9473 - Exemption of (baby) dolls from the ruling on haram images

the question

I have read all your answers regarding pictures for children. In my home, we have no pictures or animate (2-D and 3-D) figures, apart from these for children. In answering a question about photos, you stated no 3-dimensional images were allowed. Can you please explain the tradition where Aisha (May Allah be pleased with her) had a small toy unicorn (or similar) that she played with as a child, and the Prophet did not stop her.
Please answer this question, as all practising muslims I know have toys for their children. We all seek the right path of Islam.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Those toys which are made of wool are not considered to be images, because they do not have a head apart from a piece of wool, and it does not have the features of the face such as eyes, nose, mouth or ears. If an image does not have a head or any facial features, it is exempt from the ruling prohibiting images.

Even if we assume that it is an image, this does not mean that all images are permitted. Rather it is an exemption from the prohibition for a legitimate shar'i purpose, which is to teach girls how to care for babies and to develop maternal feelings in their hearts, in order to prepare them for the future.

Most of the scholars have exempted the making of girls' toys from the prohibition on making images and statues. This is the view of the Maalikis, Shaafa'is and Hanbalis. Al-Qaadi 'Iyaad narrated that most of the scholars said that this is permissible, and he was followed in that by al-Nawawi in his commentary on Muslim. He said: "Exempted from the prohibition on making images

that have a shadow are things that are used as toys for girls, because of the exemption that was narrated concerning that. This means that it is permissible, whether they are toys in the shape of people or animals, three-dimensional or otherwise, and whether they are supposed to represent real animals or not, such as a horse with wings…

The majority of scholars quote as evidence for this exemption the hadeeth of ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) in which she says:

“I used to play with dolls in the house of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). I had friends who used to play with me. When the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came in, they would hide themselves, then he would call them to join me and play with me.”

According to another report, she said that the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came back from the battle of Tabook or Khaybar, and there was a curtain in her alcove. The wind blew and lifted the curtain, showing some dolls with which ‘Aa’ishah was playing. He said, “What is this, O ‘Aa’ishah?” She said, “My daughters.” Among them he saw a mare with wings made of leather.” He said, ‘And what is this that I see in the midst of them?” She said, “A mare.” He said, “What is this on it?” She said, “Wings.” He said, “A mare with wings?” She said, “Have you not heard that Sulaymaan had a horse with wings?” She said, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) smiled so broadly that I could see his eyeteeth.

The Maalikis, Shaafa’is and Hanbalis interpreted this as an exemption for making toys because of the necessity of educating girls in how to bring up children. This interpretation is obvious if the toy is in the form of a human, but it is not obvious if it is in the form of a horse with wings. Hence al-Haleemi used this report and others to support his argument. He said: “There are two benefits of that in the case of girls, one immediate and one which comes later. The immediate benefit is that they have fun, which is one of the most effective means of child development. If a child is well taken care of and feels happy and content, his development will be stronger and better. That is because joy energizes the mind, which in turn energizes the soul, and that has an effect on the body and produces physical strength. The benefit which is seen later on is that through that (play),

the girls learn how to deal with children, love them and feel compassion for them, and that becomes second nature to them, so that when they grow up and see for themselves the things they used to play at, they will find that the compassion they used to play at is something very real indeed. Ibn Hajar quoted in al-Fath from someone who thought that making toys was haram, and that it had been permitted at first but was then abrogated by the general prohibition on making images. He responded by noting that the abrogation could have been the other way round and that the permission to make toys came later, on the grounds that in the hadeeth of ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) about her toys, there is the indication that this happened at a later date, because it mentions that this happened when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came back from Tabook. So the apparent meaning is that it happened later on. (al-Mawsoo’ah al-Fiqhiyyah – Maaddat al-Tasweer)