used an adopted child’s name for her kunniat.

Hazrat Aisha’s nephew Urwah once remarked that he was not surprised about her amazing knowledge of Islamic law, poetry and history because she was the wife of the Prophet and the daughter of Abu Bakr. If she was eight when her father migrated, when did she learn poetry and history from him?

There is consensus that Hazrat Aisha was 10 years younger than her elder sister Asma, whose age at the time of the hijrah, or migration to Madina, was about 28. It can be concluded that Hazrat Aisha was about 18 years old at migration. On her moving to the Prophet’s house, she was a young woman at 21. Hisham is the single narrator of the hadith whose authenticity is challenged, for it does not correlate with the many historical facts of the time.

The writer is a scholar of the Quran and writes on contemporary issues.

Answer

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

As-salāmu ‘alaykum wa-rahmatullāhi wa-barakātuh.

Rebuttal of a Fitnah: The age of Hadhrat Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā during marriage

A person Nilofar Ahmed has published an article in the Dawn newspaper claiming Hadhrat Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā’s age was at least eighteen during marriage. This is substantiated with statements of Muhaddithin, Ayāt, and historical facts.

This research rebuts the claim and points out the inaccuracies and academic dishonesty in the article. This is a research by Mowlāna Abdul Azīm, who is also a student in Takhassus Fil-Hadīth at the Darul Iftaa. Read the article of the Dawn newspaper first. You will observe how a simple minded person can get easily convinced with the article.

Mufti Ebrahim Desai

The Rebuttal

Due to the limitations of the mind, there are certain issues that are not easily comprehended by everyone. Generally there are two approaches in addressing such issues. The first is an apologetic one. In this, one endeavors to hide a reality in order to earn the confidence and pleasure of others. Authentic facts are denied and replaced by apparently appealing information with the fear that the masses, especially non-Muslims will have a negative understanding of Islām if the factual situation is presented.

The second approach is to present the factual situation of the matter. The feelings and sentiments of people are not considered. It is done with the firm belief that Allāh will defend and preserve His Din. While the intention in the first approach is noble, it is dangerous. The consequences of twisting information to please people are too ghastly to consider. When research uncovers the truth, Islām will be blemished contrary to ones hope of presenting a noble picture of Islām. It is also academic dishonesty and against the spirit of honesty and truthfulness which are the hall marks of Islām.

The age of Hadhrat Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā during her marriage with Rasūlullāh Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam is often highlighted and negatively presented in the context of child marriage. In an attempt to avoid the accusation of child marriage in Islām, some people have adopted an apologetic approach and began distorting the factual
situation of Hadhrat Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā’s age during marriage. This approach is dangerous and is based on a wrong premise. We have to be bold to claim that child marriage is not prohibited in Islām. However, there are rules that govern the issue to safeguard the interest of the child.

This article is a rebuttal of an essay written by Nilofar Ahmed that was produced in the Dawn newspaper on 17/02/2012. The essay is based on the following incorrect premises:

- Prohibition of child marriage
- Historical facts must be correlated with authentic narrations

The writer claims that the misinformation of Aisha Radhiyallāhu Anhā’s age at the time of her marriage being six led to the wrong view that child marriage has sanction of Islām. The second premise is that authentic narrations must correlate with historical facts. Both premises are incorrect. Child marriage is permissible. There is no difference of opinion on this from at least the four main schools of thought, Hanafī, Shafi’ī, Mālikī, and Hambalī. Yes, there are rules that govern child marriage to preserve and protect the interest of the child.

Furthermore, historical facts are not accurate. They cannot be a measure to determine the authenticity of Ahādīth, especially if the Ahādīth themselves are clearly authentic. The guiding measure should be the Ahādīth and not historical factors. Historical factors are subservient and subordinate to authentic Ahādīth. This is a basic rule. No reliable scholar would ignore such basics. This brings to question the qualifications of the writer of the article in reference. Remember the golden advice: Be careful from who you take your Dīn.

The proof for Hadhrat Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā’s age during marriage is in Sahīh al-Bukhārī and Sahīh Muslim. Consider the following Ahādīth:

 حدثنا محمد بن يوسف، حدثنا سفيان، عن هشام، عن أبيه، عن عائشة رضي الله عنها: أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم تزوجها وهي بنت سبع سنوات، وأدخلت عليها وهي بنت تسعة، ومكثت عنده تسعة (صحيح البخاري، ج 10، ص 466-467، دار الإشاعر الإسلامية)

Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā reports that Nabī Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam married her while she was six years old. She was sent to stay with Nabī Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam when she was nine and she lived with Nabī Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam for nine years.
Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā says, “Rasūlullāh Sallallāhu Aalaihi Wa Sallam married me when I was six years old, and he started living with me when I was nine years old.

(Sahīh al-Bukhārī)

The Ummah has accepted the narrations that appear in Sahīh al-Bukhārī and Sahīh Muslim as authentic. Allāmah Hāfidh bin Hajar al-Asqalānī Rahimahullāh states in “Sharh al-Nukhbah” that the Ulamā́ are unanimous in accepting Sahīh al-Bukhārī and Sahīh Muslim. [1] Allāmah Sakhawī states in “Fath al-Mughīth” that Sahīh al-Bukhārī and Sahīh Muslim are the most authentic books of Hadīth. [2]

The writer of the article objects on the Ahādīths of Sahīh al-Bukhārī and Sahīh Muslim saying that there is weakness in one of the narrators, namely Hishām bin Urwah Rahimahullāh. The writer further states, “There is only one hadith by Hisham which suggests the age of Hazrat Aisha as being nine when she came to live with her husband.”

The writer incorrectly claims Hafidh Dahabī Rahimahullāh has spoken about Hishām’s loss of memory in his later period. Hereunder are the actual wordings of Allāmah Dahabī Rahimahullāh:

هشام بن عروة [ع] أحد الأعلام.

حجة إمام، لكن في الكبار تناقص حفظه، ولم يختلف أبدا، ولا عبرة بما قاله أبو الحسن بن القطان من أنه سهيل بن أبي صالاح اختطاف، وتغيرا.

نعم الرجل تغير قليلا ولم يبق حفظه كله في حال الشبيبة، فنسى بعض محفوظه أو وهم، فكان ماذا! أهو معصوم من النسيان!

ولا قدم العراق في آخر عمره حيث بجملة كثيرة من العلم، في غضون ذلك يسر أحاديث لم يجودها، ويتهم هذا يقمعها وشيخة ولكيك ولئك الرسائل، فدعي عز الخطيب وذر حلف الأمثلة.

Hishām bin Urwah is one of the great luminaries, an authority and a leader. When he aged, his memory slightly decreased however he never became a Mukhtalīt (one who lost memory and errs in Hadīth). There is no consideration for what some people have said regarding Hishām that he became a Mukhtalīt.

How great of a person was Hishām! His memory only weakened slightly and did not remain as it was in his youth. Hence he did forget and err on certain occasions. So what? Is he not human that he is protected from forgetfulness!

When he arrived in Irāq towards the end of his life, he narrated many Ahādīths. Amongst the many Ahādīths narrated, only a few were not said perfectly. But this was also the situation with the likes of Imām Mālik, Imām Shu’bah, Wāḥīd, and other great giants of Islām. Therefore, leave your incorrect uproar! Don’t mix up the strong, reliable narrators with the weak ones because Hishām is Shaikhul Islām.”
From the above quotations, the writer’s distortion of facts is clear. Such an attitude disqualifies one from academic merit. The words of Allāmah Dhahabī Rahimahullāh were stated in support of Ḥishām b. Urwah Rahimahullāh and the writer created an image that Allāmah Dhahabī Rahimahullāh does not accept Ḥishām’s narrations. Furthermore, Hafīdīn bin Hajar says in the introduction of his great commentary to Sahīh al-Bukhārī that all the experts of Hadīth consider Ḥishām’s Ahadith to be very strong. Also, Imām al-Bukhārī and Imām Muslim considered Ḥishām to be very strong. That is why they included his narrations in their books of Hadīth.

Nevertheless, for argument’s sake, even if we do consider Ḥishām’s narrations to be weak, there are other narrations without Ḥishām’s narrations to be included in the chain. Ḥishām’s Ahadith are stated in support of Ḥishām’s narrations to be very strong. Nevertheless, for argument’s sake, even if we do consider Ḥishām’s narrations to be weak, there are other narrations without Ḥishām’s narrations to be included in the chain.

Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā reports that Rasūlullāh Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam married her when she was six years old, he started living with her when she was nine years old, and he passed away when she was eighteen years old.

(Sahīh Muslim)

In Sunan al-Nasā, a narration with a similar meaning is mentioned without Ḥishām in the chain. The Hadīth is mentioned with the chain:

Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā relates that Rasūlullāh Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam married me while she was a six years old girl and he lived with her when she was nine years old.
Also if we look at the date of Aishah Radhiyallâh Anhâ’s demise and her age when she passed away, it becomes clear that her age at the time of her marriage with Rasûlullâh Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam was indeed six. In “Mawâhib al-Laduniyyah”, Allâmah Qastalâni Rahimahullâh mentions that Aishah Radhiyallâh Anhâ passed away *fifty seven years* after the migration and at that time she was *sixty six years old*. [4] Allâmah Qastalâni also mentions that she was married to Nabî Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam three years prior to the migration. [5] When all of these facts are put together, we identify that Aishah Radhiyallâh Anhâ’s age at the time of her marriage was six.

A second objection presented by the writer is that the Qurâân sets puberty to be the minimum age of marriage. To back up her claim, the writer brings Ayah number six of Surah al-Nisâ. Hereunder is the Ayah:

وَابْتِلُوا الْبَنَاتَانِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا يَلْغُوهَا النَّكَاحُ (سورة النساء، رقم الاتية 6)

*And test the orphans until they reach a marriageable age. (Surah al-Nisâ)*

The writer uses a general Ayah to support a specific claim. It is similar to one claiming wine is permissible and supports that with the permissibility of drinking water! The intent of this Ayah is to explain that children, well before they reach puberty should be tested through small assignments of buying and selling in order to determine their ability to conduct themselves in transactions on their own. This process of practical experimentation should continue till puberty. This is the time of special assessment. Now it should be determined if they have become smart and self-reliant in their affairs. Once this is sensed as “dependable”, it is time to hand over their property to them. [6]

The word “marriageable age” is used to refer to puberty because one is able to fulfill the purpose of marriage i.e. procreation after one reaches puberty. [7] However, in no way does this Ayah forbid the marriages of those who are not mature. In fact there is a consensus of the four Imâms, namely Imâm Abû Hanîfah, Imâm Malik, Imâm Shâfî, and Imâm Ahmed Rahimunullâh that it is permissible to marry off a minor. [8] Hence, this Ayah can never be used to negate Hadhrat Aishah Radhiyallâh Anhâ’s marriage at age six.

The writer further says, “Allama Kandhulvi says that the words spoken in connection with Hazrat Aisha’s age were tissa ashara, meaning 19, when Hisham only heard (or remembered), tissa, meaning nine. Maulana Usmani thinks this change was purposely and maliciously made later.”

This is a claim without evidence. There is no reference given for this claim. This statement has no grounding, especially because it contradicts authentic narrations as quoted above.

Continuing with the objections, the writer states, “Historian Ibn Ishaq in his Sirat Rasul Allah has given a list of the people who accepted Islam in the first year of the proclamation of Islam, in which Hazrat Aisha’s name is mentioned as Abu Bakr’s “little daughter Aisha”. If we accept Hisham’s calculations, she was not even born at that time.”

This is a clear misunderstanding by Ibn Ishâq Rahimahullâh especially when it contradicts authentic narrations and other books of Sîrah. And Ibn Ishâq Rahimahullâh did not provide a chain of Hadîth to support his claim.

Another objection by the writer is that in Musnad Ahmad, Khawla Radhiyallâhu Anhâ
uses the word “Bikrun” to refer to Aishah Radhiyallahu Anhā. The writer further claims that the word “Bikrun” which means virgin is only used for unmarried girls who have passed the age of puberty.

One answer to the objection is that “Bikrun” can be used for girls who have not reached puberty also. “Lisān al-Arab” a famous dictionary on the Arabic language has the following meaning for “bikrun”:

A female who has not been deflowered (Lisān al-Arab)

“Mu’jam Lughat al-Fuqahā”, a dictionary on words used by the Jurists defines “bikrun” as:

One who has not lost her virginity through intercourse (Mu’jam Lughat al-Fuqahā)

From the above-mentioned definitions, it is obvious that the word “Bikrun” is not confined to a mature lady rather includes any female who is virgin whether she has reached puberty or not.

A second and more obvious answer to the objection is that in the same Hadīth, Aishah Radhiyallahu Anhā’s age is mentioned to be six. The writer only objected to the word “Bikrun” but failed to mention that later on in the same Hadīth, it is clearly stated that Aishah Radhiyallāh Anhā was six. This clearly indicates that Sahābah also used the word “Bikrun” for any virgin female, regardless of whether she reached puberty or not. Hereunder are the words of this Hadīth:

Abu Bakr Radhiyallāhu Anhū married Aishah Radhiyallāhu Anhā off to Rasūlullāh Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam while she was only six years of age.
The writer further objects stating, “Some scholars think that Hazrat Aisha was married off so early because in Arabia girls mature at an early age. But this was not a common custom of the Arabs at that time. According to Allama Kandhulvi, there is no such case on record either before or after Islam. Neither has this ever been promoted as a Sunnah of the Prophet. The Prophet married off his daughters Fatima at 21 and Ruquiyya at 23. Besides, Hazrat Abu Bakr, Aisha’s father, married off his eldest daughter Asma at the age of 26.”

This is another baseless and non-academic opinion. It is quite clear from narrations that some marriages at a young age took place in the era of Rasūlullāh Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam, the Sahābah Radhiyallāhu Anhum, and those Muslims that came soon thereafter. For example, Hāfidh bin Hajar Rahimahullāh quotes in his Kithāb “al-Islābah” that Nabī Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam got Salmah bin Ibbī Salmah Radhiyallāhu Anhu married to Umāmah bint Hamzah Radhiyallāhu Anhā while none of them had reached puberty. [10] Also consider the following narration from Sahīh al-Bukhārī:

وجاء فيحدث عن حليمة بنت جميلة زوجة ابنها معاذ أن رضي الله عنها أدركت الدهر والدهر رضي الله عنها بعد أن عاشела بناءً على سنين حسب البخاري، ج 5، ص 562، دار النشر الإسلامية.

Hasan bin Sālih Rahimahullāh said: I came to know of my neighbor who became a grandmother at the age of twenty one.

(Sahīh al-Bukhārī)

This indicates that the woman must have been married when she was nine, gave birth when she was ten, and the same situation took place with her daughter.

The writer’s claim about the age of Hadhrat Fātimah and Hadhrat Ruqayyah Radhiyallāhu Anhumā at the time of marriage is also inaccurate. Nabī Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam married Hadhrat Khadijah Radhiyallāhu Anhā at the age of twenty-five. His first daughter born from the marriage was Zainab Radhiyallāhu Anhā. [11] According to most of the Ulamā, Ruqayyah Radhiyallāhu Anhā is the second daughter of Rasūlullāh Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam. [12] And in “al-Islābah”, Hāfidh bin Hajar Rahimahullāh narrates on the authority of Ibn Sa’d Rahimahullāh that Utbah bin Abī Lahab married Hadhrat Ruqayyah Radhiyallāhu Anhā before the Nubuwah. [13] Rasūlullāh Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam’s age was forty at the time of Nubuwah. Hence, it is clear that Hadhrat Ruqayyah Radhiyallāhu Anhā was thirteen years old or younger at the time of her marriage and not twenty three years.

After the Nubuwah of Rasūlullāh Sallallāhu Alaihi Wa Sallam, Abū Lahab ordered his son Utbah bin Abī Lahab to divorce Hadhrat Ruqayyah Radhiyallāhu Anhā. Thereafter, Uthmān Radhiyallāhu Anhū married Ruqayyah Radhiyallāhu Anhā.

Even Ruqayyah Radhiyallāhu Anhā’s marriage with Uthmān Radhiyallāhu Anhū took place well before she was twenty three years of age. Uthmān Radhiyallāhu Anhū and Ruqayyah Radhiyallāhu Anhā migrated together to Ethiopia in the fifth year after Nubuwah. [14] This indicates that they were definitely married before the fifth year of Nubuwah. Hence, Ruqayyah Radhiyallāhu Anhā’s age at the time of her marriage to Uthmān Radhiyallāhu Anhū was between thirteen and eighteen years old and not twenty three years old.

With regards to Fātimah Radhiyallāhu Anhā’s age at the time of her marriage to Alī Radhiyallāhu Anhā, there is a difference of opinion because there is a difference of opinion on her year of birth. Some say that she was born when Nabī Sallallāhu Alaihi
Wa Sallam was thirty five years of age and others say that she was born right before Nubuwah when Nabi Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam was approximately forty years of age. [15] Regarding the year of her marriage, some Ulâmâ are of the opinion that Ali Radhiyallâh Anhû married her the first year after migration [16] and others say that he married her in the second year after the migration. [17] If we suppose that she was born when Nabi Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam was approximately forty years of age and was married in the first year after the migration her age at the time of marriage was about thirteen. And if we suppose she was born when Nabi Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam was thirty five years of age and she was married in the second year after the migration, then she was about eighteen years of age at the time of her marriage and not twenty one years of age as the article suggested.

The writer further objects saying, “Hazrat Aishah narrates that she was present on the battlefield at the Battle of Badar (Muslim). This leads one to conclude that Hazrat Aisha moved into the Prophet’s house in 1 A.H. But a nine-year-old could not have been taken on a rough and risky military mission. In 2 A.H, the Prophet refused to take boys of less than 15 years of age to the battle of Uhud. Would he have allowed a 10-year-old girl to accompany him?”

Once again, this is a mere assumption without clear evidence. It is clear that the prohibition of Nabi Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam was for males and not females because the males were the ones to actively participate in the expeditions. [18] The females would only provide services when needed. This objection does not hold any weight especially when there are clear and authentic narrations in Sahih al-Bukhâri, Sahih Muslim, and various other books of Hadîth proving the age of Aishah Radhiyallâh Anhû to be six at the time of marriage.

Providing another argument, the writer say, “Hazrat Aisha used the kunniat, the title derived from the name of a child, of Umme Abdullah after her nephew and adopted son. If she was six when her nikah was performed, she would have been only eight years his senior, hardly making him eligible for adoption. Also, a little girl could not have given up on ever having her own child and used an adopted child’s name for her kunniat.”

The kunyah of Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhû was given to her by Rasûlullâh Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam. The background of the incident is mentioned in Sunan Abî Dâwûd. The narration is as follows:

عند عائشة رضي الله عنهاもらتها يا رسول الله كل صاحبها، قال: "فأَكْثَرِي بابنك عبد الله" يعني ابن اختها قال مسدد: عبد الله بن الزبير. قال: فكانت تكتني باسم عبد الله. 

It is reported from Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhû that she said, “O Rasûlullâh, every one of your wives has a Kunyah.” So Rasûlullâh Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam said, “Keep your Kunyah according to your son’s name (meaning nephew’s name) Abdullâh. Hence, her Kunyah became Umm Abdillâh.
This proves that the Kunyah was given to Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhâ after she started to reside with Rasûlullâhullâhû Alaihi Wa Sallam. Hence, she was at least nine years old if not older when she was given this Kunyah and not six years old as the writer has suggested.

Furthermore, the writer did not provide any reference for the adoption of Abdullah bin Zubair Radhiyallâhû Anhâ. The mere fact that Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhû’s kunyah was attributed to his name does not necessitate that she had adopted him. Also, the writer suggested that the kunyah was given to Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhâ because she gave up on having a child. However, from the Hadîth of Sunan Abî Dâwûd, it is clear that the reason why Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhâ was given the kunyah was because she expressed her desire to have a kunyah, as the other wives of Rasûlullâhullâhû Alaihi Wa Sallam had one.

Making another objection, the author writes, “Hazrat Aisha’s nephew Urwah once remarked that he was not surprised about her amazing knowledge of Islamic law, poetry and history because she was the wife of the Prophet and the daughter of Abu Bakr. If she was eight when her father migrated, when did she learn poetry and history from him?”

Again there is no reference whether this saying of Urwah Radhiyallâhu Anhû is authentic or not. However, even if we accept this to really be Urwah’s statement, it is normal for young children to learn very quickly. Even these days we see small children learning very complicated information. In fact, so many children before the age of eight memorize the entire Qurîn. And it is well known that children in the past had memories far greater than the memories of children in today’s times.

And even if Abu Bakr Radhiyallâhu Anhû migrated to Medinah Munawwarah when Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhâ was only eight, she also migrated to Medinah. Just because she was staying with Nabî Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam in Medinah does not necessitate that she stopped learning from her father.

In the final objection, the author writes, “There is consensus that Hazrat Aisha was 10 years younger than her elder sister Asma, whose age at the time of the hijrah, or migration to Madina, was about 28. It can be concluded that Hazrat Aisha was about 18 years old at migration.”

The writer’s claim of consensus here is incorrect and the writer does not even provide reference for the claim. In the book “Usd al-Ghâbah”, Allâmah Jazrî Rahimahullâh quotes Abû Na’îm saying that Asmâ Radhiyallâhu Anhâ was born twenty seven years prior to migration. And in “al-Isâbah”, Hâfidh bin al-Hajar Rahimahullâh says that Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhâ was born four or five years after the Nubuwwah of Nabî Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa Sallam. This proves that Asmâ Radhiyallâhu Anhâ was eighteen or nineteen years older than Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhâ and not ten years older as was claimed by the writer. Hence Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhâ’s age at the time of migration was eight or nine years of age and not eighteen.

In conclusion, for information to be valid and authentic, it must be passed down from generation to generation through a valid chain of narrators. Hence, there is an authentic chain in Sahîh al-Bukhârî and other books of Hadîth that prove Aishah Radhiyallâhu Anhâ’s age to be six at the time of marriage. So any claim made against this through certain historical arguments holds no weight, especially when it is not supported by an authentic chain.

Allâh will preserve His Dîn and the respect of our beloved Rasûl Sallallâhu Alaihi Wa
See the following article, “The Young Marriage of Ayesha R.A.”, how Allah uses His servants to defend the cause of Islam: [http://askimam.org/public/question_detail/17300](http://askimam.org/public/question_detail/17300)

And Allah Ta’āla Knows Best

Mawlana Abdul Azīm bin Abdur Rahman, Student Darul Iftaa
U.S.A.

Checked and Approved by, Mufti Ebrahim Desai.
ففرقتها، وعليه فخرجوا. 
وبن بي، فوثب ما لكي أهلك هؤلاء. 
فاثبها عبادة شاة. 
فإلى رسل الله صل الله عليه وسلم، إذا دار إلى نساءه وأنا يومئذ تشع سنين (مسند احمد ج 42، ص 501-505 موسوعة الرسائل)

وإنما روابطنا، وتزوجها عبيبة بن أبي نفث قبل السنة، فيما بعد قال أبو عم: رأسي من رأس حرام إن لم تطلق إبنته (الاصابة ج 4، ص 2507، دار المعرفة)

وتزوجها على أوائل الحرم سنة اثنين بعد عائشة بارعية أسهر. وقبل غير ذلك. وانقطع نسل رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إلا من فاطمة (الاصابة ج 4، ص 2559، دار 

فلم بجزه) أيّ: فلم يمضه ولم يأتّن له في القتال (عمدة القاري ج 17، ص 177، دار إحياء التراث العربي)

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