259216 - Is it true that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was leaning against `Ali’s chest when he died?

the question

The Rafidis argue that the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died leaning against the chest of `Ali ibn Abi Talib and not the chest of the Mother of the Believers, our mother as-Siddiqah bint as-Siddiq (`A’ishah bint Abi Bakr – may Allah be pleased with her). They narrate from the book *Mukhatasar Tarikh Dimashq li Ibn `Asakir* by Ibn Manzur (Vol. 2, p. 392). This is a text that I checked in al-Maktabah ash-Shamilah [an online library] before sending my question:

“It was narrated that Abu Ghatafan said: I asked Ibn `Abbas: Did you see the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) with his head in anyone’s lap when he died? He said: He died leaning against ‘Ali’s chest.  I said: `Urwah narrated to me from `A’ishah that she said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died leaning against my chest. Ibn `Abbas said: That cannot be right. By Allah, indeed the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died when he was leaning against `Ali’s chest, and he is the one who washed him, along with my brother al-Fadl ibn `Abbas; my father did not want to be there, and he said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to instruct us to conceal ourselves, so he stood on the other side of the curtain.”

I hope that you can refute this specious argument.

Summary of answer

What the Shi`ah say about the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) dying when he was leaning against `Ali’s chest is all false, and no attention is to be paid to it. These reports are not strong enough to contradict the hadith of `A’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), concerning which the scholars are unanimously agreed that it is authentic.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

What is proven with an authentic chain of narration is that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died leaning against the chest of the Mother of the Believers `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her).

It was narrated from `Urwah, from `A'ishah, who said: During his [final] illness, the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to check and ask: "Where will I be today? Where will I be tomorrow?" hoping that the turn of 'Aa'ishah was close.

When it was my day, Allah took his soul when he was leaning against my chest, and he was buried in my apartment.

Narrated by al-Bukhari (1389) and Muslim (2443).

It was narrated from `Abd ar-Rahman ibn al-Qasim, from his father, from `A'ishah, who said: `Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr came in to visit the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) when I was supporting him against my chest. `Abd ar-Rahman had a fresh siwak with him, which is used for cleaning the teeth. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) kept looking at it, so I took the siwak, then I chewed it and made it soft, then gave it to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), who cleaned his teeth with it. I had never seen the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) cleaning his teeth in a better way. After he had finished brushing his teeth, he lifted his hand or his finger and said, "With those on high" three times, then he died. `A'ishah used to say: He died while his head was resting against my chest.

Narrated by al-Bukhari (4438).

With regard to what Ibn Manzur said in *Mukhtasar Tarikh Dimashq* (2/392): --

It was narrated that Abu Ghatafan said: I asked Ibn `Abbas: Did you see the Messenger of Allah

(blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) with his head in anyone's lap when he died? He said: He died leaning against 'Ali's chest. I said: `Urwah narrated to me from `A'ishah that she said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died leaning against my chest. Ibn `Abbas said: That cannot be right. By Allah, indeed the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died when he was leaning against `Ali's chest, and he is the one who washed him, along with my brother al-Fadl ibn `Abbas; my father did not want to be there, and he said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to instruct us to conceal ourselves, so he stood on the other side of the curtain. End quote. --

he quoted it without a chain of narrators (isnad) and we could not find it in *Tarikh Dimashq* by Ibn `Asakir, but Ibn Sa`d narrated it in *At-Tabaqat al-Kubra* (2/263), where he said:

Muhammad ibn `Umar told us: Sulayman ibn Dawud ibn al-Husayn told me, from his father, from Abu Ghatafan, who said:

It was narrated that Abu Ghatafan said: I asked Ibn `Abbas: Did you see the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) with his head in anyone's lap when he died? He said: He died leaning against 'Ali's chest.  I said: `Urwah narrated to me from `A'ishah that she said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died leaning against my chest. Ibn `Abbas said: That cannot be right. By Allah, indeed the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died when he was leaning against `Ali's chest, and he is the one who washed him, along with my brother al-Fadl ibn `Abbas; my father did not want to be there, and he said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to instruct us to conceal ourselves, so he stood on the other side of the curtain.

Muhammad ibn `Umar is al-Waqidi, whose hadiths are to be rejected, and he was accused of lying.

Nothing is known about the character of Sulayman ibn Dawud ibn al-Husayn.

Such a hadith with this weak isnad cannot be used to contradict the hadith of `A'ishah, concerning which the scholars are unanimously agreed that it is authentic.

Shaykh al-Albani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The report which says that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died leaning against `Ali's chest is fabricated.

It was narrated by Ibn Sa`d (2/263): Muhammad ibn `Umar told us: Sulayman ibn Dawud ibn al-Husayn told me, from his father, from Abu Ghatafan, who said …

I said: This is fabricated, and the one who made it up, Muhammad ibn `Umar – al-Waqidi – is a liar.

His shaykh Sulayman ibn Dawud ibn al-Husayn is not known. Ibn Abi Hatim narrated it – in his book *Al-Jarh wat-Ta`dil* – and he did not mention anything about its narrators, good or bad.

Then I saw that al-Hafiz ibn Hajar said in *Al-Fat-h* (8/107):

His character is not known.

I said: What confirms that the hadith is fabricated is the fact that it contradicts the hadith of `Urwah which he narrated from `A'ishah. `Urwah – who is the son of az-Zubayr – was one of the senior and trustworthy Tabi`in. A number of trustworthy scholars narrated it from him in *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad*, and also in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*.

A number of other trustworthy people narrated it in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* from `A'ishah, and also in *Al-Musnad* and Ibn Sa`d. So it is a very well-known hadith from `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), even if it is not mutawatir.

It is very unlikely that Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) would be unaware of a well-known hadith from `A'ishah. Therefore suggesting that the hadith did not refer to `A'ishah and rather it referred to `Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) can be no other than the work of liars among the Shi`ah or those who support them.

End quote from *Silsilat al-Ahadith ad-Da`ifah* (10/710-711).

There are other weak reports with content similar to that of the report narrated by Ibn Sa`d that is

quoted above. Al-Hafiz ibn Hajar pointed out that they are weak in his commentary on the hadith of `A'ishah that is quoted above. He (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This hadith – that is, the hadith of A'ishah – contradicts that which was narrated by al-Hakim and Ibn Sa`d via various isnads, which says that the Prophet died with his head in `Ali's lap. None of these isnads is free of a Shi`i narrator, so no attention should be paid to them.

I decided to highlight the status of the hadiths that you referred to, so that you do not think that I am biased.

Ibn Sa`d said: Those who said that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died in `Ali's lap. Then he quoted the hadith of Jabir: Ka`b al-Ahbar asked `Ali: What were the last words that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said?

He said: I made him lean against my chest, and he rested his head on my shoulder, then he said: The prayer, the prayer.

Ka`b said: That is the last thing that the Prophets say before they die.

Its isnad includes al-Waqidi and Haram ibn `Uthman, who are both rejected.

It was narrated from al-Waqidi, from `Abdillah ibn Muhammad ibn `Umar ibn `Ali, from his father, from his grandfather, who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said during his (final) illness: "Call my brother for me." So `Ali was called for him, and he said: "Come closer to me." He said: And he continued to lean against me and he spoke to me until he became more weaken and grew heavy in my lap, so I shouted: O `Abbas, help me, for it is too much for me. So al-`Abbas came, and they both helped to lay him down.

There is an interruption in the isnad, in addition to the presence of al-Waqidi, and `Abdullah is not strong.

He also narrated from his father, from `Ali ibn al-Husayn, that he [the Prtophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)] died with his head on `Ali's lap. There is also an interruption in the

isnad of this report.

It was narrated from al-Waqidi, from Abul-Huwayrith, from his father, from ash-Sha`bi, that he died with his head on `Ali's lap. This isnad also includes al-Waqidi and is interrupted. Abul-Huwayrith's name is `Abd ar-Rahman ibn Mu`awiyah ibn al-Harith al-Madani. Malik said: He is not trustworthy, and his father's character is not known.

Al-Hakim narrated in *Al-Iklil* via Habbah al-`Adani, from `Ali [who said]: I made him lean against my chest and his soul departed. Habbah is a weak narrator.

In the hadith of Umm Salamah it says: `Ali was the last of them to be with the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) before he died. However, the hadith from `A'ishah is more sound than this. Perhaps Umm Salamah meant that he was the last of the men to be with him, and it is possible to reconcile between the reports by saying that `Ali was the last of them (the men) to be with him, and he did not leave him until he slumped, then when he slumped, he thought that he had died. Then the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came round after he had been propped up, so `A'ishah made him lean against her chest, then he died.

End quote from *Fat-h al-Bari* (8/139).

Conclusion: What the Shi`ah say about the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) dying when he was leaning against `Ali's chest is all false, and no attention is to be paid to it. These reports are not strong enough to contradict the hadith of `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), concerning which the scholars are unanimously agreed that it is authentic.

And Allah knows best.