How Old Was A’yshah When She Married The Prophet Muhammad?

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Ahl al-Sunnah insist on proving that A’yshah was betrothed to the Prophet Muhammad (S) at six years of age and that she entered his house at nine years [where the marriage was consummated]. [Ahl al-Sunnah] consider this to be evidence for A’yshah’s superiority over the other wives of the Messenger of Allah. Does this, however, reflect reality? In the following article we will investigate this matter.

However, before embarking on the crux of the matter, we must shed light on the history of the Prophet’s marriage to A’yshah so that we may afterwards draw a conclusion as to how old she was when she married the Messenger of Allah.

There are differing views in regard to the history of the Messenger of Allah’s marriage to A’yshah. Muhammad b. Isma’il al-Bukhari [d. 256 A.H/870 C.E] narrates from A’yshah herself that the Messenger of Allah betrothed her three years after [the death] of Lady Khadijah (Allah’s peace be upon her):

 حدثنا قَتِيبَةُ بْنِ سَعِيدُ حُدَيْنَا حُمَيْدُ بْنِ عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ مِنْ هَاشَمِ بْنِ عُروْاَةَ عِنْ أَبِيْهِ عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنَّهَا قَالَتْ مَا غَرَّتْ عَلَى امْرَأَتِهِ مَا غَرَّتْ عَلَى حَدِيثَةٍ مِّنْ كَثِّرَةِ ذَکْرِ الرَّسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ إِیَّاهَا قَالَتْ وَتَزْوَجْنِی بَعْدَهَا بِثَلَاثِ سَنَاتٍ وَأَمْرُهُ رَبُّهُ عَزْ وَجَلْ وَجِرْبِیْلُ عَلَیْهِ السَّلَامُ أَنْ يَبْشَرُهَا بِبَيْنَتِ فِي الجِنَّةِ مِنْ قُصْبٍ.

It has been narrated by A’yshah (may Allah be pleased with her) [where] she said: “I have not been jealous of any woman as I have with Khadijah. [This is because first], the Messenger of Allah (S) would mention her a lot”. [Second], she said: “he married me three years after her [death] and [third], his
Lord (Exalted is He!) or [the archangel] Jibril (peace be upon him) commanded him to bless her with a house in heaven made out of reed (qasab).”


Given that Lady Khadija (Allah’s peace be upon her) left this world during the tenth year of the Prophetic mission (biʿthah), the Messenger of Allah’s marriage with Aʿyshah therefore took place during the thirteenth year of the Prophetic mission.

After having narrated al-Bukhari’s tradition, Ibn al-Mulqin derives the following from the narration:

وَبِنِىَهَا بِالمَدِينَةِ فِي شَوْالِ فِي الْسَّنَةِ الثَّانِيَةِ…

…and the Prophet (S) consummated the marriage in Madinah during [the month] of Shawwal in the second year [of the Hijrah].


According to this narration, the Messenger of Allah betrothed Aʿyshah in the thirteenth year of the Prophetic mission and officially wed her [i.e. consummated the marriage] in the second year of the Hijrah.

From what has been related by other prominent [scholars] of Ahl al-Sunnah, we can [also] conclude that the Prophet wed Aʿyshah during the fourth year of the Hijrah. When commenting on the status (sharh al-hal) of Sawdah, the other wife of the Messenger of Allah (S), al-Baladhuri [d. 297 A.H/892 C.E] writes in his Ansab al-Ashraf that:

وَتَزَوَّجَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلِّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمُ ابْنتَ زَمَعَةَ بْنِ قَيْسٍ، مِنْ بَنِي عَامِرٍ بْنِ لُؤْيٍ قَبْلَ الْهَجْرَةِ بَأَشْهُرٍ… فَكَانَتْ أَوْلَى امْرَأَةٍ وَطِئَهَا بِالمَدِينَةِ.

After Khadijah, the Messenger of Allah (S) married Sawdah b. Zamʿah b. Qays from Bani ʿAmir b. Laʿwi a few months before the Hijrah...she was the first woman that the Prophet joined [in matrimony] in
Madinah.


Al–Dhahabi [d. 748 A.H/1347 C.E], on the other hand, claims that Sawdah b. Zamʿah was the only wife of the Messenger of Allah for four years:

[Sawdah] died in the last year of ʿUmar’s caliphate, and for four years she was the only wife of the Prophet (S) where neither [free] woman nor bondmaid was partnered with her [in sharing a relationship with the Prophet (S)]...

According to this conclusion, Aʿyshah married the Prophet in the fourth year of the Hijrah (i.e. four years after the Prophet’s marriage to Sawdah).

Now we shall investigate Aʿyshah’s age at the moment of her betrothal by referring to historical documents and records:

Comparing the Age of Aʿyshah with the Age of Asmaʿ b. Abi Bakr

One of the things which may establish Aʿyshah’s age at the moment of her marriage with the Messenger of Allah is comparing her age with that of her sister Asmaʿ b. Abi Bakr [d. 73 A.H/692 C.E]. According to what has been narrated by the prominent scholars of Ahl al–Sunnah, Asmaʿ was ten years older than Aʿyshah and was twenty–seven years of age during the first year of the Hijrah. Moreover, she passed away during the year 73 of the Hijrah when she was a hundred years of age.

Abu Naʿim al–Isfahani [d. 430 A.H/1038 C.E] in his Marʾifat al–Sahabah writes that:

أسماء بنت أبي بكر الصديق ... كانت أخت عائشة لأبيها وكانت أصغر من عائشة ولدت قبل التأريخ بسبعين وعشرين سنة.
Asma’ b. Abi Bakr al-Siddiq...she was the sister of ʿA’yshah through her father’s [side i.e. Abu Bakr] and she was older than ʿA’yshah and was born twenty-seven years before History [i.e. Hijrah].


Al-Tabarani [d. 360 A.H/970 C.E] writes:

Asma’ b. Abi Bakr al-Siddiq died on the year 73 [of the Hijrah], after her son ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr [d. 73 A.H/692 C.E] by [only] a few nights. Asma’ was a hundred years of age the day she died and she was born twenty-seven years before History [Hijrah].


Ibn Asakir [d. 571 A.H/1175 C.E] also writes:

Asma’ was the sister of ʿA’yshah from her father’s [side] and she was older than ʿA’yshah where she was born twenty-seven years before History [Hijrah].


Ibn Athir [d. 630 A.H/1232 C.E] also writes:

قال أبو نعيم: ولدت قبل التاريخ بسبيع وعشرين سنة.
Abu Naʿim said: [Asma'] died before History [Hijrah] by twenty-seven years.


Al-Nawawi [d. 676 A.H/1277 C.E] writes:

وَعَنِ الحَافِظِ أَبِي نَعْمَى قَالَ: وَلَدَتْ أَسْمَاءَ قَبْلَ هَجْرَةِ الرَّسُولِ صلى الله عليه وسلم بِسَبَعِ وَعِشْرِينَ سَنَةً.

[It has been narrated] from al-Hafiz Abi Naʿim [who] said: Asma` was born twenty seven-years before the Hijrah of the Messenger of Allah (S).


Al-Hafiz al-Haythami [d. 807 A.H/1404 C.E] said:

وَكَانَتْ لَا سَمَاَءَةً يُومَ مَاتِتْ مَائَةَ سَنَةً وَلَدَتْ قَبْلَ التَّارِيْخِ بِسَبَعِ وَعِشْرِينَ سَنَةً وَلَدَتْ أَسْمَاَءَ لَأَبِي بَكْرٍ وَسَنَهُ إِحْدَى وَعْشِرَاتِ سَنَةً.

Asma` was a hundred years of age when she died. She was born twenty-seven years before History [Hijrah] and Asma` was born to her father Abi Bakr when he was twenty-one years of age.


Badr al-Din al-Ayni [d. 855 A.H/1451 C.E] writes:

أَسْمَاءُ بُنتُ أَبِي بَكْرِ الصَّدِيقِ... وَلَدَتْ قَبْلَ الْهَجْرَةِ بِسَبَعِ وَعِشْرِينَ سَنَةً، وأَسْلَمْتُ بَعْدَ سَبْعَةَ عُشْرِ إِنْسَانًا... تُوْفِيَتْ بَمَكَّةِ فِي جَمَادِيَةَ الْأُولَى سَنَةً ثَلَاثَةٍ وَسَبْعِينَ بَعْدَ قُتْلِ أَبِنَهَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ الزَّبِيرِ، وَقَدُ بَلَغَتْ الْمَائَةَ وَلَمْ يُسْقِطْ لَهَا سَنًّا وَلَمْ يَتَغَيِّرْ عَقْلُهَا، رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَلَى هَذَٰلِكَ.

Asma’ b. Abi Bakr al-Siddiq...she was born **twenty-seven years** before the Hijrah and she was the seventeenth person to convert to Islam...she died in Makkah in the month of Jamadi al-Awwal in the **year 73** [of the Hijrah] after the death of her son ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr when she reached a hundred years of age. [Despite her old age], none of her teeth had fallen out and neither was her intellect impaired (may Allah – Exalted is He! - be pleased with her).


Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani [d. 852 A.H/1448 C.E] writes:

8525 أسماء بنت أبي بكر الصديق زوج الزبىير بن العوام من كبار الصحابة

很漂亮 سنة وماتت سنة ثلاثين أو أربع وسبعين.

8525 Asma’ b. Abi Bakr al-Siddiq married al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwam who was one of the great Sahabah. She lived [up to] a hundred years of age and she died in the year 73 or 74 [of the Hijrah].


[He also wrote]:

لها سن ولم ينكر لها عقل وقال أبو نعيم الأصبهاني ولدت قبل الهجرة بسبع
وعشرين سنة

[and] she had [her full set of] teeth and she had not lost her intellect. Abu Naʿim al-Isbahani said [that] she was born before the Hijrah by twenty-seven years.


Ibn ʿAbd al-Birr al-Qurtubi [d. 463 A.H/1070 C.E] also writes:

Asma’ died in Makkah in [the month of] Jamadi al-Awwal in the year 73 [of the Hijrah] after the death of her son ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr...Ibn Ishaq said that Asma’ b. Abi Bakr converted to Islam after seventeen people had [already] converted...and she died when she reached a hundred years of age.

See: al-Nimri al-Qurtubi, Abu ʿUmar Yusuf b. ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAbd al-Birr (d. 463 A.H/1070 C.E), *al-
Al–Safadi [d. 764 A.H/1362 C.E] writes:

وماتت بعده أيام بسيرة سنة ثلاث وسبعين للهجرة وهي وأبوها وأبنها وزوجها صاحبيون قيل إنها عاشت مائة.

[Asma'] died a few days after ʿAbd Allah b. Zubayr in the year 73 of the Hijrah. And she [herself], her father, her son and husband were Sahabis. It has been said that she lived a hundred years.


The Difference in Age Between Asma’ and A’yshah

Al–Bayhaqi [d. 458 A.H/1065 C.E] narrates that Asma’ was ten years older than A’yshah:

أبو عبد الله بن منده حكاية عن بن أبي الزناد أن أسماء بنى أبي بكر كانت أكثر من عائشة بعشر سنين.

Abu ʿAbd Allah b. Mundah narrates from Ibn Abi Zannad that Asma’ b. Abi Bakr was older than ʿA’yshah by ten years.


Al–Dhahabi and Ibn ʿAsakir also narrate this:

قال عبد الرحمن بن أبي الزناد كانت أسماء أكبر من عائشة بعشر.

ʿAbd al–Rahman b. Abi al–Zannad said [that] Asma’ was older than ʿA’yshah by ten years.

Ibn Abi al-Zannad said [that Asma'] was older than ʿA’yshah by ten years.


...of those who died along with ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr in the year 73 [of the Hijrah] in Makkah were]... Asma’ b. Abi Bakr, the mother of ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr... and she was older than her sister ʿA’yshah by ten years...her life span reached a hundred years and none of her teeth had fallen out nor did she lose her intellect [due to old age].


Mulla ʿAli al-Qari [d. 1014 A.H/1605 C.E] writes:

[Asma’] was older than her sister ʿA’yshah by ten years and she died ten days after the killing of her son...she was a hundred years of age and her teeth had not fallen out and she did not lose a thing of her intellect. [Her death took place] in the year 73 [of the Hijrah] in Makkah.
Al-Amir al-Sanʿani [d. 852 A.H/1448 C.E] writes:

[Asma’] was ten years older than ʿA’yshah by ten years and she died in Makkah a little less than a month after the killing of her son while she was a hundred years of age. This took place in the year 73 [of the Hijrah].

Asma’ was fourteen years of age during the first year of the Prophetic mission (biʿthah) and ten years older than ʿA’yshah. Therefore, ʿA’yshah was four years old during the first year of the Prophetic mission \[14 - 10 = 4\] and as such, she was seventeen years of age during the thirteenth year of the Prophetic mission \[4 + 13 = 17\]. In the month of Shawwal of the second year of the Hijrah (the year of her official wedding to the Prophet) she was nineteen years of age \[17 + 2 = 19\].

On the other hand, Asma’ was a hundred years of age during the seventy-third year after Hijrah. A hundred minus seventy-three equals twenty-seven \[100 - 73 = 27\]. Therefore, in the first year after the Hijrah she was twenty-seven years old.

Asma’ was ten years older than ʿA’yshah. Twenty-seven minus ten equals seventeen \[27 - 10 = 17\]. Therefore, ʿA’yshah was seventeen years of age during the first year of the Hijrah. [In addition to this], we previously established that ʿA’yshah was officially wed the Prophet during the month of Shawwal of the second year after Hijrah, meaning that ʿA’yshah was nineteen years of age \[17 + 2 = 19\] when she was wed to the Messenger of Allah.

When did ʿA’yshah convert to Islam?

ʿA’yshah’s conversion to Islam is also an indicator as to when she married the Messenger of Allah.

According to the prominent scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah, ʿA’yshah became a believer during the first year of the Prophetic mission and was among the first eighteen people to have responded to the Messenger of Allah’s [divine] calling.
Al-Nawawi writes in his *Tahdhib al-Asma’*:

Ibn Abi Khuthaymah narrates from ibn Ishaq in his *Tarikh* that ʿA’yshah converted to Islam while she was a child (saghirah) after eighteen people who had [already] converted.


[Muttahar] al-Maqdisi [d. 507 A.H/1113 C.E] writes that:

Of those [among males] who had precedence [over others] in their conversion to Islam were Abu ʿUbaydah b. al-Jarrah, al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwam and ʿUthman b. Mazʿun... and among the women were Asmaʾ b. ʿUmays al-Khattamiyyah (the wife of Jaʿfar b. Abi Talib), Fatimah b. al-Khattab (the wife of Saʿid b. Zayd b. Amr), Asma b. Abi Bakr and ʿA’yshah who was a child [at the time]. The conversion to Islam of these [people occurred] within the [first] three years of the Messenger of Allah having invited [people] to Islam in secret [which was] before he entered the house of Arqam b. Abi al-Arqam.1


Similarly, Ibn Hisham [d. 213 A.H/828 C.E] also mentions the name of Aʿyshah as one of the people who converted to Islam during the first year of the Prophetic mission while she was a child:

Islam Aسماء وعائشة ابنتي أبي بكر وخباب بن الآرت وأسماء بنت أبي بكر
Asma and ʿAʾyshah, the two daughters of Abi Bakr, and Khabab b. al-ʿAratt converted to Islam [in the initial years of the Prophetic mission, and as for] Asmaʾ b. Abi Bakr and ʿAʾyshah b. Abi Bakr, [the latter] was a child at that time and Khabab b. al-ʿAratt was an ally of Bani Zuhrah.


If Aʾyshah was seven years of age when she converted to Islam (the first year of the Prophetic mission), she would have been twenty-two years old in the second year after the Hijrah (the year she was officially wed to the Messenger of Allah) [7 + 13 + 2 = 22].

If, [however], we accept al-Baladhuri’s claim that [Aʾyshah] was wed to the Messenger of Allah four years after his marriage to Sawdah, that is, in the fourth year after the Hijrah, then Aʾyshah would have been twenty-four years of age when she married the Prophet.

This number, [however], is subject to change when we take into consideration her age when she converted to Islam.

In conclusion, Aʾyshahʾs marriage to the marriage to the Messenger of Allah at six or nine years of age is a lie which was fabricated during the time of Banu Ummayah and is not consistent with historical realities.

1. Translator’s note: for early Muslims, the house of Arqam was a safe-haven for worship given its relatively isolated location.

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