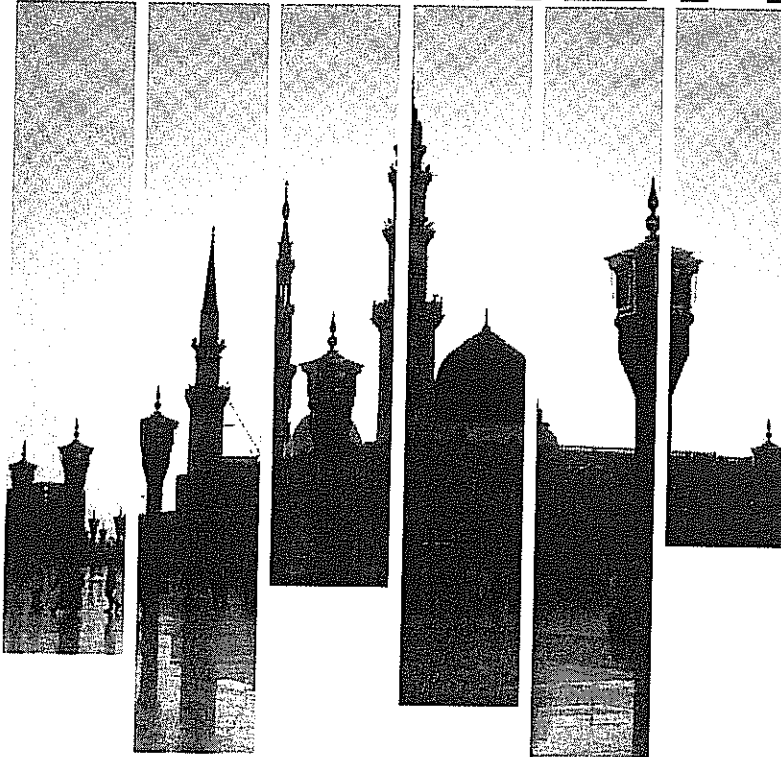


# AT WHAT AGE DID **AISHA** MARRY THE **PROPHET**?



WHILE LISTING NAMES OF MUSLIMS DURING THE FIRST DAYS OF ISLAM, AISHA'S NAME, TOGETHER WITH HER OLDER SISTER ASMA, ARE LISTED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE NAMES OF THE SABIQUN 'AL-AWWALUN (THE FIRST ONES). SHE WAS THE 18TH PERSON TO ACCEPT ISLAM. THIS MEANS SHE WAS LIVING THEN AND MATURE ENOUGH TO MAKE SUCH A CHOICE AND EXERCISE HER WILL.

**W**hen covering the life of Prophet Muhammad, one of the most debatable topics is that of the age of his wife Aisha when the two married. Her alleged very young age has been used in smear campaigns against the Prophet.

Reports that Aisha bint Abi Bakr was 6 or 7 years old when she became engaged and 10 when she married<sup>1</sup> have been the most basic factor in the formation of the view regarding her age of marriage. Also, it should not be forgotten that factors such as similar practices being quite widespread at the time and the physical development of children becoming complete at an earlier age at that time also contributed to the dispersion of this view. For this reason, this subject was not made a current issue for discussion until very recently.

Orientalists who do not consider the conditions of the time period in which an action occurred and who examine Islam from "outside" have made this a current issue. The Muslim world's reaction to this different stance has been mixed. While some have insisted that Aisha's above-mentioned age at marriage is correct,<sup>2</sup> others are of the opinion that Aisha was older.<sup>3</sup> In this situation, where it is not always possible to maintain a balanced view, various approaches have developed as an answer to Orientalists' claims, including those that choose to deny the reports or ignore the existence of other alternatives as a response to this view.

First of all, we should know

that everyone is a child of the time they live in and therefore must be evaluated according to the cultural context of the relevant time. There are certain values that form a society's customs and when a society is evaluated, these values have to be taken into consideration. Otherwise, were we to attempt to evaluate historical events within today's conditions, we should remember that we are fated to make mistakes.

It is known that during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, young girls were married at an early age<sup>4</sup> and that age difference was not important in marriage.<sup>5</sup> Especially in regard to young girls, it should not be forgotten that there was social pressure for this, that they matured earlier due to climatic and geographical conditions and that they were seen as goods that needed to grow in their husband's house. Moreover, this is not a matter just related to girls; boys were also married at ages 8, 9 and 10 and they became the head of a family at an age that is perceived as very young today.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it is this culture that lies at the basis of this issue's not having been questioned until recent times. Otherwise, it was impossible for a mentality that wanted to brew a storm in regards to the Prophet's marriage with Zaynab bint Jahsh and that slandered Aisha after her return from the Muraysi expedition to not criticize such an issue at that time.

In the verses of the Qur'an that came at the same time, the age for marriage was mentioned and it was

emphasized that children should be married when they come of age.<sup>7</sup> So, opposing a divine suggestion cannot be considered. Using the mentality of Umar, if intervention had been a matter of consideration here, the Prophet would surely have been warned in a coming revelation and a step would have been taken to resolve the issue. At any rate, the Prophet's wedding to Aisha took place in accordance with direction from divine will.<sup>8</sup>

Now, putting the extremes behind us and using moderate criteria, let's examine sources related to Aisha's age at marriage once again.

1. While listing names of Muslims during the first days of Islam, Aisha's name, together with her older sister Asma, are listed immediately after the names of the Sabiqun al-Awwalun (the first ones) like Uthman ibn Affan, Zubayr ibn Awwam, Abdurrahman ibn Awf, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, Talha ibn Ubaydullah, Abu Ubayda ibn Jarrah, Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam and Uthman ibn Maz'un. Being the 18th person to accept Islam, Aisha's name precedes the names of Umayr ibn Abi Waqqas, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Salit ibn Amr, Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, Abdullah ibn Jahsh, Abu Hudayfa, Suhayb ibn Sinan, Ammar ibn Yasir, Umar ibn Khattab, Hamza ibn Abdilmuttalib, Habbab ibn Aratt, Said ibn Zayd and Fatima bint Khattab.<sup>9</sup> This means she was living then and was mature enough to make such a choice and exercise her will. In addition, the information in

REGARDLESS OF WHETHER AISHA'S AGE AT MARRIAGE WAS 9 OR 17 OR 18, THERE IS NOTHING STRANGE ABOUT IT. IT IS NECESSARY TO EVALUATE EVERY SOCIETY ACCORDING TO ITS OWN RULES. HOWEVER, WHEN WE LOOK AT INFORMATION PASSED DOWN TO US, IT SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN THAT THIS INFORMATION TO THE EFFECT THAT AISHA, MAY GOD BE PLEASED WITH HER, WAS BORN IN 605, ENGAGED AT THE AGE OF 14 OR 15 AND MARRIED AT THE AGE OF 17 OR 18 IS TOO STRONG TO BE IGNORED.

reports that "she was a small girl then" shows that her name was mentioned in a conscious way.<sup>10</sup>

This date refers to the early days of Islam. For it is known that Aisha's sister Asma, who was born in 595, was 15 when she became a Muslim.<sup>11</sup> This indicates the year 610, when the Prophet started to receive the revelation and this then shows that Aisha was at least 5, 6 or 7 that day and that she was at least 17 or 18 when she married the Prophet in Medina.

2. In regard to days in Mecca, Aisha said, "I was a girl playing games when the verse, 'Indeed, the Last Hour is their appointed time [for their complete recompense], and the Last Hour will be more grievous and more bitter'<sup>12</sup> was revealed to God's Messenger."<sup>13</sup> This information opens other doors for us regarding her age.

The verse under consideration is the 46th verse of Surah Qamar, the 54th chapter of the Qur'an, which explains the miracle of the split moon [the splitting of the moon is one of the miracles performed by the Prophet Muhammad]. Revealed as a whole, this surah came while the Prophet was in Ibn Arqam's home in the fourth (614)<sup>14</sup> or eighth (618) or ninth (619)<sup>15</sup> year of his mission, according to differing reports. Looking especially at necessity, some scholars focused on the date being 614;

when this date is taken, Aisha either had not been born or had just been born. While when this date is taken it appears that she must have been born at least eight or nine years earlier, the situation does not change much when 618 or 619 are taken. In that situation she would have only been 4 or 5 years old, neither an age at which she would be in a position to understand this event and relate it years later. According to the second possibility, she was probably born when the Prophet's mission had just begun.<sup>16</sup>

Another matter worth mentioning here is that while describing that day, Aisha stated, "I was a girl playing games." The word she used to describe herself, *jariya*, is used to describe the passage into puberty. Ibn Yara, an Arab poet, describes this passage as follows: "When a girl becomes 8 years old, she is not a '*jariya*.' She is a bridal candidate that I can marry to Utba or Muawiya." Some scholars say that it is used for girls who are older than 11.

If we look at the issue taking 614 as the year that Surah Qamar was revealed, Aisha would have been born at least eight years before the revelation of this verse, or in 606. If we accept 618, then the year of birth would have been 610; this event alone makes it impossible for her to have been 9 when she married.

When this information is combined with her name being on the list of the first Muslims, we get the result that Aisha's date of birth was probably 606. Consequently, she would have been at least 17 when she married.

3. Of course, Aisha's memories of Mecca are not limited to this. In addition to this, the following memories confirm this matter:

a) Her saying that she had seen two people begging who had remained from the Year of the Elephant (the year in which Yemeni King Abraha sent an army of elephants to Mecca in order to destroy the Ka'ba; the elephants were pelted with pebbles dropped on them by birds), which occurred 40 years before the prophetic mission and is accepted as a milestone for determining history, and her handing down this information with her sister Asma only.<sup>17</sup>

b) Her describing in detail that during difficult times in Mecca, God's Messenger had come to their house morning and evening and that her father, Abu Bakr, who could not endure this hardship, attempted to migrate to Abyssinia.<sup>18</sup>

c) Her stating that first it was mandatory to offer two cycles of obligatory prayer and that later it was changed to four cycles for residents, but that during military campaigns two cycles were performed.<sup>19</sup>

d) In reports about the early days, there being statements like, "We heard that Isaf and Naila had committed a crime at the Ka'ba and for this reason God turned them into stone as a man and woman from the Jurhum tribe."<sup>20</sup>

4. Being betrothed before the engagement: Another factor that supports the above view is that at the time when the Prophet's marriage was a topic of discussion, Aisha was engaged to Mur'im ibn Adiy's son Jubayr. The suggestion for the Prophet to marry Aisha came from Hawla bint Hakim, the wife of Uthman ibn Maz'un, someone not from the family. Both situations show that she had come to the age of marriage and was known as a young marriageable girl.

As is known, this betrothal was broken by the Ibn Adiy family due to the possible religious conversion of their son to Islam, and it was only after this that Aisha's engagement to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, took place.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the marriage agreement was either made before the prophetic mission or when the call to Islam was being made openly (three years after the Prophet began receiving revelation). If it was made before the mission, together with the idea that Aisha was 9 years old when she married being shaken from its foundation, it implies that Aisha was born even earlier than has been thought. For this reason, some say that she was a 13- or 14-year-old girl then.<sup>22</sup>

It should not be overlooked that this decision was made during the period when the call to Islam had begun to be made openly. In

regard to time, this means 613-614. If it is assumed that Aisha was born four years after the mission, it has to be accepted that she had not yet been born, so it is not possible to talk about a marriage agreement under these circumstances. In this case, it has to be accepted that she was at least 7 or 8 when her engagement was broken, so the year was probably 605.<sup>23</sup>

Here, another possibility can be mentioned; namely, an agreement of arranged future marriage similar to "cradle tallying," an agreement between parents in the early years after the birth of a baby. However, there are no details in the texts under consideration to confirm this.

5. The age difference of Aisha's siblings should be taken into account. As is known, Abu Bakr had six children. Asma and Abdullah were born from Qutayla bint Umayy, Aisha and Abdurrahman from Umm Ruman, Muhammad from Asma bint Umayy and Umm Kulthum from Habiba bint Harija. Asma and Abdullah have the same mother as do Aisha and Abdurrahman. The age difference between children from the same mother can enlighten our subject matter.

a) Abu Bakr's first daughter, Asma, was born in 595, 27 years before the Hijra, Prophet Muhammad's emigration to Medina.<sup>24</sup> At the time of the Hijra, she was married to Zubayr ibn Awwam and was six-months pregnant.<sup>25</sup> Her son Abdullah was born three months later in Quba while she was migrating to Medina. She died in the 73rd year of the Hijra at the age of 100; her teeth had not even fallen out.

Here there is another critical piece of information. The age difference between Aisha and her sister Asma was 10 years.<sup>26</sup> According to this, Aisha's year of birth was 605 (595+10=605) and her age at the time of the Hijra was 17 (27-10=17). Since her marriage took place six, seven or eight months after the Hijra, or just after Badr,<sup>27</sup> this means Aisha was 17-18 years old at that time.

b) The age difference between Aisha and her brother Abdurrahman is also striking. Abdurrahman became Muslim after the Treaty of Hudaibiya was signed, six years after the Hijra. He was careful not to encounter his father at the Battle of Badr, in the second year after the Hijra, and that day Abdurrahman was 20 years old.<sup>28</sup> In other words, he must have been born in 604. Taking into consideration the conditions of that time, the probability is low that the sister of a child born in 604 would be born 10 years later in 614. Put another way, at a time when the age difference between brothers and sisters is one or two years, a large difference such as 10 years between Aisha and her brother is highly unlikely.

6. Reports regarding Aisha's death are also of a nature to illuminate this issue. The year in which she died is listed as the 55th, 56th, 57th, 58th or 59th year after the Hijra<sup>29</sup> and her age at that time as 65, 66, 67 or 74.<sup>30</sup> Just as there is no agreement regarding her date of birth, there is no agreement regarding her date of death.

Reports to the effect that she died in the 58th year after the Hijra

and that she was 74 when she died give the impression that they are sounder than others because they give detailed information such as the day she died as being Wednesday, that it corresponded to the 17th day of Ramadan, that upon her request she was buried at night after the Witr prayer in the Janah al-Baqi graveyard, that again upon her last request the funeral prayer was lead by Abu Hurayrah and that she was lowered into the grave by persons like her sister Asma's two sons, Abdullah and Urwa, her brother Muhammad's two sons, Qasim and Abdullah, and her brother Abdurrahman's son Abdullah.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, when calculations are made according to this date, we see she lived 48 years after the Prophet's death ( $48+10=58+13=71+3=74$ ). This means she was born three years before his prophethood and, in view of this information, she was 17 when she married ( $74-48=26-9=17$ ).

In support of the above, her being on the battle front at Uhud, in the third year after the Hijra, when even boys were turned away; her depth in scholarly matters and the mature attitude and statements she put forth in regard to the matter of slander; the age difference between her and the Prophet's daughter Fatima; her knowledge and awareness of the Hijra and later developments; after arriving in Medina, her marriage being consummated at her father's suggestion and after the *mahr* (dowry) had been paid<sup>32</sup>; the position of the Prophet as a guide in the society; the sensitivity of the Prophet and fatherly com-

passion; the differences in reports regarding the date of marriage and their having no finality<sup>33</sup>; Aisha's using the doubtful expression "six or seven" when referring to her age; dates of birth and death not being as clearly determined in that society as they are today—all this strengthens the probability that she was born before the commencement of Islam, was engaged at 14 or 15 years of age and was married to the Prophet at the age of 17 or 18.

In this situation, it is up to us to attribute the meaning "I appeared to be" to the report "I was 6 or 7 when I was engaged and 9 when I married" and reconcile the two.<sup>34</sup> The fact that Aisha was physically thin strengthens this interpretation. She was affected by physical events faster and had a smaller body than her peers. Events like her becoming ill during the migration to Medina,<sup>35</sup> her mother's showing her special attention and trying to make her well,<sup>36</sup> her losing her necklace after the Muraysi expedition and the enclosed litter being put on the camel thinking that she was in it<sup>37</sup> all show this.

In short, regardless of whether Aisha's age at marriage was 9 or 17 or 18, there is nothing strange about it. It is necessary to evaluate every society according to its own rules. When we look at examples, it was quite a widespread custom to marry both boys and girls at a young age. However, when we look at information passed down to us, it should not be forgotten that this information to the effect that Aisha, may God be pleased with her, was born in 605, engaged at the age of 14 or 15 and married at the

age of 17 or 18 is too strong to be ignored. □

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#### Notes

1. Bukhari, *Manaqib al-Ansar*, 20, 44; Muslim, *Niqah*, 71; *Fadail al-Sahaba*, 74; Abu Dawud, *Adab*, 55; Ibn Maja, *Niqah*, 13; Nasai, *Niqah*, 78; Darimi, *Niqah*, 56.
2. Azimli, Mehmet, "Hz. Âişe'nin Evlilik Yaşı Tanışmalarında Savurmacı Tarihçiliğin Çıkarmazı," *İslâmi Araştırmalar*, Vol. 16, Issue 1, 2003.
3. See Doğru, Ömer Rıza. *Asrı Saâdet*, İstanbul: Eser Kitabevi, 1974, 2/141; Nadwi, Sayyid Sulayman. *Hazreti Âişe*, (trns. by Ahmet Karataş), İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2004, p. 21; Savaş, Rıza. "Hz. Âişe'nin Evlenme Yaşı İle İlgili Farklı Bir Yaklaşım," *D. E. Ü. İlahiyât Fak. Derg.* Issue 4, İzmir, 1995, pp. 139-144; Yüce, Abdülhakim, *Efendimiz'in Bir Günü*, İstanbul: Işık Yayınları, pp. 82-83, 2007.
4. Abdul Mutalib, the grandfather of the Prophet, married Hala bint Uhayb, who was young then. Since he married off his son Abdullah to Amina at an early age at around the same time of his own marriage with Hala, the Prophet was almost of the same age with his uncle Hamza.
5. In order to have family relationship with the Prophet and thus further his close relation with God's Messenger, Umar ibn Khattab married Ali's daughter Umm Qulthum, and this marriage was not found strange at that time at all.
6. Amr ibn As, for instance, was 12 years older than his son Abdullah. This means that he was around 10 when he got married. For further information see Ibn al-Athir, *Usud al-Gaba*, 3/240.
7. Nisa 4:6.
8. Bukhari, *Ta'bir*, 21, *Manakib al-Ansar*, 44, *Niqah*, 9; Muslim, *Fadail al-Sahaba*, 79; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 6/41, 128.
9. Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 1/271; Ibn Ishaq, *Sira*, Konya, 1981, 124.
10. Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 1/271; Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 124.
11. Nawawi, *Tahzib al-Asma*, 2/597; Hakim, *Mustadrak*, 3/635.