124483 - How Old Was ‘Aishah When She Married the Prophet ?

the question

Whilst visiting some chat rooms, I read a very strange topic, and I want someone who has knowledge of the Prophet’s biography (sirah) to explain this matter to me, may Allah bless you.

To sum up, after researching the accusations the reports narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari which state that ’Aishah’s age, when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did the marriage contract with her, was six years, and that he consummated the marriage with her when she was nine years old.

A journalist cast doubts on Sahih al-Bukhari. The researcher did not only examine the reports from the angle of figures and dates, but also from the angle of the isnads through which the most famous hadiths were narrated, as mentioned in al-Bukhari and Muslim.

In both cases, he seems to have wanted to demonstrate that he is smart and prove his point.

Summary of answer

The age of ‘Aishah when the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) married her is a historical narration which is proven by evidence that confirms its soundness and the necessity of accepting it for several reasons detailed below.

Detailed answer

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Age of ‘Aishah when she married Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him)

The definition of the age of ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did the marriage contract with her as being six years, and of the age when he consummated the marriage with her as being nine years, is not a matter of ijtihad (individual opinion) on the part of the scholars, such that we could argue whether it is right or wrong; rather this is a historical narration which is proven by evidence that confirms its soundness and the necessity of accepting it. That is for several reasons:

1. It was narrated by the individual concerned herself, namely ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her), and is not something that someone else said about her, or the description of a historian or hadith scholar. Rather it comes in the context of her speaking about herself (may Allah be pleased with her), when she said:

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married me when I was six years old. We came to Madinah and stayed among Banu’l-Harith ibn Khazraj. I fell sick and lost my hair, (then I recovered) and my hair grew down to my earlobes. My mother Umm Ruman came to me when I was on a swing and some of my friends were with me. She called me loudly and I went to her, and I did not know what she wanted of me. She took me by the hand and made me stand at the door of the house, as I was gasping for breath, until I had calmed down. Then she took some water and wiped my face and head with it, then she took me into the house. There were some women of the Ansar in the house, who said: With good wishes and blessings and good luck. She handed me over to them and they adorned me, and suddenly I saw the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) at mid-morning, and they handed me over to him. At that time I was nine years old. (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3894; Muslim, 1422)

2. This report from ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) is in the soundest of books after the Book of Allah, may He be exalted, namely the two Sahihs of al-Bukhari and Muslim.
3. It was narrated from ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) via a number of isnads (chains of narration), not by one isnad only, as some ignorant people claim.

- The most well-known chain of narration is that of Hisham ibn ‘Urwah ibn az-Zubayr, from his father ‘Urwah ibn az-Zubayr, from ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her). This is one

of the soundest narrations, as ‘Urwah ibn az-Zubayr is one of the most well acquainted of people with ‘Aishah, because she was his maternal aunt.

- It was also narrated via another chain, by az-Zuhri from ‘Urwah ibn az-Zubayr, from ‘Aishah. Narrated by Muslim, 1422.
- It was also narrated via another chain by al-A‘mash, from Ibrahim, from al-Aswad, from ‘Aishah, who said: “The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married ‘Aishah when she was six years old and consummated the marriage with her when she was nine years old, and he died when she was eighteen years old. Narrated by Muslim, 1422.
- It was also narrated via another chain, from Muhammad ibn ‘Amr, from Yahya ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Hatib, from ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her). Narrated by Abu Dawud, 4937.

Shaykh Abu Ishaq al-Huwayni compiled the names of those who followed ‘Urwah ibn az-Zubayr, namely: al-Aswad ibn Yazid, al-Qasim ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahman, al-Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, ‘Amrah bint ‘Abd ar-Rahman, and Yahya ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Hatib.

He also compiled the names of those who followed Hisham ibn ‘Urwah in narrating this hadith. They were: Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri and Abu Hamzah Maymun, the freed slave of ‘Urwah.

Then he named those who narrated it from Hisham ibn ‘Urwah among the scholars of Madinah. The reader should understand that this hadith is one of those that were also narrated by Hisham in Madinah. They were: Abu’z-Zinnad ‘Abdullah ibn Dhakwan and his son ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi’z-Zinnad, and ‘Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Yahya ibn ‘Urwah.

Among the people of Makkah (it was narrated by) Sufyan ibn ‘Uyaynah.

(It was also narrated by) Jarir ibn ‘Abd al-Hamid ad-Dubbi among the people of ar-Rayy.

Among the people of Basra (it was narrated by): Hammad ibn Salamah, Hammad ibn Zayd, Wuhayb ibn Khalid, and others.

All of these lists are mentioned in order to ward off the specious argument of some ignorant people who say that Hisham ibn ‘Urwah was the only one who narrated it. Even if we accept that Hisham became confused at the end of his life, the correct view is that this accusation was made only by Abu’l-Hasan ibn al-Qattan in Bayan al-Wahm wa’l-Iham, and he was mistaken in doing so.

Adh-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Hisham ibn ‘Urwah was one of the prominent and authoritative scholars, but when he grew old his memory failed, although he did not get confused, and there is nothing valid in the view of Abu’l-Hasan ibn al-Qattan, which suggests that he and Suhayl ibn Abi Salih became confused and changed. Yes, the man changed a little and his memory was not as sound as it had been in his youth. He forgot some of the things he had memorized and he made some mistakes, but so what?! He was not infallible. When he came to Iraq at the end of his life he passed on a great deal of knowledge, among which were a few hadiths that he did not remember well. Something similar happened to Malik, Shu‘bah, Waki‘ and other senior, trustworthy narrators. So forget about this nonsense and mixing trustworthy scholars with weak narrators and those who became confused. Hisham was Shaykh al-Islam, and may Allah help us against what Ibn al-Qattan suggested and what ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Kharash said: Malik did not approve of him because he got angry with him for going and narrating hadith in Iraq.” (Mizan al-I‘tidal, 4/301-302)

4. There are reports from people other than ‘Aishah that speak of the Prophet’s marriage to her when she was nine years old. Among those who were her contemporaries and knew her better than others were the following:

Imam Ahmad narrated in al-Musnad, 6/112 from Muhammad ibn Bishr, who said: Muhammad ibn ‘Amr told us: Abu Salamah and Yahya told us: When Khadijah died, Khawlah bint Hakim, the wife of ‘Uthman ibn Maz‘un, came and said: O Messenger of Allah, why don’t you get married? He said: To whom? She said: If you wish, a virgin, and if you wish, a previously married woman. He said: Who is the virgin? She said: The daughter of the dearest of Allah’s creation to you: ‘Aishah bint Abi Bakr… And he mentioned the story in detail, including the fact that she was six

years old when the marriage contract was done, and was nine years old when the marriage was consummated.

5. This is what ‘Aishah narrated concerning herself, and it was conveyed by the narrators from her, and it is what is stated in all the historical sources that give the biography of ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her). There is no difference among them concerning that, and the matter was not subject to ijtihad. When a person speaks about himself (or herself), no one has the right to suggest anything else.
6. The historical sources are also agreed that ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) was born in Islam, four or five years after the Prophet’s mission began.

Imam al-Bayhaqi (may Allah have mercy on him) said – commenting on the hadith, “I only ever remember my parents as following Islam”–:

‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) was born in Islam, because her father became Muslim at the beginning of the Prophet’s mission. It is proven from al-Aswad, from ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married her when she was six years old, and consummated the marriage with her when she was nine years old, and he died when she was eighteen years old. But Asma bint Abi Bakr was born during the Jahiliyyah, and became Muslim when her father became Muslim. … According to what Abu ‘Abdullah ibn Mandah said, narrating from Ibn Abi’z-Zinnad, Asma bint Abi Bakr was ten years older than ‘Aishah, and the mother of Asma became Muslim later on. Asma (may Allah be pleased with her) said: My mother came to me and she was (still) a mushrik. According to a hadith that she quoted, her name was Qatilah, from Banu Malik ibn Hasal. She was not the mother of ‘Aishah. Asma became Muslim when her father did, not her mother. With regard to ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr, it seems that he was an adult when his parents became Muslim, but he did not follow them in becoming Muslim, until he became Muslim a long time after that. He was the oldest of the children of Abu Bakr.” (As-Sunan al-Kubra, 6/203)

Adh-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

‘Aishah is one of those who were born in Islam; she was eight years younger than Fatimah. She used to say: “I only ever remember my parents as following Islam”.” (Siyar A‘lam an-Nubala, 2/139)

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“She – i.e., ‘Aishah – was born four or five years after the Prophet’s mission began.” (Al-Isabah, 8/16)

Based on that, her age at the time of the Hijrah was eight or nine years. This is in accordance with the hadith quoted above from ‘Aishah herself.

7. The historical sources are also agreed that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died when ‘Aishah was eighteen years old, so at the time of the Hijrah she must have been nine years old.
8. The books of biography and history state that ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) died at the age of sixty-three years, in 57 AH. So before the Hijrah her age was 6 years. So if you round up or down – as is the custom of the Arabs in counting years – they round up or down the first and last years, so her age at the time of the Hijrah was eight years, and her age at the time when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married her, eight months after the Hijrah, was nine years.
9. The above is also in accordance with what the scholars have narrated concerning the difference in age between Asma bint Abi Bakr and ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her). Adh-Dhahabi (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “She – i.e., Asma – was ten or more years older than ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her).” (Siyar A‘lam an-Nubala, 2/188)

‘Aishah was born four or five years after the Prophet’s mission began. Abu Na‘im said in Mu‘jam as-Sahabah that Asma was born ten years before the Prophet’s mission began. End quote.

So the difference in age between ‘Aishah and Asma was fourteen or fifteen years. This is the view of adh-Dhahabi quoted above: She – i.e., Asma – was ten or more years older than ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her).

10. Although we quote these numbers that are mentioned in the books of biography and history, what we mostly rely on is what is narrated with sahih isnads, not what we find in books quoted without any isnad. But all of the reports are in accordance with the hadiths with undoubtedly sahih isnads that we quoted at the beginning of this answer. Hence we quoted reports from the history books that support what we quoted above.

Age difference between Asma and ‘Aishah

As for the response to the author of the hostile article quoting as evidence what is narrated in some sources about the age difference between Asma and ‘Aishah being ten years, we say:

That is not proven in terms of the isnad or chain of narrators. If its isnad is proven, then it may be understood in a manner that is in accordance with the definitive evidence mentioned above.

With regard to the isnad or chain of narrators, it was narrated from ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi’z-Zinnad that he said: Asma bint Abi Bakr was ten years older than ‘Aishah.

This report was narrated via two isnads from al-Asma‘i from ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi’z-Zinnad.

The first isnad was narrated by Ibn ‘Asakir in Tarikh Dimashq (69/10). He said: Abu’l-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Ahmad al-Maliki told us: Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahid as-Sulami told us: My grandfather Abu Bakr told us: Abu Muhammad ibn Zabr told us: Ahmad ibn Sa‘d ibn Ibrahim az-Zuhri told us: Muhammad ibn Abi Safwan told us: al-Asma‘i told us, that Ibn Abi’z-Zinnad said: … and he quoted the report.

The second isnad was narrated by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in al-Isti‘ab fi Ma‘rifat al-Ashab (2/616): Ahmad ibn Qasim told us: Muhammad ibn Mu‘awiyah told us; Ibrahim ibn Musa ibn Jamil told us: Isma’i ibn Ishaq al-Qadi told us: Nasr ibn ‘Ali told us: al-Asma‘i told us: Ibn Abi’z-Zinnad told us: Asma bint Abi Bakr, who was ten years or so older than ‘Aishah, said:…

If the fair-minded researcher thinks about this report it will become clear to him that accepting its apparent meaning and rejecting all the proven evidence to the contrary is an offense against knowledge and scholarship, for the following reasons:

- ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi’z-Zinnad (100-174 AH) is the only one who stated that the difference in age between Asma and ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with them both) was ten years. The evidence mentioned above, on the other hand, is abundant and was narrated from more than one of the Tabi‘in. It is known that what is abundant takes precedence over that which is smaller.
- Most of the scholars regarded ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi’z-Zinnad himself as da‘if (weak). In his biography of him in Tahdhib al-Tahdhib (6/172), Imam Ahmad is quoted as saying concerning him: He is mudtarab al-hadith (his hadeeth is faulty). Ibn Ma‘in is quoted as saying: He is not one of those whom the scholars of hadith quote as evidence. ‘Ali ibn al-Madini is quoted as saying: Whatever he narrated in Madinah is sahih, but whatever he narrated in Baghdad was corrupted by the Baghdadis. I saw ‘Abd ar-Rahman – i.e., Ibn Mahdi – draw a line through the hadith of ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi’z-Zinnad. Abu Hatim said: His hadith may be written down but it may not be quoted as evidence. An-Nasai said: His hadith cannot be quoted as evidence.

With regard to at-Tirmidhi describing him as thiqah (trustworthy) in his Sunan, following hadith no. 1755, this contradicts the criticism of the previous commentator, and criticism (of a narrator) takes precedence over praise, especially with regard to the reports that were narrated only by ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi’z-Zinnad , especially when he says something that is contrary to what is well-known in the books of the Sunnah and history.

- According to the report of Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, he said: “She (Asma) was ten years or so older than ‘Aishah.” This report is more sound than the report of Ibn ‘Asakir, because Nasr ibn ‘Ali, who narrated it from al-Asma‘i in the isnad of Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr is thiqah (trustworthy), as it says in Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, 10/431. With regard to Muhammad ibn Abi Safwan, the narrator from al-Asma‘i in the isnad of Ibn ‘Asakir, no one described him as trustworthy.

The words in the report of Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, “or so”, indicate that he was not certain about (the difference in age) being ten years. This makes his report weak and it is not permissible for the fair-minded researcher to reject the evidence quoted above for the sake of this uncertainty.

- Moreover, it is possible to reconcile this report with the other reports by saying that Asma was born six years or five years before the Prophet's mission began, and 'Aishah was born four or five years after his mission began. When Asma died in 73 AH, she was ninety-one or ninety-two years old, as was mentioned by adh-Dhahabi in Siyar A'lam an-Nubala, 3/380: Ibn Abi'z-Zinnad said: She was ten years older than 'Aishah. I (adh-Dhahabi) say: Based on that, her age would have been ninety-one years. Hisham ibn 'Urwah, on the other hand, said: She lived for one hundred years and not one of her teeth fell out. End quote.

- It may also be said that Asma was born approximately 14 years before the Prophet's mission began – which is what is affirmed by the author himself in his previous article – and that in the year of the Hijrah she was twenty-seven years old, and her age at the time of her death in 73 AH was one hundred years, so as to be in harmony with what the historical sources are agreed upon with regard to Asma bint Abi Bakr, that she died in the same year in which her son 'Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr was killed (73 AH), and that she died at the age of one hundred years. Hisham ibn 'Urwah said, narrating from his father: Asma reached the age of one hundred years and not one of her teeth fell out and she remained alert all her life.

There follow the names of the sources that mention that:

- Hilyat al-Awliya, 2/56
- Mu'jam as-Sahabah by Abi Na'im al-Asbahani
- Al-Isti'ab by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, 4/1783
- Tarikh Dimashq by Ibn 'Asakir, 69/8
- Usd al-Ghabah by Ibn al-Athir, 7/12
- Al-Isabah by Ibn Hajar, 7/487
- Tahdhib al-Kamal, 35/125

With regard to the idea of her having been born ten years before the Prophet's mission began, this was only stated by Abu Na'im al-Asbahani, in a statement in which he said:

"She – i.e., Asma – was the sister of 'Aishah through her father. She was older than 'Aishah; she was born twenty-seven years before the Hijrah, and ten years before the mission of the Prophet

(blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) began. When she was born, her father (Abu Bakr) as-Siddiq was twenty-one years old. Asma died in 73 AH in Makkah, a few days after her son ‘Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr was killed, at the age of one hundred years, having lost her sight.”

It is as if Abu Na‘im meant that the Makkan period (of the Prophet’s mission) lasted for seventeen years, which is the view of some of the scholars of sirah; it is a da‘if (weak) view, but it should be pointed out when trying to understand the opinion of Abu Na‘im.

For the wisdom behind the marriage of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to ‘Aishah despite the difference in their ages, please see the answer to question no. 44990 .

And Allah knows best.