122534 - Refutation of the lie that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married ‘Aa’ishah when she was 18 years old

the question

I read in a newspaper an article entitled “Young journalist corrects a thousand-year-old mistake of leading scholars”. What was said in the article may be summed up as follows:
1. The idea that the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married the Mother of the Believers ‘Aa’ishah when she was six years old and consummated the marriage with her when she was nine years old, based on the report narrated by al-Bukhaari, is wrong, and the mistake has to do with the age of ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) at that time.
2. From researching historical sources (according to what the author of the article says), it is clear that the real age of ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) when the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) consummated the marriage with her was 18 years, not 9 years.
3. This mistake was overlooked by all the Muslim scholars, and was not discovered except by this journalist!
I hope that you can explain this matter to ordinary Muslims and give us the Islamic perspective on this issue.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The saheeh hadiths state that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did the marriage contract with ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) when she was six years old, and consummated the marriage with her when she was nine years old. These hadiths include the following:

It was narrated that ‘Aa’ishah said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married me when I was six years old and he consummated the marriage with me when I was nine years old. We came to Madinah and stayed among Banu’l-Haarith ibn Khazraj, and I fell sick… My mother Umm Roomaan 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 Ansaar 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-Bukhaari (3894) and Muslim (1422)

It was narrated from her (may Allah be pleased with her) that she said: I used to play with dolls in the presence of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and I had friends who would play with me. When the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) entered they would hide themselves and he would call them to come and play with me.

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (7130) and Muslim (2440).

Abu Dawood (4932) narrated from her (may Allah be pleased with her) that she said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came back from the campaign to Tabook or Khaybar and there was a curtain over her niche. The wind lifted the edge of the curtain and uncovered ‘Aa’ishah’s toy dolls. He said: “What is this, O ‘Aa’ishah?” She said: My dolls. He saw among them a horse with two wings made of cloth and he said: “What is this that I see in the midst of them?” She said: A horse. He said: “What is this that I see on it?” I said: Two wings. He said: “A horse with wings?” She said: Have you not heard that Sulaymaan had horses with wings? She said: And the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) smiled so broadly that I saw his eyeteeth.

Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Adaab az-Zafaaf (p. 203)

Al-Haafiz said:

Al-Khattaabi said: A concession was only granted allowing ‘Aa’ishah to play with them (toys) because at that time she had not yet reached the age of puberty. I say: As to whether this was the case, we cannot be certain but it is possible, because at the time of the campaign to Khaybar, ‘Aa’ishah was fourteen years old, so either she had reached the age of fourteen or had passed that age or was close to it. But at the time of the campaign to Tabook, she had definitely passed the age of fourteen, so the reports of those who say that it was Khaybar are more likely to be correct. End quote. The campaign to Khaybar occurred in 7 AH.

Muslim (1422) narrated from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married her when she was seven years old and she was taken to him as a bride when she was nine years old, and she took her dolls with her. He died when she was eighteen years old.

An-Nawawi said:

What is meant by dolls is these toys that young girls play with; this highlights that she was very young. End quote.

In this report she said that she was seven years old, but in most of the reports it says that she was six years old. The way to reconcile between the reports is to note that she was six years and some months, so sometimes she only mentioned the years, and sometimes she counted the year that she had embarked upon (her seventh year). This was suggested by an-Nawawi in Sharh Muslim.

Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) narrated that this is a matter on which the scholars were agreed, and there was no report that any one of them disagreed.

He (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The words “he married her when she was six years old and consummated the marriage with her

when she was nine years old” are a matter concerning which there is no difference of opinion among the scholars, as it is proven in the Saheehs and elsewhere, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) consummated the marriage with her two years after he migrated to Madinah.

End quote from al-Bidaayah wa’n-Nihaayah (3/161)

It is well-known that scholarly consensus is protected from error, because the ummah cannot agree on misguidance. At-Tirmidhi (2167) narrated from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah will not cause my ummah to agree on misguidance.” Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Jaami‘ (1848)

Secondly:

The writer of the article mentioned was led by his ignorance and fanatical support for his false view to tell many lies and twist things, aiming thereby to support his falsehood.

For example, he quotes Ibn Katheer as saying, in al-Bidaayah wa’n-Nihaayah, concerning the earliest Muslims: “Among the woman were Asma’ bint Abi Bakr and ‘Aa’ishah, when she was small; these people became Muslim within three years.” But we have not come across these words in al-Bidaayah wa’n-Nihaayah. Rather Ibn Katheer said (3/25): The first free man to believe was Abu Bakr as-Siddeeq; the first child was ‘Ali ibn Abi Taalib; and the first woman was Khadeejah bint Khuwaylid. End quote. He did not mention either Asma’ or ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with them both).

In fact ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) was born approximately four years after the Prophet’s mission began.

This author also says:

“All the sources, without exception, say that she – i.e., Asma’ – was ten years older than ‘Aa’ishah.”

That is not the case. Adh-Dhahabi said in Siyar A‘laam an-Nubala’ (3/522): Asma’ was more than ten years older than ‘Aa’ishah.” End quote.

The Arabic phrase translated here as “more than ten” may refer to any number between thirteen and twenty.

Thirdly:

The fact that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) when she was nine years old is nothing strange. It is well-known that the age at which girls reach puberty varies according to race and environment. In hot regions girls reach puberty earlier, whereas in cold polar regions puberty may be delayed until the age of twenty-one years.

At-Tirmidhi said: ‘Aa’ishah said: When a girl reaches the age of nine years, she is a woman.

Sunan at-Tirmidhi (2/409)

Imam ash-Shaafa‘i said: In Yemen I saw many girls aged nine who had reached puberty.

Siyar A‘laam an-Nubala’ (10/91)

Al-Bayhaqi (1588) narrated that ash-Shaafa‘i said: The earliest age at which I heard of girls reaching puberty was the women of Tihaamah who reach puberty at the age of nine.

Ash-Shaafa‘i also said: In San‘aa’ I saw a grandmother who was twenty-one years old; she reached puberty at the age of nine and gave birth at the age of ten, and her daughter reached puberty at the age of nine and gave birth at the age of ten.

As-Sunan al-Kubra by al-Bayhaqi (1/319)

Based on that, the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) consummated his marriage with ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) when she had reached puberty or was very close to it.

For more information, please see the answer to question no. 44990

What is required of anyone who speaks about any branch of knowledge is that he should speak on the basis of knowledge and fairness, far removed from ignorance, fanaticism and following whims and desires.

It is sufficient evil for a person to fabricate a view that was not uttered by any of the scholars throughout the centuries. This indicates that this view is wrong. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Every view that is held by only one of the later scholars, and not by any of the earlier scholars, for which there is no precedent among any of the earlier scholars, is wrong, as Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal said: Beware of developing a view that you have never heard from any scholar. End quote.

Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (21/291)

We ask Allah to show as the truth as truth and enable us to follow it, and to show us falsehood as false, and enable us to avoid it.