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Ignorance, Dishonesty, or Both?

A Reply to the Christian Polemic

Mary the Mother of Jesus: A Houri in Paradise?

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The praise is for Allah, and it is sufficed. May peace be upon His slaves who He has chosen. As for what follows ...

After painting a sexually explicit picture for his Christian readers with a long introduction in which he describes the Hūrīs of Paradise, their physical features, and other sexually oriented details pertaining to the pleasures of the Hereafter, this Christian polemicist presents his prized piece of evidence for his attack on Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, *Mary the Mother of Jesus: A Hourī in Paradise?*: a (clipped) quote taken from Ibn Kathīr’s *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyâ’* which states,

“The Messenger of God ... said, ‘**God MARRIED ME IN PARADISE TO MARY THE DAUGHTER OF 'IMRAN** and to the wife of Pharaoh and the sister of Moses.’ (Tabarani)” (Ibn Kathir, *Qisas al-Anbiya* [Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 1968/1388], p. 381- as cited in Aliah Schleifer’s *Mary The Blessed Virgin of Islam* [Fons Vitae; ISBN: 1887752021; July 1, 1998], p. 64; bold and capital emphasis [the writer’s]).

Unfortunately, there have been a couple of ignorant Muslims who have tried to refute this polemic drafted by this Christian writer by referring to the available English translations of *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyâ’*, which do not include this quote, or any of the similar narrations that Ibn Kathīr quoted along with it. Had they referred to the Arabic text of the work, or to the work it was originally taken from, *al-Bidâyah wan-Nihâyah*, they would have surely found the quote presented above as well as the necessary information to properly address this polemicist’s allegations. So in all fairness, he was not guilty of fabricating some made up ḥadīth or lying (at least in this instance) to support his claims.

One thing he is guilty of, however, is being ignorant—or perhaps not, but is dishonest enough to keep hidden from his readers—of the fact that Ibn Kathīr quotes a significantly important statement concerning this narration that directly effects the validity of his attack.

The above cited narration from *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyâ’* is quoted by Ibn Kathīr under his chapter on the story of Jesus ﷺ, under the subheading, “Allah’s choosing Mary, peace be upon

her”. After mentioning a number of the authentic narrations concerning Mary’s high status among the women of Paradise, Ibn Kathîr states,

The purpose here is the mention of what is connected to Mary bint 'Imrân, peace be upon her. For indeed Allah purified her and chose her over the women of the worlds of her time, and it is conceivable that the favouring of her over the women [of mankind] is general, as we have presented. And it has been mentioned in a ḥadīth that she is from the wives of the Prophet ﷺ in Paradise—her and Âsiyah bint Muzâḥim¹—and in the *Tafsîr* we have mentioned from some of the predecessors that he [i.e., Prophet Muḥammad] said that and drew upon His statement, «widows and virgins» (66:5): he said thus the widow is Âsiyah and from the virgins is Mary bint 'Imrân; and we mentioned it at the end of the chapter of *at-Taḥrîm* [ch. 66]. So Allah is more knowledgeable.

at-Ṭabarânî said,

'Abdullah bin Nâjiyyah narrated to us: Muḥammad bin Sa'd al-'Awfî narrated to us: Ubay narrated to us: my uncle al-Ḥusain informed us: Yūnus bin Nafî' narrated to us from Sa'd bin Junâdah—he is al-'Awfî—[who] said, ‘Allah’s messenger ﷺ said, «Surely Allah will marry me to Mary bint 'Imrân, the wife of Pharaoh, as well as the sister of Moses in Paradise.»’

It was narrated by Abū Ja'far al-'Uqailî from the ḥadīth of 'Abdun-Nūr with it, and he [Abdun-Nūr] added, “So I said, ‘[Be it] a pleasure for you, O Allah’s messenger!’” Then al-'Uqailî said, “*It is not preserved.*” [Emphasis mine; take note that al-'Uqailî’s statement, “it is not preserved,” is an indication of the ḥadīth’s weakness].

Ibn Kathîr then cites three narrations in which the Prophet ﷺ entered upon his dying wife Khadîjah رضى الله عنها and mentioned to her that Allah will marry him in Paradise to Mary bint 'Imrân, Âsiyah bint Muzâḥim, and Kulthum the sister of Moses. He then comments,

The basis of the peace from Allah upon Khadîjah and her glad tidings with house of pearls in Paradise that contains no noise or hardship is in the *Ṣaḥîḥ*. However, this context with these additions is very strange. Each of these ḥadīths, *their chains [of transmission] contain a problem.* [Emphasis mine].

Let us now take a look at what Ibn Kathîr said in his exegesis of the above mentioned verse (66:5) in his *Tafsîr al-Qur'ân al-'Aḍḥim*. Ibn Kathîr mentions,

In his *al-Mu'jam al-Kabîr*, Abul-Qâsim at-Ṭabarânî said,

¹ I.e., the wife of Pharaoh.

Abū Bakr bin Sadaqah narrated to us: Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin Marzūq narrated to us: 'Abdullah bin Umayyah narrated to us: 'Abdul-Quddūs narrated to us from Ṣāliḥ bin Ḥayyān, from Ibn Buraidah, from his father: [concerning] 《widows and virgins》 (66:5), he said, 'In this verse, Allah promised His prophet ﷺ that He would marry him to the widow: Âsiyah, wife of Pharaoh, and with the virgins: Mary bint 'Imrân.'

In his biography of Mary, peace be upon her, Ḥāfiḍ Ibn 'Asâkir mentioned from the route of Suwaid bin Sa'îd: Muḥammad bin Ṣāliḥ bin 'Umar narrated to us from aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk and Mujâhid, from Ibn 'Umar, he said,

Gabriel came to Allah's messenger ﷺ at the death of Khadîjah and said, 'Surely, Allah greets her with peace and gives glad tidings of a house of pearls in Paradise, distant from the fire, containing no hardship, nor noise, of hollow pearls between Mary bint 'Imrân's house and Âsiyah bint Muzâḥim's house.'

And from the ḥadîth of Abî Bakr al-Hudhalî, from 'Ikrimah, from Ibn 'Abbâs that the Prophet ﷺ entered upon Khadîjah while she was dying and said, «O Khadîjah, if you meet your co-wives, then greet them with peace from me.» She said, “O Allah's messenger, have you married before me?” He said, «No, but Allah will marry me to Mary bint 'Imrân, Âsiyah wife of Pharaoh, and Kulthum sister of Moses.» [It is] weak also.

Abū Ya'lâ said,

Ibrâhîm bin 'Ar'arah narrated to us: 'Abdun-Nūr bin 'Abdillah narrated to us: Yūnus bin Shu'aib narrated to us from Abî Umâmah, he said, “Allah's messenger ﷺ said, «I have learned that Allah married me in Paradise to Mary bint 'Imrân, Kulthum sister of Moses, and Âsiyah wife of Pharaoh.» So I said: [be it] a pleasure for you, O Allah's messenger!”

What is mentioned from Ibn 'Asâkir in this quote is contained in one of the three narrations alluded to previously for which Ibn Kathîr said, “Each of these ḥadîths, their chains [of transmission] contain a problem.” The last narration was also quoted earlier and as was mentioned, al-'Uqailî viewed it as being weak; in *Silsilah al-Aḥâdîth aḍ-Ḍa'îfah* (2/220/no.812), Shaikh al-Albânî elaborates further mentioning the criticisms of two narrators in its chain: Yūnus bin Shu'aib, who Imam al-Bukhârî declared was rejected in Ḥadîth and 'Abdun-Nūr bin 'Abdillah bin Sinân, who Imam adh-Dhahabî declared was a liar and accused of fabricating Ḥadîth.

With the narrations regarding the marriage of Mary to Prophet Muhammad in Paradise weak, the question is: where did this story originate? Enter Eulogius of Cordova, a Spanish Christian writer and (so-called) martyr who lived during the 800s in Muslim-ruled Andalusia (he was beheaded around 859CE). In his book, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (p. 93), John V. Tolan writes,

Eulogius deforms Muhammad's biography to fit the standard biographies of Antichrist. He is certainly not ignorant of what Muslims say about their prophet; he simply chooses to present the elements of Muhammad's life that fit the images of Antichrist. One of the favorite topics of Christian polemicists is sex: Muhammad's wives, Muslim polygamy, and the celestial houris promised to the faithful [sounds quite a bit like this writer, no?]. All this is foreign to the ideal of Christian celibacy and to Christian ideas of heaven, but it fits well with the doctrines traditionally attributed to Antichrist. Eulogius has more trouble explaining the Koran's affirmation of the virginity of Jesus' mother. Here, again, his solution is a gross deformation: "I will not repeat the sacrilege which that impure dog [Muhammad] dared proffer about the Blessed Virgin, Queen of the World, holy mother of our venerable Lord and Savior. He claimed ... that in the next world he would deflower her." [Eulogius, *Memoriale sanctorum*, 1:7 in *Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicorum*. 376] This outrageous claim, it seems, is Eulogius's invention; I know of no other Christian polemicist who makes this accusation against Muhammad. Eulogius fabricates lies designed to shock his Christian reader. This way, even those elements of Islam that resemble Christianity (such as reverence of Jesus and his virgin mother) are deformed and blackened, so as to prevent the Christian from admiring anything about the Muslim other.

The goal is to inspire hatred for the "oppressors," and (as wartime propagandists have long known) there is little better way to do so than to accuse the enemy of murder and rape. If most Cordovans seem ready to tolerate Islam with a sort of ecumenical open-mindedness, Eulogius sets out to show that the Muslim is not a friend but a potential rapist of Christ's virgins.

Here we have a more than likely origin for such a story. As it is known that some of the early narrators of Ḥadīth would also narrate Israelite traditions (Isrā'īliyyât; narrations originating from the People of the Book), as well as the fact at least one of the narrators of this ḥadīth was accused of fabricating ḥadīths, it is not entirely strange that this story could have (and probably did) originate from Eulogius (or other Christian polemicists in Andalusia during the third century of Islam). Add the fact that those who recorded the ḥadīth (al-'Uqailī, at-Ṭabarānī, Abū Ya'lā, and Ibn 'Asâkir) were either young children or not even born yet by the time Eulogius was beheaded and the likelihood only increases.

This book by John Tolan is quite the read; it shows the lengths to which Christian polemicists and anti-Muslim writers of the past went in twisting facts, distorting truths, providing misinformation, or simply fabricating blatant lies in order to defend their religion and attack Islam; lengths we see the Christian polemicists and anti-Muslim writers of today (like this writer and his cronies) going to as well. What Tolan mentions above perfectly illustrates the high probability that many of the weak narrations found in early Islamic texts concerning the Biblical Prophets and other Biblical notables—which many Christian missionaries and polemicists use to attack Islam—were concocted and fabricated by Christians themselves.

And the last of our claim is that the praise is for Allah, Lord of the worlds; and may Allah send His salutations, prayers, and blessings upon our beloved Prophet Muḥammad, upon his

family, his companions, and those who follow them upon charitable conduct until the establishment of the Final Hour.

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