



The Prophet's Marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh: A Reexamination and Historiographic Analysis

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Abstract

The Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh (rA) stands unique among all of his marriages because of its explicit pronouncement in the Qur'an. Despite the stated theological, social, and legal goals the Qur'an posits as the reason for its contraction, the marriage has remained a topic of contention for centuries. This controversy emanates from a number of bizarre traditions proposing instead that the Prophet's ﷺ primary motivation in securing the marriage was his infatuation with Zaynab (rA). Muslim responses to the narrations have primarily focused on a few noteworthy inconsistencies in the narrative, as well as the weakness of the chains of transmissions of the hadiths reporting it. This article will examine the many internal and external contradictions that characterize the story, many of which render the lovestruck narrative logistically unfeasible. Additionally, it will underscore the evolution of the account, detailing its development over a century after the Prophet's ﷺ death as it gradually transformed into its final form as recognized today. It will detail its origins from inadvertent reactions to Byzantine fabrications advanced as anti-Islamic polemics that were historically the first to depict this marriage as one based on lust. It will then trace the story's metamorphosis from that undeveloped prototype to its fully fleshed final variant replete with details that were drawn through a parallel with the Biblical narrative of the Bathsheba affair, which alleges an affair between David and Bathsheba, with that of the Prophet's ﷺ marriage with Zaynab (rA). The article will highlight the role that three specific Qur'an commentators—Qatādah, Ibn Jurayj, and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān—played in the development of the story with their commentary on Sūrat al-Aḥzāb. Finally, the article will provide an analysis of the pre-Islamic sociological context in which the Prophet's marriage to Zaynab took place. It will illustrate that, far from a marriage of convenience based on passion, it was a necessary one to enact social and specifically marital reform in an attempt to eradicate unjust practices towards vulnerable individuals, and thereby overthrow and abolish an oppressive institution.

Introduction

The Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh (rA) is distinguished from his other marriages in that it is directly referenced within the Qur'an, where it is not only endorsed but contracted. The underlying objectives of this marriage are also immediately explicated unequivocally after its contraction. The Qur'an offers a twofold *raison d'être* for the marriage. The first was to abolish the pre-Islamic practice of the ascription of one's patronym to an adopted child. As Zaynab (rA) had previously been married to Zayd ibn Hārithah (rA), then recognized as the Prophet's ﷺ adopted son and identified by his patronym, the Prophet's ﷺ subsequent marriage to Zaynab (rA) nullified the pre-Islamic proscription of marriage with the spouse of one's adopted child in the event of their divorce. This prohibition had been founded on the conflation of an adopted child with a biological one, and this marriage annulled any legal basis for such a conflation. Second, it established the nonexistence of any male offspring ascribable to the Prophet ﷺ, at that juncture and in the future, and as such the conclusion of prophethood with the death of the Prophet. After the death of the Prophet ﷺ, none of his progeny could lay a hereditary claim to his prophethood or indeed his political leadership. Instead, it was vested in Abū Bakr (rA), a man whose only political and spiritual authority stemmed from his personal qualities, as he was born of comparatively humble ancestry which only united with that of the Prophet's seven generations before. The Qur'an's declaration that the Prophet ﷺ was not, and would not be, the father of any male offspring was particularly prescient as none of the Prophet's many biological sons lived to maturity despite the excellent health of all of his daughters. Indeed, one of his sons passed away during childhood after the revelation of this verse.

Despite the stated sociological, legal, and theological aims that were consequently achieved by this marriage in one masterful stroke, it has nonetheless attracted significant notoriety and engaged the fascination of a multitude of critics of the Prophet ﷺ, particularly in the past few centuries. Almost all prominent Western biographies of the Prophet ﷺ, no matter how cursory their engagement of other critical issues, include the elaborate details of a variant of this event which does not

even appear in most Muslim biographies.¹ The full details of this peculiar variant differ quite a bit among various narrations, but the general theme is as follows: one day the Prophet ﷺ went searching for Zayd ibn Hārithah (rA), then married to Zaynab (rA) (who also happened to be the Prophet’s paternal cousin). Upon reaching Zayd’s house, he discovered that Zayd (rA) had stepped out, and only Zaynab (rA) remained to greet him. Zaynab (rA) invited the Prophet in, but something in her appearance stimulated a strong attraction to her in the Prophet ﷺ, and he immediately departed, uttering, “Glory be to Allah, who causes hearts to turn!” Zaynab informed Zayd of his visit and statement, who recognized its implication, and immediately offered to divorce Zaynab for the Prophet’s benefit. The Prophet ﷺ, however, advised Zayd to uphold his marriage with Zaynab, though he concealed his inner desire that Zayd divorce her so that he could marry her instead. Zayd for one reason or another undertook his own initiative to divorce Zaynab. The Prophet ﷺ then received a timely revelation (preserved in the aforementioned *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*) that, though it censured the Prophet for concealing his desires, wed the Prophet ﷺ with Zaynab (rA) anyway and satisfied the Prophet’s deep desire.

The full event chronicled above or even an abridged version of it is glaringly absent from the extant works of the earliest *maghāzī* and *sīrah* compilers, most notably such doyens as ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/712), Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741), Mūsā ibn ‘Uqbah (d. 141/758), Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770) and of course, Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767).² However, it is present in a handful of

¹ See, for instance, Washington Irving, *Mahomet and His Successors* (New York: The Cooperative Publishing Society, 1849), 141–42; William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1861), 3:231; David Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905), 320–21; William Tisdall, *The Religion of the Crescent or Islam: Its Strength, Its Weakness, Its Origin, Its Influence* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1895), 177; Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), 205–8; Nabia Abbott, *Aishah: The Beloved of Mohammed* (London: Saqi Books, 1998), 16–18; Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time* (New York: Harper Press, 2007), 167. The most renowned Western biographer of the Prophet who cast doubt on the historicity of the lovestruck narrative is Montgomery Watt, who situated the event in the full context of the social reforms that the Prophet was attempting to enact. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 282–83. Recently, Wilferd Madelung has also cast doubt on this narrative. Wilferd Madelung, “Social Legislation in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*,” in *Islam and Globalization: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Proceedings of the 25th Congress of L’Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants), *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 226 (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 197–203.

² David Powers intimates that as Ibn Ishāq’s *Kitāb al-maghāzī* does not survive in its entirety and exists primarily in the recension of Abu Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mālik ibn Hishām, who admittedly expurgated less savory portions of Ibn Ishāq’s work, it is likely that Ibn Hishām also bowdlerized the lovestruck narrative. David Powers, *Zayd*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 15. However, as Sean Anthony notes in his critical book review of Powers’ monograph, the lovestruck narrative is absent not just in Ibn Hishām’s abridgement of Ibn Ishāq,

narrations found in some later and relatively obscure works of *tafsīr* and hadith. The argument forwarded by proponents of the historicity of what is termed in this paper “the lovestruck narrative” for succinctness is quite simple and invokes the “criterion of embarrassment.” That is, traditions that relate this version of events are found in exegetical and hadith works composed by Muslim authors and compilers, and it is improbable that Muslims would have been motivated to concoct multiple spurious narrations that portray the Prophet ﷺ in such an unflattering light. Therefore, the reports must be factual.³

Muslim responses and interpretations of this event, particularly modern ones, have largely rejected this account, though throughout multiple historical periods, some have accepted its veracity with surprising nonchalance. The standard repudiation undertaken by most modern Muslim biographers of the Prophet ﷺ as well as a number of medieval Qurʾan and hadith commentators is represented quintessentially by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, who scathingly labeled those who deemed the lovestruck narrative veracious as “ignorant” claimants who “don’t esteem the Messenger of Allah as he deserves to be esteemed (*man lam yaqdir rasūl Allāhi haqqa qadrihi*).”⁴ A number of Muslim scholars who ostensibly deemed the event baseless, eschewed altogether a detailed rejoinder or indeed any reference to the lovestruck narrative.⁵ This is exhibited in the summary affirmation

but in all of the extant recensions of Ibn Ishāq’s *Maghazī*: the Medinan recension of Ibrāhīm ibn Sa’d ibn Ibrāhīm, the Kūfān recensions of Ziyād al-Bakkā’ī and, Yūnus ibn Bukayr, the Ḥarrānīan recension of Muḥammad ibn Salamah al-Ḥarrānī, and the Rayy recension of Salamah ibn al-Faḍl. Therefore, the pithy reference that Ibn Hishām and the other three uniformly make regarding the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab without any hint of the lovestruck narrative is a faithful representation of Ibn Ishāq’s original. Sean Anthony, *Review of Qurʾanic Research* 1 (2015): 1–5 (online pagination).

³ Tor Andrae, *Mohammed: Sein Leben und Glaube*, (Göttingen: Vanderhoek and Ruprecht, 1932), 124-125; Rodinson, *Muhammad*, 205–8.

⁴ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zād al-ma’ād fī hadī khayr al-’ibād*, ed. Shu’ayb al-’Arna’ūt and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-’Arna’ūt (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1998), 4:244–46; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *al-Dā’ wa al-dawā’* (Mecca: Dār al-’Ālim al-Fawā’id, 2008), 528, 554–55. See also, Abū Ishāq al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf wa al-bayān ‘an tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Jeddah: Dār al-Tafsīr: 2015); Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, ed. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2006), 17:153–58; Shiblī al-Nu’mānī, *Siratun Nabi* (Lahore: Darul Ishaat, 2003), 2:351–54; Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *The Life of Muḥammad* (United States: American Trust Publications, 1976), 275–89; Idris Kandehlawi, *Siratul Muṣṭafā* (Karachi: Zam Zam Publishers, 2015), 3:306–10; Abu al-A’lā al-Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān* (Lahore: Tarjumān al-Qur’ān, n.d.), 4:99–101; Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Ṣābūnī, *Ṣafwat al-tafāsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, 1981), 2:527; Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet* (Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2014), 487–94.

⁵ Among those who eschewed any reference to the narrative in modern times are Safiur-Raḥmān al-Mubarakpuri, *al-Raḥeeq al-Makhtum* (Saudi Arabia: Maktaba Darussalam, 1979); Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwi, *Prophet of Mercy* (London: Turāth Publishing, 2014); ‘Alī Muḥammad as-Sallaabee, *The Noble Life of the Prophet* (Saudi Arabia: Maktaba Darussalam, 2005).

of Isma‘īl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kathīr that this narrative is “one that we would prefer to strike from the pages because of its dearth of authenticity.”⁶ The explanation of the verses in *al-Aḥzāb* by those who repudiated the lovestruck narrative, either explicitly or implicitly, chronicle instead a more straightforward narrative, advanced by Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ in his popular *Kitāb al-Shifā* as the “more sound view,” and extolled by Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī as “a lucid, satisfactory narrative.”⁷ In this version, the Prophet ﷺ was informed in some manner of his impending marriage to Zaynab (rA) through divine revelation. Yet when Zayd (rA) came to him seeking a divorce with Zaynab (rA), the Prophet ﷺ—understandably wary of the calumniation of his many detractors for the marriage’s contravention of established marital mores as Ibn Ḥajar notes (*kāna yastahī...wa kāna yakhshā al-nāsa an ya‘ībū ‘alayhi wa yaqūlū tazawwaja imra’ata ibnihi*)—instead advised him to keep his marriage intact. As a result, Allah censured the Prophet ﷺ in the Qur’an for concerning himself with the animadversion of critics, and enacted the marriage Himself.

Views giving credence to the lovestruck narrative are also present in Muslim literature, and appear most prevalent in a number of exegetical works and commentaries of *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, but also in a few modern works.⁸ Some contemporary clerics have also inclined to this view, citing the widespread prevalence of the narrations that allude to it.⁹ The latter do not find the lovestruck narrative problematic at all, and ignore the expressed aims of the marriage referred to in the Qur’an as well as the absence of any divine wisdom in the Qur’an ever needing to embarrass the Prophet ﷺ by publicly broadcasting such a storyline.

⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’an al-‘Adhīm* (Riyadh: Dār Tayba lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 1997), 6:425, 8:48.

⁷ Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *al-Shifā’ bi-ta’rīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-‘arabī, 1984), 876-879; Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī bi sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-‘Arna’ūt, (Beirut: al-Risālah al-‘Ālamiyyah, 2013), 14:158-159.

⁸ Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’an*, ed. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Hījr, 2001), 19:116; Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-‘ulūm* (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1993), 3:51–53; Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1983), 212–13.

⁹ Yasir Qadhi, “Seerah of Prophet Muḥammad 69 - The Prophet's Marriage to Zaynab,” Yasir Qadhi, YouTube video, November 18, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbaorsGGFio>; Yasir Qadhi, “Mothers of the Believers pt. 12 Zaynab bint Jaḥsh,” Memphis Islamic Center, YouTube video, August 5, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuguuikqJCQ&t=2892s>. Qadhi states that the reports of the lovestruck narrative are so widespread that they are *mutawātir* (i.e., mass transmitted so as to provide epistemological certainty of the event’s historicity). Also, ‘Ā’ishah ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (commonly known by her pen name Bint al-Shāṭi’) claims as does Qadhi that the lovestruck narrative proves the Prophet’s human nature; ‘Ā’ishah ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi’, *Nisā’ al-nabī*, (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1979), 161.

Most importantly, they seem to not be conscious of the full theological implications of the prompt and opportune revelation of the Qur’anic verses that just happened to sanction the Prophet’s existing personal interests. Instead, they profess that it demonstrates the Prophet’s ﷺ human aspect and desires, of which he was at least outwardly, entirely in control. Yet another and somewhat bizarre explanation is posited by Muhammad Hamidullah, who accepted the veracity of the account. However, he attributes the Prophet’s ﷺ emotion after seeing Zaynab (rA) not to desire, but to astonishment at Zayd’s (rA) domestic discord, alluded to as an explanation for his eventual divorce in some narrations, with a wife who possessed such incredible beauty.¹⁰

Rebuttals of this event by medieval and contemporary Muslim biographers revolve primarily around three contentions. As Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī argues, not a single one of the narrations that mention this event is free of considerable narrative weaknesses.¹¹ None has a chain of narrators (*isnād*) that actually extends continuously back (*muttaṣil*) to the Prophet ﷺ. Only one traces back to a Companion (*ṣaḥābī*), and that too a Companion who did not witness the event in question. Additionally, not one is devoid of at least one impugned narrator in the *isnād*, and many have no *isnād* at all. This would render all of the hadiths at best severely weak (*ḍa‘īf*) and inapt for cumulative validation (*taṣḥīḥ li-ghayrihi*), if not entirely fabricated (*mawḍū‘*).¹²

¹⁰ Muḥammad Hamidullah, *Le Prophète de l’Islam: Sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris: El Falah, 1959), 454-455.

¹¹ Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur’an* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyyah, 2003), 3:576–78; Additionally the late contemporary ḥadīth expert Muḥammad Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī reviews a number of these transmissions, though not all of them, in his compendium of weak ḥadīths and grades them as “severely repudiated” (*munkar jiddan*) and entirely “spurious” (*mawḍū‘*); Muḥammad Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa‘īfah wa al-Mawḍū‘ah*, (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 2000), 7:402, entry 3390 and 14:799-801, entry 6848.

¹² That is, fabricated, extremely weak reports and reports arising from the same source cannot be used to corroborate one another and raise the grading of a specific ḥadīth, though mildly defective reports of a multiplicity of origins can be utilized in this manner. This is for obvious reasons, since two fabricated reports provide no incremental epistemological strength to a report even if they present the same information, particularly if they draw on the same fabricated parent report. This is underscored in the case of the lovestruck narrative, whose multiple variant transmissions share a common origin, as will be demonstrated later. This is the reason that *mutawātir* reports require a preponderance of transmitters at every every level in the *isnād*. All of the reports of the lovestruck narrative are devoid of a *single* eyewitness, and all but one are lacking even a narrator for the first century after the Prophet; thus, the unprecedented claim made in recent times that these reports collectively are *mutawātir* is ultimately baseless. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūri, *Muqaddimah*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), 33–35; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalani, *Nuzhat al-naẓar*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr (Karachi: Maktabat al-Bushrā, 2011), 60–61; Jalal al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawawī*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Awwāmah (Jeddah and Medina: Dār al-Minhāj and Dār al-Yusr, 2016), 3:72–76.

Second, Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ and Ibn al-‘Arabī both note that Zaynab (rA) was not a woman foreign to the Prophet ﷺ—she was his paternal cousin, and during a period when regulations on hijab had not been yet enacted, it is difficult to imagine that the Prophet ﷺ had not met Zaynab prior to the event at Zayd’s house. Some hadiths do in fact mention direct dealings between the two that would have preceded the lovestruck narrative.¹³ It seems unlikely that the Prophet ﷺ suddenly realized Zaynab’s beauty and became infatuated with her after a single glimpse near the end of his life (and that too when she was 38 years of age at the time of her marriage to the Prophet ﷺ, which would have made her the oldest of his wives at marriage other than Khadījah bint Khuwaylid).¹⁴

Last, the Prophet ﷺ himself had Zaynab (rA) married to Zayd (rA), and with considerable reluctance on the part of Zaynab and her brother ‘Abd Allāh ibn Jaḥsh, both of whom had to be persuaded by the Prophet ﷺ and eventually the Qur’an until they relented.¹⁵ Zaynab and ‘Abd Allāh’s unwillingness is attributed to Zayd’s prior status as a slave.¹⁶ Accordingly, if the Prophet ﷺ had desired to marry Zaynab at this juncture, he could easily have carried this out instead of persuading her to wed Zayd. The Jaḥsh family would have been only too enthusiastic with Zaynab’s marriage with the Prophet ﷺ, who not only had never been a slave, but originated from the Quraysh and that too from one of its most noble clans. Zaynab herself could not lay claim to the Prophet’s nobility,

¹³ The Prophet visited Zaynab’s house (*fa dakhala ‘alā Zaynab bint Jaḥsh*) to propose to her on behalf of Zayd, but she refused. When he requested her again, she asked him, “Oh Messenger of Allah, are you commanding me regarding my own [marriage], and I am a member of my people and also your cousin?” Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 19:112–13. It should be noted that this report’s *isnād* includes impugned narrators who transmit it, but there are a number of other distinct supporting narrations that reveal interactions between the Prophet and Zaynab prior to her marriage with Zayd. See additionally, ‘Alī ibn ‘Umar al-Dāraqūṭnī, *Sunan al-Dāraqūṭnī*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-‘Arna‘ūt (Beirut, Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2004), 4:461–62, hadith 3796; Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-kabīr*, ed. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Markaz li’l Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-‘Arabīyyah wa al-Islāmīyyah, 2011), 14:176–77, hadith 13896.

¹⁴ Muḥammad ibn Sa’d mentions that Zaynab was 53 years of age when she died in 20/652, and she married the Prophet in 5/637, when she would have been 38. Ibn Sa’d also reproduces a transmission from ‘Uthman ibn ‘Abd Allah that she was 35 years at the time of her marriage. Muḥammad ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad ‘Umar (Cairo: al-Nāshir Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), 10:111. Also note that there are hadiths that refer to Khadījah being 28 years of age at the time of her marriage to the Prophet, though the dominant position has been that she was 40. If Khadījah were indeed 28, that would make Zaynab the oldest of the Prophet’s wives at the time of her marriage with him; Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 10:18.

¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 19:112–15; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dur al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr al-ma‘thūr*, ed. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin (Cairo: Markaz li’l Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-‘Arabīyyah wa al-Islāmīyyah, 2003), 12:49.

¹⁶ Zaynab explained her initial refusal to marry Zayd to the Prophet explicitly, “I am of superior stock than he (*ana khayrun minhu ḥasaban*).” Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 19:113; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dur al-manthūr*, 12:49. This narration’s *isnād* is also deficient and includes disparaged transmitters.

because even though her mother was Qurayshī, the majority of Arab tribes ascribed lineage based on an agnatic ancestry, and Jaḥsh ibn Riʿāb descended from Banū Asad ibn Khuzaymah, which did not command near the same prestige as the Quraysh. That the Jaḥsh family would have been enthusiastic to marry Zaynab to the Prophet ﷺ is not mere speculation, as ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī and Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī both relate that when the Prophet visited Zaynab to present a marriage proposal on Zayd's behalf, she initially misconstrued the proposal as one from the Prophet himself and was thrilled. When it became clear that the Prophet ﷺ was only proposing for Zayd and not himself, she refused until the revelation of *al-Aḥzāb*, 36, which commanded obedience to the Prophet even in matters that related to marriage.¹⁷

Some of these contentions are individually circumstantial, but collectively they are reasonable and even compelling, and a number of Muslim historians have therefore deemed the lovestruck narrative highly improbable. Nevertheless, considerably more can be said about the event, which declines from mere improbability to complete absurdity based on a closer reading of the primary texts that deal with the event. This study analyzes those texts, including the Qur'an as the one preserved primary source that documents the marriage at the time of its occurrence, as well as the very hadiths that chronicle the lovestruck narrative. These provide a wealth of information that pose critical challenges to the lovestruck narrative. The study then goes on to assess the actual underlying motives for the Qur'anic enjoinder of the marriage with Zaynab (rA). The article will focus on the pre-Islamic sociological context in which the Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Zaynab was implemented, and demonstrate that far from a marriage of convenience based on passion, it was a necessary one to enact social and specifically marital reform in an attempt to eradicate unjust practices towards vulnerable individuals. The study then analyzes the event from the perspective of the historiographic and hermeneutical underpinnings employed by the Qur'an commentators who reported the event, which inform when and how the views on this affair developed, and the etiologies for their development. Finally, the article examines Muslim historical responses and their evolution to the Prophet's ﷺ marriage with Zaynab (rA).

¹⁷ ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 1999), 3:40, hadith 2345; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 19:113.

The Qur’anic evidence

The Qur’anic evidence lies in the few verses of *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* that directly address the Prophet’s ﷺ marriage with Zaynab (rA):

[37] And [remember] when you were saying to the one who was favored by Allah and favored by you, “Hold fast to your wife and fear Allah.” And you were concealing in your heart what Allah was going to reveal and you were fearing people, while Allah is more entitled to be feared by you. So when Zayd concluded his union with her, We married you to her, so that there may not be any hindrance for the Believers in marrying the wives of their adopted sons when they have divorced them. And Allah’s mandate had to be carried out.

[38] There is no harm for the Prophet in doing what Allah has obligated for him; [that has been] the way of Allah with those who have preceded him. And Allah’s command is an absolutely settled decree.¹⁸

[39] [That is the way] of those who convey the messages of Allah and fear him, fearing none other than Allah. And Allah is sufficient to take account.

[40] Muhammad is not the father of any of your men; rather he is a Messenger of Allah and the Last of the Prophets. And Allah has full knowledge of all things.

Several aspects of the Prophet’s ﷺ marriage to Zaynab (rA) become evident with these verses. First, the Prophet ﷺ instructed Zayd (rA) to maintain his marriage to Zaynab (rA). It is not apparent immediately why he instructed Zayd to do this based on the verses alone, but the Qur’an states that the Prophet ﷺ concealed something in his heart that he was fearful of the public becoming

¹⁸ *Faraḍa Allāhū lah* can be understood in two ways as Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī explicates in his exegesis: that Allah commanded and obliged the marriage or that he legalized and permitted the marriage. The Arabic term *faraḍa* can encompass both of those meanings, though the vast majority of exegetes have interpreted the phrase as something permitted based on the lexical understanding. Ibn Kathīr appears to favor the interpretation that it encompasses both meanings (*fīmā aḥalla lahu wa amruhu bihi min tazwīj Zaynab*), as did Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī and others; Abu Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlat ahl al-sunnah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2005), 8:393; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Adhīm*, 6:427; Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī, *Sharḥ al-Shifā li’l Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001), 2:348.

cognizant of. We also gather that, whatever the Prophet ﷺ concealed, Allah wanted him to divulge it, censured him for not doing so immediately, and promised the Prophet that He would reveal it anyway.

The verses go on to indicate that after Zayd took it upon himself to separate from Zaynab, Allah then married the Prophet ﷺ to Zaynab Himself. The rationale for the Prophet's marriage with Zaynab is immediately identified—to establish the precedent of the Prophet ﷺ marrying the ex-wife of an adopted son who took on the name of a non-biological father (*ad'īyā'*), so that the proscription on this practice could be forever abolished. The Qur'an then asserts in defense of the Prophet ﷺ, no doubt to ward off condemnation of the Prophet for his marriage to his adopted son's ex-wife, that the Prophet ﷺ cannot be impugned for undertaking a practice that Allah had obligated him to do. It continues by stating that Allah's command to the Prophet ﷺ is just one in a long chain of commandments that He had decreed to the prophets of old who also commendably conveyed His message despite the condemnation and scorn they were no doubt subject to. The verses conclude by delivering their coup de maître: the Prophet ﷺ was not the biological father of any son, and as such, could not be censured for the marriage on legal grounds. Concurrently, without a legal heir to his spiritual, political, and material inheritance, the Prophet ﷺ was the final amongst the long chain of prophets. The annulment of adoption and his lack of a biological heir removed any confusion with regards to his inheritance, for now no one could lay claim to prophethood or political authority based on hereditary succession.

The precise wording of these verses immediately disqualifies the lovestruck narrative from any shred of plausibility. The first issue is regarding the nature of the Prophet's ﷺ secret that Allah censured him for concealing. If the Prophet ﷺ were concealing temptation for Zaynab (rA), the Qur'an's censure of the Prophet for failing to disclose his secret is tantamount to reprimanding him for not having made a public spectacle of his attraction to a married woman. This elementary idea seems to have been overlooked by the exegetes and chroniclers championing the lovestruck narrative. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī and Adil Salahi both identified this problem, and the latter sardonically poses, “Suppose that a man

falls in love with another man's wife—is he morally bound to speak of that love in public? Would God criticize a man who could not help his feelings if he suppressed such a love and kept it to himself? Would he be better rewarded if he were to write some love poems expressing his feeling?"¹⁹

The Qur'an also makes clear that the Prophet's ﷺ concealment was because of his fear of the public's response, and also expresses Allah's promise that He would make what the Prophet concealed manifest to the general public. Yet, we hear of no criticism of the Prophet ﷺ for coveting Zaynab (rA) in any of the primary sources, nor is there any record of a single contemporary of the Prophet ever quoting anything that suggests that what the Prophet concealed was a desire to marry Zaynab. The lack of criticism on this point is all the more remarkable, since his secret needed to have become publicly exposed for it to reach us millennia later, and additionally because the Qur'an promised its disclosure. If the Prophet's ﷺ desire for Zaynab (rA) became public without any backlash as is suggested by the primary record's resounding silence, then it can be only because the Prophet ﷺ miscalculated and overestimated the degree of criticism that would be leveled upon him. It follows that either it was not taboo to desire a married woman (even though the Prophet ﷺ clearly was under that misunderstanding), or that the Prophet's contemporary critics suddenly softened towards him and forfeited a golden opportunity to highlight what would be considered a moral failing in most societies. Instead of any reference to criticism of the Prophet's ﷺ desire for Zaynab, the primary sources do mention excoriation by the Prophet's critics for his marrying an adopted son's ex-wife.²⁰ For the lovestruck narrative to fit with the available data, it would necessarily entail extreme oversight by the Prophet ﷺ in his agonizing over the disclosure of his attraction to Zaynab (rA)—a trivial concern it seems based on the indifference that ensued—and overlooking the true scandal that his marriage with the ex-wife of his own adopted son would generate.

If we do accept that the Prophet ﷺ concealed a desire for Zaynab (rA) which was eventually made public knowledge of (as is necessarily required for the

¹⁹ Al-Ṣābūnī, *Ṣafwat al-tafāsīr*, 2:527; Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Nubuwwah wa al-anbiyā'* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Ghazali, 1985), 100; Salahi, *Muḥammad*, 489.

²⁰ Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut: Dar-al-Gharb al-Islami, 1996), 5:264–65, hadiths 3207, 3208.

narrative to have reached us), and frivolously put aside the problem of the lack of any historical record of the censure it would have entailed, there still remains the difficulty in explaining how this information was disseminated to the public. Clearly there is nothing in the Qur'an itself that divulges this. Was the Prophet ﷺ compelled to acknowledge his feelings publicly—and if so why is there no record of this? From where do the reports of the lovestruck narrative originate? We are also left asking how the Prophet ﷺ could explain away the convenient obligation to marry Zaynab (rA) that just so happened to accord with his desires. The Companions (*ṣaḥābah*) were not unthinking and uncritical devotees, and an event that pandered so much to the Prophet's ﷺ personal interests would not have gone unnoticed by his astute and honorable deputies, some of whom expressed reservations at other occasions regarding much less problematic episodes in the Prophet's life.²¹ Indeed, the Scottish Orientalist William Muir, having taken the incident's veracity as granted, identifies the problem, and marvels that any of the Companions could maintain confidence in the Prophet's ﷺ sincerity after this marriage. Rather than conceive that the lovestruck narrative could be spurious, however, he resorted to shaky conjecture that invoked generalizations about the Companions' intellectual deficiencies (which he frequently did in his work using racial overtones) and a mysterious supernatural power the Prophet ﷺ held over them.²²

In contrast, the interpretation of the event by medieval and modern Muslim exegetes and historians gainsaying the lovestruck narrative accords substantially better with the verses in *al-Aḥzāb*. According to this narrative, Allah indicated to the Prophet ﷺ his impending marriage with Zaynab (rA) as a means of effecting specific marital reforms. The Prophet ﷺ immediately grasped the confusion and turmoil his marriage with his adopted son's ex-wife would provoke given that such a marriage would have been deemed not only unbecoming by pre-Islamic Arab standards but incestuous and tantamount to marrying one's biological son's wife.

²¹ For instance, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's well-known reluctance to endorse the Ḥudaybiyah treaty, or Ubay ibn Ka'b's misgivings regarding the Qur'anic variants (*ahruf*).

²² "Our only matter of wonder is, that the revelations of Mahomet continued after this to be regarded by his people as inspired communications from the Almighty, when they were so palpably formed to secure his own objects, and pander even to his evil desires. We hear of no doubts or questionings; and we can only attribute the confiding and credulous spirit of his followers to the absolute ascendancy of his powerful mind over all who came within its influence." William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, 3:231.

Quite separate from the practical matter of furnishing his opponents a convenient pretext to besmirch his character, the Prophet ﷺ himself, *the* paragon of modesty and discretion, would undoubtedly have felt a natural level of discomfiture with the prospect; and therefore when Zayd (rA) approached him of his own volition to ask for a divorce from Zaynab (rA) because of an ongoing domestic conflict, the

Prophet ﷺ advised against it.²³ In response to this, Allah censured him in the Qur'an for fearing the public's reproach more than His, for concealment of His mandate when Allah Himself had promised to disclose it, and for postponing its observance by directing Zayd to preserve his marriage. The Qur'an itself then goes

²³ The nature of the Prophet's precognition of his marriage with Zaynab remains undisclosed in any of the primary texts, and there are three modes of revelation that are possible. The Prophet's advice to Zayd to preserve his marriage can be understood in different ways based on each of those contexts. One possibility is an indirect revelation in which Allah inspired the Prophet simply by making him conscious of his impending marriage to Zaynab when Zayd came to him requesting a divorce. A man as astute as the Prophet may have anticipated the obligation to marry Zaynab based on Allah's practice of correcting misconceptions by having His prophets embody the correction of that social ill, and Allah's inspiration need not have been through formal revelation but by steering the Prophet's gifted intellect to this conclusion based on his own reasoning. In this case, the explicit divine obligation to marry Zaynab only came *after* the revelation of *al-Aḥzāb*, 37 which contracted the marriage. Thus, the Prophet's advice to Zayd would have been his way of warding off the possibility of being obligated to marry her to avoid the turmoil that would ensue—a possibility that he would have predicted with his own foresight (albeit sparked by divine inspiration) rather than with direct revelation.

A second alternative is that Allah directly and unequivocally did inform the Prophet of his impending marriage with Zaynab through formal revelation, and moreover commanded the fulfillment of the prophecy to the Prophet by taking it upon himself to marry Zaynab. In this case, this imperative would have predated Zaynab's divorce with Zayd. The Prophet in this situation would have been conscious of Allah's command unlike in the first situation. This is the view of 'Alī Zayn al-'Abidīn, al-Suddī, Qāḍī 'Iyād, and others. Faced with the obligation to wed a married woman, the Prophet would have been confronted with one of three options to discharge the obligation. The first would be to direct Zayd to divorce his wife so that he could fulfill Allah's command. Instructing a married man to divorce his wife so that one could marry her would obviously not have been an advisable method of carrying out Allah's directive. However, Zayd was already involved in marital discord with his wife, and came of his own accord seeking a divorce. The Prophet was thus faced with a second option to fulfill the commandment—to counsel a divorce so that he could marry her in lieu of Zayd. This prospect would still have been less than honorable for a man with the Prophet's shy disposition, and therefore he opted for a third recourse. This was to advise Zayd to maintain his marriage, so that the Prophet would play no role whatsoever in the upcoming divorce, which he already knew would inevitably ensue. The Prophet would have intended to enact his marriage with Zaynab at an occasion more auspicious, once Zayd exercised the divorce of his own volition, and which the Prophet knew was only a matter of time in coming. The Prophet likely concluded that counseling Zayd to divorce Zaynab to render his own marriage possible was not the most prudent approach. Moreover, his counsel was keeping within his mission to simply convey guidance (in this case the preservation of the sacred institution of marriage) whether or not his advice was heeded. In this context, his advice was actually sound, (and also, it should be noted, the same guidance that he would have offered in the absence of any divine commandment) except for the fact that the Prophet's recommendation was additionally driven by concern for the reproach that would arise—both that he had advised divorce with a woman that he ended up marrying, and also that he had married the ex-wife of his adopted son. It was this concern of his that elicited his censure in the Qur'an. Of note, his deferral of the fulfillment of the divine mandate to marry Zaynab only once Zayd divorced her on his own was within his discretionary limits as a prophet of Allah. The Prophet did in fact exercise this license at other times in his life. This is manifested in the Qur'an where Allah enjoins a number of injunctions as well as in hadiths where the Prophet expounded on some directive that he was responsible for discharging—directives that clearly did not warrant prompt action. Rather, they were open edicts that were to be acted upon at the most judicious time, place, and manner as determined by the Prophet's judgment.

A third possibility, advanced by Abu al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī, relates to the content of Allah's command. If Allah's directive to the Prophet was only predicated on the *condition* of Zayd's divorce from Zaynab (i.e. the Prophet would only be required to marry Zaynab *if* Zayd divorced her), the Prophet may have been trying to preempt that divorce to avoid the obligation in the first place. Regardless, in all of those situations, the Prophet's advice to Zayd is within the boundaries of his prophetic discretion, and the basis for his censure in the Qur'an is not his advice to Zayd per se, but the underlying motive for his recommendation—his disquiet with the upbraiding that would ensue from the marriage; Abu al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur'an*, 4:101.

on to immediately disclose the cause for the Prophet's ﷺ hesitation as per its promise—his marriage to Zaynab which Allah promptly contracted. The Prophet ﷺ, of course, complied.

This interpretation is compelling in its simplicity and concordant with the Qur'anic verses in their entirety, lacking the need for fanciful tales found in obscure works to make sense of the verses, unlike the lovestruck narrative. It is independently robust and can be gleaned simply by a literal reading of the Qur'an. This likely explains why none of the Companions (rA) ever felt the need to provide context or exegesis on these verses of *al-Aḥzāb*, except for one comment of 'Ā'ishah's (rA) that is also consonant with this interpretation, and will be discussed later. It also resolves all the inconsistencies that arise from the lovestruck narrative. First, it explains Allah's censure of the Prophet ﷺ for failing to disclose some information, as it is far more reasonable if that undisclosed information which elicited divine command to be broadcast publicly were dispassionate knowledge of his impending marriage as opposed to his private infatuation. Second, it accounts for the Qur'an's reproachful manner towards the Prophet ﷺ for instructing Zayd (rA) to retain his wife, which would on the contrary be laudable if he were advising it out of guilt for his attraction to Zaynab (rA). Third, it fulfills the Qur'anic promise to divulge the secret (the Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Zaynab), whereas the lovestruck narrative is found nowhere in the Qur'an. Fourth, this reading also accounts for the next verse in *al-Aḥzāb*, 38 in which the Qur'an defends the Prophet ﷺ from his detractors for admirably fulfilling a divine obligation despite the personal cost it incurred. Those actions would not have been described as commendable and worth championing if the Prophet ﷺ were merely indulging in his carnal passions. Finally, it conforms with the historical record in that multiple hadiths reveal the indignation evinced by the Prophet's ﷺ critics over his marriage to his adopted son's ex-wife, also alluded to in *al-Aḥzāb*, 38, and the converse lack of any record of criticism for falling in love with a married woman.

The hadiths that make reference to the lovestruck narrative

We can now turn our attention to the hadiths that mention this event. To begin, a complete record of the reports that recount either the complete lovestruck narrative or some part of it are listed below. These reports will be analyzed from a textual standpoint, which will demonstrate a number of insurmountable internal and historical incongruities. The *isnāds* are provided here to assist with the *isnād* analysis that follows, but also because the identities of the transmitters will play a cardinal role in tracing the historiographic development of the narrative that will be undertaken later.

(1) Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal from Mu'ammal ibn Ismā'īl from Ḥammād ibn Zayd from Thābit from Anas ibn Mālik.²⁴ The Prophet ﷺ visited the house of Zayd ibn Ḥārithah (rA) and he glimpsed his wife Zaynab (rA), and something entered into him (*fa ka'annahu dakhalahu*).²⁵ Mu'ammal ibn Ismā'īl states [regarding the Prophet's visiting Zayd's house and something entering into the Prophet's heart]: "I do not know if this is the statement of Ḥammād or from the hadith." Zayd approached him to complain about [his wife], but the Prophet ﷺ said, "Keep your wife and fear Allah." Then it was revealed: "And you were concealing in your heart what Allah was going to reveal" (al-Aḥzāb, 37).²⁶

(2) Al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, and Ibn Sa'd all narrate from Muḥammad ibn 'Umar (al-Wāqidī) from 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir al-Aslamī from Muḥammad ibn Yahyā ibn Ḥabbān: The Prophet ﷺ visited the house of Zayd ibn Ḥārithah (rA). He came to his domicile searching for him but did not find him. Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (rA), his wife, rose to meet him garbed in a

²⁴ The chains of transmitters are represented as the individual links in the *isnād*, separated by the generic term "from." Therefore, in the hadith of Anas, "Ḥammād ibn Zayd from Thābit from Anas ibn Mālik" means that Ḥammād ibn Zayd received a report from Thābit, who in turn received the report from Anas ibn Mālik, and so on. The original Arabic terminologies for transmission with their subtle variations (*ḥaddathanā*, *akhbaranā*, *ballaghanā*, *'an*, etc.), of great import to the *ḥadīth* expert, are not differentiated in the translation provided, for the sake of brevity.

²⁵ The wording here is ambiguous and can be interpreted in other ways. However, the order of events in this narration—that the Prophet saw Zaynab, followed by the phrase, *fa ka'annahu dakhalahu*, suggests that the Prophet experienced some emotion. This is also the understanding of other exegetes such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Qurṭubī, who refuted this *ḥadīth* for suggesting this.

²⁶ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, ed. Shu'ayb al-'Arna'ūt (Beirut, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1995), 19:492, hadith 12512.

single garment (*wa taqūmu ilayhi Zaynab bint Jaḥsh zawjatuhu fuḍulan*). Therefore, the Prophet ﷺ turned from her, and she told him: “He is not here, Messenger of Allah, but enter, you who are dear to me as my father and mother!” Nevertheless, the Prophet ﷺ refused to enter. Zaynab had dressed hurriedly when she was told that the Messenger of Allah was at the door, and she had jumped up in haste which excited the admiration of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ (*fawathabat ‘ajlā fa a‘jabat Rasūl Allāh*). He turned away murmuring something that could barely be recognized except for “Glory be to Allah the Almighty! Glory be to Allah, who causes hearts to turn!” When Zayd returned home, his wife informed him that the Prophet ﷺ had visited his house. Zayd said, “Why did you not invite him in?” She replied, “I did, but he refused.” “Did you hear anything [from him]?” he asked. She replied, “As he left, I heard him say some words, but I did not understand them: ‘Glory be to Allah the Almighty! Glory be to Allah, who causes hearts to turn!’” So Zayd went to the Prophet ﷺ and said, “O Messenger of Allah, it reached me that you came to my house. Why did you not enter, you who are as dear to me as my father and mother? Messenger of Allah, perhaps Zaynab excited your admiration, and [if you want], I will separate from her.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Keep your wife and fear Allah.”²⁷

- (3) Al-Ṭabarī from Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā from Ibn Wahb from Ibn Zayd: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ had married Zayd ibn Ḥārithah to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, the daughter of his paternal aunt. One day the Prophet ﷺ set out, seeking Zayd. There was a haircloth that covered the doorway, but the wind lifted the covering so that the doorway exposed Zaynab [who] was in her chamber in dishabille [*wa hiya fī ḥujratihā ḥasīratan*]. The Prophet’s ﷺ heart was filled with admiration for her [*fā waqa‘a i‘jābuhā fī qalb al-nabī*], and when that occurred, she was made displeasing to the other [man]. So he came and said, “O Messenger of Allah, I want to separate myself from my wife.” Muḥammad asked: “What is wrong? Do you find anything on her part concerning?” “No, by Allah,” replied Zayd, “nothing on her part is

²⁷ Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 10:98–101; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rasūl wa al-mulūk* (Cairo, Dār al Ma‘ārif, 1967), 2:562–64; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn, Kitāb ma‘rifat al-ṣaḥābah* (Beirut: Dār al-Ta‘ṣīl, 2014), 7:50, hadith 6955.

disquieting, Messenger of Allah. I have seen nothing in her except excellence.” The Prophet ﷺ said to him, “Keep your wife, and fear Allah.”²⁸

(4) Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī from Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥaḍramī from al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥilwānī from Muḥammad ibn Khālīd ibn ‘Athmah from Mūsā ibn Ya‘qūb from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Munīb from Abū Bakr ibn Sulaymān ibn Abī Ḥathmah: The Prophet ﷺ went to the house of Zayd ibn Ḥārithah and sought permission [to enter] and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh gave him permission. She was not wearing a headcovering (*la khimāra ‘alayhā*) so she threw a cloth on her head. The Prophet ﷺ asked her about Zayd, and she replied, “He left not long ago.” The Prophet ﷺ stood murmuring something. Zaynab states: I followed him and I overheard him saying, “Blessed is Allah, the One who causes hearts to turn!”²⁹ And he did not cease saying that until he had left.³⁰

(5) Ibn ‘Adī from al-Sājī from al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-Wāsiṭī from ‘Alī ibn Nūh from Muḥammad ibn Kathīr from Sulaym, the client (*mawlā*) of al-Sha‘bī from al-Sha‘bī: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ caught sight of Zaynab bint Jaḥsh and said, “Glory be to Allah, who causes hearts to turn!” So Zayd asked him, “Should I divorce her, O Messenger of Allah?” But he responded, “Keep your wife.” Yūnus ibn Bukayr also inserts an addendum (*ziyādah*) to his recension of Ibn Ishāq’s *al-Maghāzī* with this transmission.³¹

²⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rasūl wa al-mulūk*, 2:562–64, 1/1461; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 19:116.

²⁹ Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythami notes in his *Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id* that although al-Ṭabarānī narrates that Zaynab followed the Prophet, in other versions it is reported that it was Umm Salamah bint Abī Umayyah who stated that she followed the Prophet and overheard him glorifying Allah, “the turner of hearts.” This is likely an error, as Umm Salamah is featured nowhere in the account. It is quite possible that Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythami was privy to other sources, but the other compilers of whom I am aware who cite this specific report with this *isnād* all have Zaynab making the statement (Ibn Abī ‘Aṣim in *al-Aḥād wa al-mathānī* and Abū Nu‘aym in his popular *Ma‘rifat al-ṣaḥābah*). Nevertheless, if the hadith were actually reported from Umm Salamah, it further adds to the absurdity of this narration. Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythami, *Majma‘ al-zawā‘id wa manba‘u al-fawā‘id* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2015), 18:709, hadith 15338.

³⁰ Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *Mu‘jam al-kabīr*, (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1983), 24:44; it is also transmitted by Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī with the same *isnād* in his *Ma‘rifat al-ṣaḥābah*. Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ma‘rifat al-ṣaḥābah* (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan li al-Nashr, 1998), 3224, hadith 7423.

³¹ Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil fī al-ḍu‘afā’* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2013); 5:402, hadith 7816; Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Uṭāridī, *Kitāb al-siyar wa al-maghāzī*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1978), 262. Yunus ibn Bukayr added numerous additions to his recension of Ibn Ishāq, which are known as *ziyādāt al-maghāzī*. The fact that Yūnus was forced to reach for reports of the lovestruck narrative circumventing Ibn Ishāq establishes furthermore that Ibn Ishāq would have been unaware of it. This explains why it was never transmitted by Yūnus or

(6) Al-Ṭabarī from Bishr from Yazīd from Saʿīd from Qatādah, and ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī from Maʿmar ibn Rāshid from Qatādah regarding *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, 37: What he concealed in himself was a desire that [Zayd] divorce her. Qatādah said, “al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī) would say, “If the Prophet ﷺ would have hidden anything from the revelation, he would have hidden this.”³² [Regarding the next verse in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, 38—“There is no harm for the Prophet ﷺ in doing what Allah has obligated for him; [that has been] the way of Allah with those who have preceded him.”]—Qatādah says: “Similar to how the Prophet Dāwūd desired the woman upon whom his gaze fell upon, so he married her. Likewise, Allah decreed that Muḥammad would marry Zaynab as was the practice (*sunnah*) of Dāwūd when he married that woman.”³³ Note that apart from al-Ṭabarī and ʿAbd al-Razzāq, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī additionally narrate this in their own compilations, and all include Qatādah’s citing of al-Ḥasan’s statement immediately after his own.³⁴

(7) Al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭabarānī both from ʿAlī ibn al-Mubārak al-Ṣanʿānī from Zayd ibn al-Mubārak from Muḥammad ibn Thawr from Ibn Jurayj regarding *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, 37: What he concealed in himself was a desire that [Zayd] divorce her and that he marry her instead. So Allah denied him that. [Regarding the next verse in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, 38—“There is no blame on the Prophet ﷺ for [doing] what Allah has obligated for him. That has been the way of Allah with those who had gone before”]—Ibn Jurayj states: “[This refers] to Dāwūd and the woman whom he married whose name was al-Yasʿiyah, and it was similarly the practice (*sunnah*) of Muḥammad ﷺ with Zaynab.”³⁵

any of Ibn Ishāq’s other pupils (see Footnote 2). Additionally it was not transmitted by al-Ṭabarī from Ibn Ishāq who would often transmit from Ibn Ishāq via his own *isnāds*. For further information regarding the various recensions of Ibn Ishāq’s work, refer to Sean Anthony’s monograph on early Islamic historical sources. Sean Anthony, *Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

³² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 19:116; al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī*, 3:41, hadith 2346.

³³ Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾan al-ʿAdhīm* (Riyadh: Maktabah Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1997), 9:3136, hadith 17693.

³⁴ Al-Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam al-kabīr*, 24:42.

³⁵ Al-Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam al-kabīr*, 24:43.

(8) Muqātil ibn Sulaymān narrates without any *isnād* (*mu‘allaqan*): Not long after Zayd married Zaynab that he began to complain to the Prophet ﷺ about her. So the Prophet ﷺ went [to Zaynab] to persuade her. But when he conversed with her, he was captivated by her attractiveness, beauty, and charm (*fa lammā kallamahā a‘jabahu ḥusnahā wa jamālahā wa zarfahā*). But that was a matter decreed by Allah, the Mighty and Exalted. The Prophet ﷺ returned, but [the thought of] her remained in his heart (*wa fī nafsihi minhā*). The Prophet ﷺ would ask Zayd, “How is she with you?” And he would complain, but the Prophet ﷺ would say to him, “Fear Allah and keep your wife.” But in his heart was something other than that (*wa fī qalbihi ghayra dhālik*).

The Prophet ﷺ came searching for Zayd one day, and he saw Zaynab who was standing, and she was fair, beautiful, shapely, and one of the most striking women of Quraysh (*wa kānat bayḍā’a jamīlatan jasīmatan min atammi nisā’i Quraysh*). So the Prophet ﷺ developed an intense desire for her (*fa hawiyahā*), and said, “Glory be to Allah, the one who causes hearts to turn!” Zaynab overheard him and mentioned it to Zayd who understood its implication. So Zayd said: “O Prophet, permit me to divorce her, for she is arrogant, deems herself superior to me, and she injures me with her tongue (*fa inna fīhā kibran, tu‘azzimu ‘alayya wa tu’dhīnī bi lisānihā*). But the Prophet ﷺ told him [again], “Keep your wife and fear Allah.”³⁶

(9) Al-Tha‘labī al-Naysābūrī and Abū Muḥammad al-Baghawī relate from Ibn ‘Abbās without any *isnād*: [Regarding *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, 37, What he concealed in himself was] “love for [Zaynab] (*ḥubbuhā*).”³⁷

(10) Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī relates without an *isnād* that ‘Abd ibn Ḥumayd and Ibn al-Mundhir narrate on the authority of ‘Ikrimah (likely ‘Ikrimah al-Barbarī, the client of Ibn ‘Abbās): The Prophet ﷺ entered the house of

³⁶ Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth, 2002), 3:491–93; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li ahkam al-Qur’an*, 17:156.

³⁷ Al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf*, 8:48. Unsurprisingly, Ibn ‘Abbās’s alleged exegesis is quoted additionally by al-Baghawī also without an *isnād* in his more popular abridgment of al-Tha‘labī’s exegesis, *Ma‘ālim al-Tanzīl*. Given this *tafsīr* work’s popularity, it is through reading al-Baghawī that the notion that Ibn ‘Abbās supported the lovestruck narrative likely originates. Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī: Ma‘ālim al-tanzīl* (Riyadh: Dār Tayba, 1989), 6:355.

Zayd one day and glimpsed Zaynab, and it was as if [the thought] of her overcame him (*fa ka'annahā waqa'at fī nafsīhi*).³⁸

A superficial analysis may lend credence to the belief that there are such a considerable number of reports of this event as to render it a compelling account, as some have indeed hastily concluded, but closer examination demonstrates several major difficulties. The single most important challenge is that the majority of these reports originated over a century after the putative event. Although the lengthy *isnāds* may obfuscate this, not a single of these reports traces back to the Prophet ﷺ through an eyewitness or even terminates with any Companion except for the first, which is purportedly through Anas ibn Mālik (rA). Additionally, the reports of Ibn 'Abbās (rA), along with those of 'Ikrimah and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (rA), are narrated without any *isnād* at all (*mu'allaq*), and also mysteriously come into existence suddenly some hundred years later. Other than with Anas, the earliest narrator with which any of these *isnāds* terminates is Qatādah ibn Di'āmah who died in 120/737. It is also interesting that several of these narrations are put forward as exegesis for the portion of *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, 38 which refers to the Prophet ﷺ fulfilling the normative practice of other ancient prophets, specifically identified as Dāwūd by the narrations.

In juxtaposition are some hadiths about the Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Zaynab (rA) which add some additional details. There are a number of these, but we will focus on just a few of these that are sound or provide some perspective from a historiographic standpoint.

- (11) Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī relates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that 'Ā'ishah (rA) stated, as would later al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in hadith (6), “There was nothing that was revealed that was more severe to him than this. If the Prophet ﷺ would have hidden anything from the revelation, he would have hidden this.” This is also alleged to be a statement of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān—who once again narrates as he did in hadith (8) without an *isnād*.³⁹

³⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dur al-manthūr*, 12:60.

³⁹ Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'ṣīl, 2012), 9:337, hadith 7415; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 5:264–65, hadiths 3207, 3208.

(12) Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj narrates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that Anas (rA) said: After her waiting period expired, the Prophet ﷺ sent Zayd ibn Ḥārithah to Zaynab with a marriage proposal. When Zayd entered upon her, she was fermenting dough. Zayd said, “When I saw her, I developed a sense of awe for her in my chest, so much so that I could not [bear] to see her because the Prophet had mentioned her. Therefore, I turned my back towards her and said, “Zaynab! The Prophet ﷺ has sent me to you and has mentioned you [regarding marriage].” She said, “I will make no decision until I solicit Allah’s guidance.” She then stood [and began to pray] in her place of prayer. The Qur’anic verse was revealed regarding this issue, whereupon the Prophet ﷺ entered upon her without taking permission.⁴⁰

(13) Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī from Aslam from Sufyān ibn ‘Uyaynah from ‘Alī ibn Zayd ibn Jud‘ān: ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn [Zayn al-‘Ābidīn] asked me, “What does al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] state regarding [the verse], ‘You concealed in yourself what Allah was going to reveal?’” So I told him, but he responded, “No, rather Allah had informed his Prophet ﷺ that Zaynab was going to be one of his wives prior to his marriage to her. But when Zayd came to him complaining about her, he said, ‘Keep your wife and fear Allah.’ And so Allah revealed the verse.”⁴¹

Aḥmad ibn Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī and al-Ṭabarī also narrate the same with their own *isnāds*, also through Sufyān ibn ‘Uyaynah. Note that Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Bayhaqī’s version contextualizes ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s statement by citing his probing of Ibn Zayd about al-Ḥasan’s interpretation followed by ‘Alī’s rebuttal. Al-Ṭabarī’s version only provides ‘Alī’s statement in isolation. Neither Ibn Abī Ḥātim nor al-Bayhaqī quotes al-Ḥasan’s interpretation of the verse, but only that ‘Alī disputed his interpretation.⁴² However, al-Tha‘labī relates in his *tafsīr* the same incident in which al-Ḥasan’s interpretation is explicit:

⁴⁰ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār al-Ta’ṣīl, 2014), 4:45, hadith 1450.

⁴¹ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Adhīm*, 9:3137, hadith 17695.

⁴² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 19:116; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyyah, 1988), 3:466.

(14) Al-Tha‘labī from Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn Fanjawayh from Ṭalḥah ibn Muḥammad and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ya‘qūb from Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid from Ibn Abī Mihrān from Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā Abī ‘Umar al-‘Adanī from Sufyān ibn ‘Uyaynah from ‘Alī ibn Zayd ibn Jud‘ān: ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn [Zayn al-‘Ābidīn] asked me, “What does al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] state regarding [the verse], ‘You concealed in yourself what Allah was going to reveal?’” So I told him, “When Zayd went to the Prophet ﷺ and said, ‘O Prophet, I want to divorce Zaynab,’ that attracted him (*fa a‘jabahu dhālik*).” ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn said, “This is not so. Rather Allah had informed his Prophet ﷺ that Zaynab was going to be one of his wives prior to his marriage to her.” The rest of al-Tha‘labī’s version is the same as al-Bayhaqī’s and Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s.⁴³

(15) Ibn Abī Ḥātim relates (without an *isnād*) that Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Suddī stated regarding what the Prophet ﷺ concealed in his heart: Allah informed his Prophet ﷺ after [Zaynab’s marriage with Zayd] that she would become his wife. But the Prophet ﷺ felt shame in instructing Zayd to divorce his wife... And he was apprehensive of the public’s reproach for marrying his son’s ex-wife.”⁴⁴

The last narration is particularly interesting because it submits further detail to ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s exegesis. Al-Suddī correctly identified the difficult course of action the Prophet ﷺ was confronted with: if he had not advised Zayd to maintain his marriage, the alternative would be either to *advise or command* Zayd to divorce his wife so that he could marry her instead. The Prophet ﷺ found this understandably awkward, which resulted in his response enshrined in the Qur’an. Al-Suddī’s narration otherwise concurs with ‘Alī’s and deviates from the lovestruck narrative in which attraction played a role, but this is an isolated report, and at best al-Suddī’s personal opinion which, without *isnād* tracing to a senior Companion, cannot be used as a primary resource.

⁴³ Al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf*, 21:458–60.

⁴⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’an al-‘Adhīm*, 9:3137, hadith 17696.

Textual analysis

The first 10 reports that refer to the lovestruck narrative can be summarily dismissed because of the information contained within them, even before engaging in rigorous *isnād* analyses. For, if accurate, only three individuals would have been privy to the events: Zayd, Zaynab, and the Prophet ﷺ himself. No one of the three could have disseminated the information embodied within these hadiths. Obviously, the Prophet ﷺ would not have, given the embarrassing nature of the secret. Additionally, the Qur'an itself (and even the hadiths that recount the event explicitly) informs that the Prophet ﷺ concealed the secret—whatever the nature of said secret—which is the reason for the Qur'an's censure in the first place. Zaynab also could not have been the source either. In most of the hadiths it is either implied or explicitly stated, as in hadith (2), that she did not comprehend the Prophet's statement, "Glory be to Allah, who causes hearts to turn," and that it was Zayd who appreciated the implication. Her affirmations of superiority over the other wives of the Prophet ﷺ because, "You were married by your fathers and brothers, but I was married by Allah from above the seven heavens" leaves no doubt that she would have been unaware of the entire spectacle, and thus could not have publicized it.⁴⁵ So that leaves Zayd, a man so intensely loyal to the Prophet ﷺ that we are to believe he relinquished all of his protective jealousy and honor (*ghīrah*) for his wife and offered to divorce her for the Prophet's amorous sentiments, and yet despite such a demonstration of loyalty, went about and divulged the Prophet's ﷺ most humiliating secret. It is also noteworthy that Zayd was killed just a few years later prior to the Prophet's ﷺ own passing, and therefore did not have a throng of students to circulate his experiences as did the

⁴⁵ Other hadiths mention her account of her marriage with Zayd and subsequent divorce and also establish she was not cognizant of any emotion on the Prophet's part: "I abused [Zayd] verbally, and so he complained about me to the Prophet. But the Prophet told him 'Hold fast to your wife and fear Allah.' Nevertheless, Zayd told him, 'I have divorced her.'" This account attests to Zaynab's understanding of the Prophet as merely playing the role of a mediator in his advice to Zayd and that she was not the least bit suspicious of any infatuation the Prophet may or may not have harbored. This report has deficiencies in its *isnād*, but it has multiple transmissions that extend directly to Zaynab with an unbroken chain of transmitters through her client, *Madhkūr*, unlike the transmissions of the lovestruck narrative that are reported regarding Zaynab from transmitters who lived a century after her death. Al-Dāraqūṭnī, *Sunan al-Dāraqūṭnī*, 4:461–62, hadith 3796; al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-kabīr*, ed. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Markaz li'l Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-'Arabīyyah wa al-Islāmīyyah, 2011), 14:176–77, hadith 13896; Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā' wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah, 1988), 2:51–52; Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 10:99.

Companions who passed later. The same could be said of Zaynab, who coincidentally was the first of the Prophet's ﷺ wives to die after him, which was just a few years after the Prophet's death, and who also did not benefit from multiple students transmitting her sayings. Therefore, even if Zayd or Zaynab did disclose this story, it remains unanswered how their reports reached us miraculously without any direct link between the terminal transmitters of hadiths (1-10) to either of the two, and that too with minute details such as the clothing that Zaynab was or was not garbed in and her precise bodily movements that so attracted the admiration of the Prophet ﷺ.

Also worth mentioning is that, except for the hadiths of Anas and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, none of these hadiths endorsing the lovestruck narrative suggest any domestic disturbance between Zayd and Zaynab prior to the Prophet's ﷺ visit to their house. And some such as hadiths (2) and (3), which are reproduced by al-Ṭabarī through Ibn Zayd and Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Ḥabbān, explicitly chronicle that Zayd offered to divorce Zaynab only for the Prophet's ﷺ benefit when Zayd became cognizant of the Prophet's desire for his wife rather than because of marital discord. This is in complete conflict with *al-Aḥzāb*, 37 which is explicit that Zayd no longer had any desire to remain wedded to Zaynab, and which could not have been the case if he were divorcing her for the Prophet ﷺ. Notably, a later variant—hadith (3)—appends the comment that, “she was made undesirable for [Zayd]” which appears to be an interpolation to confer some semblance of concordance with the Qur'an.

An additional internal difficulty with these hadiths is the allegation that Zayd offered his wife to the Prophet ﷺ to wed in the first place, not because it contravened Arab (and Islamic) notions of honor (which it did), but *because* societal norms deemed it illicit and even incestuous. The hadiths mention that at the time of the event Zayd (rA) was addressed as Zayd ibn Muḥammad, and the Islamic proscription on identifying individuals by their adopted fathers had not been realized. It would be still fanciful to imagine any Companion offering his wife or daughter to the Prophet ﷺ when the propriety of the marriage was ambiguous to any degree based on existing customs—Abū Bakr's (rA) hesitation in wedding 'Ā'ishah (rA) to the Prophet ﷺ because he considered himself his

brother, despite the Prophet's direct proposal is a prime example of this.⁴⁶ There is absolutely no scope for Zayd (rA) to actively offer his wife to the Prophet ﷺ when he viewed himself as his son—a relationship far more compelling per prevailing mores than any speculative brotherhood Abū Bakr (rA) may have imagined. Zayd too would have deemed his wife unlawful for the Prophet ﷺ prior to the revelation of *al-Aḥzāb*, 36. In effect, what the narrations suggest is that Zayd (rA) offered his wife to the Prophet ﷺ, *despite* believing that it would be an illicit relationship.

Other minor issues lie with specific hadiths such as that of Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Ḥabbān in hadith (2), which extends into a lengthier chronicle than is reproduced here, but attributes the conveyance of the Prophet's ﷺ marriage proposal to Salmā (rA) when the authentic hadith of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* reports that the Prophet ﷺ sent Zayd (rA) himself to propose on his behalf [hadith (12)].⁴⁷ Additionally, the same hadith of Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā alleges that the Prophet ﷺ laughed when the command to marry Zaynab (rA) was revealed, which at least is for once internally consistent with the hadith's personification of a Prophet ﷺ driven by passions of the flesh. But it is entirely discordant with al-Bukhārī's authentic depiction of the Prophet ﷺ as anxious upon the revelation of that verse of *al-Aḥzāb*, in multiple transmissions of hadith (11). The Prophet's ﷺ disquiet is only sensible with the narrative in which Allah exposed his command to the Prophet ﷺ to marry Zaynab (rA), and in which the marriage could no longer be

⁴⁶ The Prophet asked for 'Ā'isha's hand in marriage, but Abu Bakr said, "[Even though] I am your brother?" [The Prophet] replied, "Rather, you are my brother in Allah's religion and His book. She is lawful for me to marry." Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, 7:14, hadith 5071. This condensed version of events by al-Bukhārī is further expanded in a report narrated by Ibn Ḥanbal in his *Musnad*: After Khadīja bint Khuwaylid died, Khawlah bint Ḥakīm suggested to the Prophet that he marry 'Ā'isha, so he permitted her to inquire on his behalf. Khawlah proceeded to Abū Bakr's domicile and exclaimed, "Umm Rumān! What excellence and blessings has Allah bestowed upon you!" So Umm Rumān asked, "And what is that?" Khawlah said, "The Messenger of Allah has sent me to propose on his behalf to 'Ā'isha." Umm Rumān replied, "Wait until Abū Bakr returns." When Abū Bakr arrived, Khawlah informed him of the Prophet's proposal. Abū Bakr asked, "Is she befitting for him (*wa ḥal taṣluhu lahu*)? For she is the daughter of his brother." Khawlah returned to the Prophet and mentioned what Abū Bakr had told her, to which he replied "Return to him and tell him, 'I am indeed your brother as you are my brother, [but] in Islam. Your daughter is suitable for me (*wa ibnatuka taṣluhu lī*).'" Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, 42:501–4, hadith 25769. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī graded this more detailed hadith by Ibn Ḥanbal as sound (*ḥasan*); Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, 11:429. Similarly, the Prophet had to reassure Asmā' bint 'Umays that 'Alī was legally permissible for his daughter Fāṭima for marriage, which Asmā' questioned the legality of because 'Alī was his "brother." 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī, *Musannaf, Kitāb al-maghāzī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'ṣīl, 2015), 5:114, hadith 10548.

⁴⁷ Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:45, hadith 1450.

deferred. It is wholly incongruous with the dishonorable lovestruck narrative since the Qur'an fails to make any mention of it: it is inexplicable why the Prophet ﷺ would have been so self-conscious with those verses when they don't divulge anything about the events surrounding his marriage. On the contrary, it is more sensible that he would have welcomed the verses since they served as a pretext to realize his corporal passions (and with nothing more than a ceremonial slap on the wrist in the form of an inconsequential rebuke which nonetheless appears to not have raised a single whisper of any reservation), and his satisfaction with the verses' revelation is indeed reported in the full version of hadith (2). Moreover, the minor variations in the narrations which invoke various literary descriptions (did Zaynab (rA) come out to greet the Prophet ﷺ leaping in excitement, or did the wind blow the curtain and expose her?) do nothing to instill confidence in the account. Much more can be said about these relatively less critical discrepancies, but for the purpose of this paper, this much is sufficient.

Isnād analysis

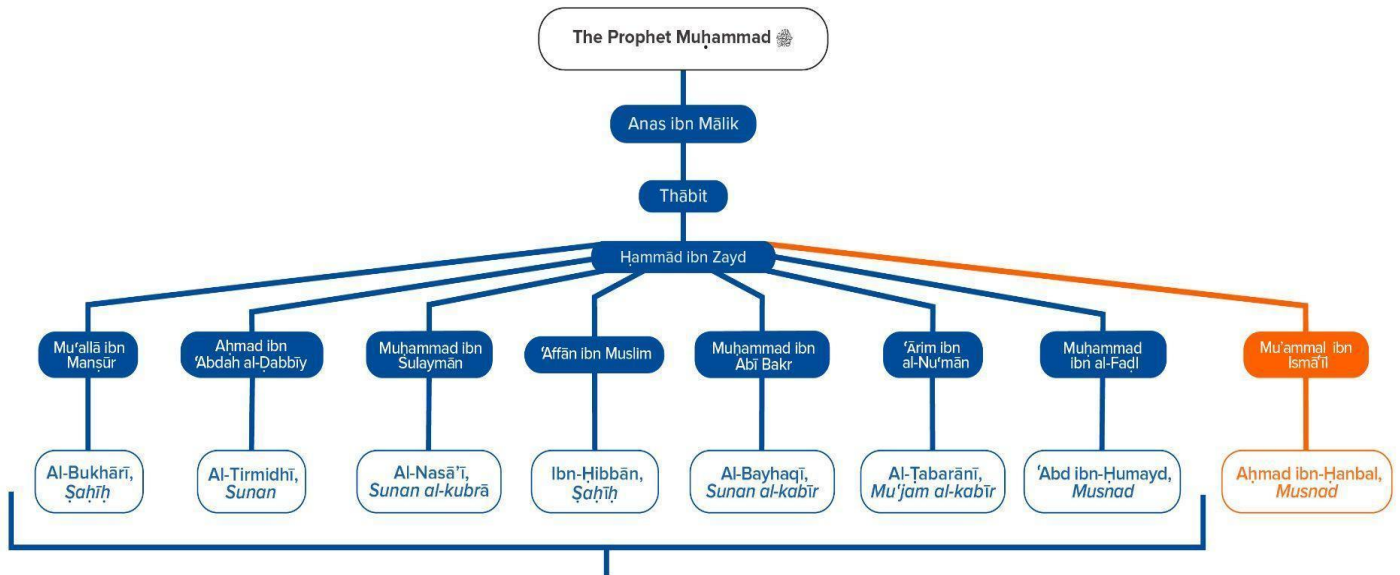
Finally, we come to the *isnād* analysis, which at this point is only for academic purposes, given that we have already discredited the lovestruck narrative quite thoroughly.

Hadith (1) includes Mu'ammal ibn Ismā'īl (d. 206/821), about whom al-Bukhārī stated, "he is rejected in hadith (*munkaru al-ḥadīth*)," and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī said, "He is trustworthy, but makes excessive mistakes." His mistakes were explained by the fact that he would narrate not from memory but by relying on his books as an aid, and that he lost his books and thereafter made errors in abundance.⁴⁸ Mu'ammal is the *only* one of Ḥammād ibn Zayd's students who recounted this variant, and the same exact hadith is narrated by Ḥammād's 7 other students without the lovestruck narrative mentioned (Figure 1).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmā al-rijāl*, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2002), 29:176–78.

⁴⁹ Mu'ammal narrates from Ḥammād ibn Zayd from Thabit from Anas in this variant. Other narrators apart from Mu'ammal who relate the exact same hadith from Ḥammād ibn Zayd from Thabit from Anas but without the portion of the Prophet visiting Zayd, include Mu'alla ibn Manṣūr, Ahmad ibn 'Abdah al-Ḍabbī, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān,

Figure 1



These 7 narrators and students of Ḥammād ibn Zayd report the same hadith from Ḥammad as Mu'ammal ibn Ismā'īl, exactly the same as the latter—that Zayd approached the Prophet to complain about this wife, but the Prophet counseled him to maintain his marriage, with the difference that not a single one mentions the preceding account that the Prophet visited Zaynab bint Jaḥsh's house and upon glimpsing her, something “entered into him.” Given that Mu'ammal's memory was called into question by multiple *ḥadīth* critics, and in this case by Mu'ammal himself who honestly conceded he did not remember what his source was for the story, it is clear that Mu'ammal forgetfully and anachronistically interpolated the Zaynab narrative which he had acquired from other less reputable sources into his *ḥadīth* as an explanation for Zayd's divorce. Therefore, the variant can be discarded with confidence.

Hadith (2) includes both Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Wāqīdī, who was considered a liar and fabricator despite his obvious mastery of the *maghāzī* literature.⁵⁰ It

'Affān ibn Muslim, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr al-Muqaddami, 'Aram Abū al-Nu'mān, and Muḥammad ibn al-Faḍl by al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī (in *al-Kubrā*), Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Bayhaqī, al-Ṭabarānī, and 'Abd ibn Humayd, respectively. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-tafsīr*, 6:320, ḥadīth 4769; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 5:266, ḥadīth 3212; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-kubrā*, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2001), 10:220, ḥadīth 11343; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, ed. Shu'ayb al-'Arna'ūt (Beirut, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1988), 15:519, ḥadīth 7045; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kabīr, Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, ed. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Hījir, 2011), 13:524, ḥadīth 13491; al-Ṭabarānī, *Mu'jam al-kabīr*, 24:43; 'Abd ibn Humayd, *al-Muntakhab min musnad 'Abd ibn Humayd* (Riyadh: Dār Balnasiyyah, 2002), 2:234, ḥadīth 1205.

⁵⁰ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-i'tidal fī naqd al-rijāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 3:662-666. Interestingly, al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, who included this narration in his *al-Mustadrak*, in which he intended to collate rigorously authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*) ḥadīths that had not been compiled by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in their *Ṣaḥīḥs* but fulfilled their rigorous criteria concedes in the introduction to the chapter *Kitāb ma'rifat al-ṣaḥābah* that he would be unable to attain those exacting standards in the chapter. Al-Ḥākim attributes that to the relative paucity of *ṣaḥīḥ* traditions regarding biographical information regarding the Companions, noting that he would have to rely on al-Wāqīdī for a considerable amount of his biographical material instead—thus tacitly acknowledging the latter as a weak ḥadīth transmitter; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn, Kitāb ma'rifat al-ṣaḥābah*, 5:225.

additionally includes ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Āmir al-Aslamī (d. 150/767) who was considered “weak” (*da‘īf*) in his hadith transmissions by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Nasā’ī, ‘Alī ibn ‘Umar al-Dāraqūṭnī, Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, and Abū Zur‘ah al-Rāzī; the latter’s eminent fellow Rayy hadith critic, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī deemed ‘Abd Allāh “rejected (*matrūk*),” but Yaḥyā ibn Ma‘īn was the harshest in grading him, and said about him “he is nothing, he is weak (*laysa bi shay’*, *da‘īf*).” Al-Bukhārī also questioned the soundness of his memory which was expounded on by Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī, who explained that he would mix up *isnāds* and the texts of various hadiths.⁵¹

Hadith (3) includes Ibn Zayd who is ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 182/798), who is also deemed weak (*da‘īf*) by Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā’ī, and ‘Alī ibn al-Madīnī; Ibn Ḥanbal specifically disliked that Ibn Zayd would relate unreliable hadith. Yaḥyā ibn Ma‘īn also said of him, “his hadith are nothing (*laysa ḥadīthahu bi shay’*),” and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī refused to narrate from him because of his unreliability.⁵²

Hadith (4) includes Muḥammad ibn Khālīd ibn ‘Athmah (d. 158/775) whom Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī noted, “He is truthful but errs (*sadūq, yukhṭi*).”⁵³ In the hadith, Muḥammad goes on to narrate from Mūsā ibn Ya‘qūb, whom some hadith critics such as Yaḥyā ibn Ma‘īn and Ibn Ḥibbān deemed trustworthy (*thiqah*), though ‘Alī ibn al-Madīnī, al-Nasā’ī, and ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Adī considered him weak and rejected in hadith (*da‘īfu al-ḥadīth, munkaru al-ḥadīth*). Ibn Ḥanbal also did not hold a high opinion of him (*la yu‘jibun ḥadīthuhu*), and al-Dāraqūṭnī concurred. Abū Dāwūd specifically objected to his students being unknown.⁵⁴ Ibn Ḥajar reconciled the disparate gradings and concluded by grading him as trustworthy, but of poor retention (*sayyi’u al-hifdh*).⁵⁵ Abū Dāwūd’s analysis comes to bear in this particular hadith, as the identity of the narrator Mūsā ibn Ya‘qūb relates from, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Munīb, is unknown and is not found in any of the well-known works of hadith narrator criticism.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* (Beirut, Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2014), 2:323–24.

⁵² Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 17:114–17.

⁵³ Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 25:144.

⁵⁴ Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 29:171–73.

⁵⁵ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Taqrīb al-tahdhīb* (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Asamah, 2000), 987.

⁵⁶ I was not able to find him with this name in al-Mizzī’s *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, Ibn Ḥajar’s *Lisān al-mizān*, Ibn ‘Adī’s *al-Du‘afā’*, al-‘Ijlī’s *al-Du‘afā’ wa al-matrūkūn*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī’s *al-Jarḥ wa al-ta’dīl*, Ibn Ḥibbān’s

Hadith (5) contains Sulaym the client of al-Sha‘bī, about whom Ibn Ma‘īn and Abū Ja‘far al-‘Uqaylī both graded weak in his narrations, and about whom al-Nasā’ī said, “He is not reliable (*laysa bi thiqaḥ*).” Ibn Muthannah noted that he had never heard Ibn Ma‘īn or ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī ever narrate from him, exhibiting their extreme disapproval of his hadith. Additionally, ‘Alī ibn Nūḥ, another transmitter in this isnād, is also unknown.⁵⁷ Indeed this hadith is found in, among other works, in *Al-Kāmil fī Ḍu‘afā’ al-rijāl*, a compendium of weak and rejected narrators, and their hadiths by Ibn ‘Adī.⁵⁸

Hadiths (6) and (7) are sound until they reach Qatādah and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Jurayj, but these are merely the opinions of these two later commentators who happened to live one century after the Prophet ﷺ, and whose sources will later be discussed in great detail. Hadiths (8), (9), and (10) about which much will also be said later, have no *isnād* and are therefore of no value from an evidentiary

al-Thiqāt, al-Dāraqutnī’s *al-Du‘afā’ wa al-matrūkūn*, al-Nasā’ī’s *al-Du‘afā’ wa al-matrūkūn*, or in Khaṭīb al-Baghdadī’s *Tārīkh Baghdād*. The hadith in question is found in al-Ṭabarānī’s *Mu‘jam al-kabīr*; and the editor of the work, Hamdī ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Salafī, notes in his footnote to the work that he was also unable to locate the identity or credibility of the narrator. Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī also states that he is not aware of the identity of this narrator. Note that al-Bukhārī also alludes to this narrator by transmitting a very similar hadith in his biographical encyclopedia *Tārīkh al-kabīr*. This has the same *isnād* as al-Ṭabarānī’s, with the exception that he designates ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Munīb as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Musayyab. His report is also comparatively abridged. (“The Prophet went to the house of Zayd ibn Ḥāritha and sought permission [to enter] and Zaynab gave him permission, but the Prophet turned away. Zaynab states: I followed him and I overheard him saying, “Blessed is Allāh, the One who causes hearts to turn!”) Noticeably, there is no mention of Zaynab’s hair being uncovered or other details that are found in al-Ṭabarānī’s version. It is not clear to me why al-Ṭabarānī, Abū Nu‘aym al-Isbahānī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī refer to him as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Munīb, whereas al-Bukhārī does not. Nevertheless, regardless of the precise name of this narrator, his credibility and status as a transmitter of hadith remains indeterminate; al-Bukhārī himself only mentions him and this hadith as an example of one of his transmissions in *Tārīkh al-kabīr*, and he does not comment on his reliability. Additionally, this transmitter remains absent in most of the biographical encyclopedias of the hadith critics, even with the name of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Musayyab. I was only able to find the latter name additionally in Ibn Ḥibbān’s *al-Thiqāt*, where he provides no reason to deem him reliable and only says about him, “He narrated from Abū Bakr ibn Sulaymān ibn Abī Ḥathmah who in turn narrated from Mūsā ibn Ya‘qūb.” This laconic reference to a narrator certainly cannot overcome the fact that none of the other well-known hadith critics seem to have knowledge of his identity, and Ibn Ḥibbān appears to identify him only because of this specific hadith of Zaynab rather than through any personal cognizance. In any case, the weakness of this narration does not hinge on the identity of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Munīb but on the known acknowledged weaknesses of the other known transmitters, as Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī mentions in his *Majma’ al-zawā’id*. Al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa‘īfah wa al-Mawḍū‘ah*, 7:402, entry 3390; Al-Bukhārī, *Tārīkh al-kabīr* (Hyderabad: Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif al-Uthmāniyyah, 1958), 5:302, entry 986; al-Haythamī, *Majma’ al-zawā’id*, 18:709, hadith 15338; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-thiqāt* (Hyderabad: Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif al-Uthmāniyyah, 1973), 7:82.

⁵⁷ Al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa‘īfah wa al-Mawḍū‘ah*, 14:799, entry 6848.

⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Lisān al-Mizān*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah (Beirut: Maktabat al-Matbū‘āt al-Islāmiyyah), 4:187, entry 3668; Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil fī ḍu‘afā’*, 5:402, hadith 7816.

standpoint. Al-Tha‘labī’s quoting of hadith (9), in which Ibn ‘Abbās is alleged without *isnād* to have interpreted *al-Aḥzāb*, 36 the same as Qatādah and Ibn Jurayj, would appear to be an egregious error, and Ibn ‘Abbās likely has been confused with Qatādah given the latter’s customary reliance on Ibn ‘Abbās’s opinions. Qatādah’s opinion on this matter had been widely transmitted by a number of narrators as reproduced in hadith (6), but Ibn ‘Abbās had never been credited with this opinion until some four centuries later by al-Tha‘labī. All the earlier *tafsīrs* that quote Qatādah’s opinion such as those of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and ‘Abd al-Razzāq, among others fail to make any mention of Ibn ‘Abbās. Including Qatādah’s opinion while neglecting that of Ibn ‘Abbās, the most celebrated Qur’an commentator in history, would have been a grave omission for any one of those authors let alone all of them. (Ibn Abī Ḥātim explicitly expounds on his exegetical methodology in the introduction to his *tafsīr*, which is quite informative: “When I come upon commentary from the Prophet ﷺ, I refrain from mentioning [the opinion] of any of the Companions... When I come upon [a statement] from the Companions, if there was consensus amongst them, I cited it from the loftiest of them in standing... If I did not find [a statement] from the Companions, and if I found it [only] from the Followers, I included what I found from them.... And thus I did with regards to the next generation and thereafter.”⁵⁹ Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s statement makes it clear that his quoting of Qatādah was only because he, along with the illustrious hadith masters of Rayy from whom he took his knowledge such as his father Abū Ḥātim and Abū Zur‘ah al-Rāzī, were not cognizant of the commentary of a Companion such as Ibn ‘Abbās on this verse. The same can be said of al-Ṭabarī and ‘Abd al-Razzāq.) The omission of Ibn ‘Abbās by three of the greatest early *tafsīr* authorities is only explicable if Ibn ‘Abbās’s exegesis was not his at all and was not in circulation when those exegeses were authored. Al-Tha‘labī’s erroneous attribution of the lovestruck narrative to Ibn ‘Abbās later found its way into al-Baghawī’s own commentary, whose mentioning of Ibn ‘Abbās is drawn not from a distinct source, but from al-Tha‘labī himself. This is easily recognizable as al-Baghawī duplicated al-Tha‘labī’s entire discussion including the erroneous attribution to Ibn ‘Abbās as well as the preceding and subsequent paragraphs, into his own work, with all of al-Tha‘labī’s errors freely incorporated verbatim.

⁵⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘an al-‘Adhīm*, 1:14.

Hadith (10) is quoted by al-Suyūṭī, who ascribes it without *isnād* to Ibn al-Mundhir and ‘Abd ibn Ḥumayd, but which is not found in any of their published works of hadith.⁶⁰ Ibn al-Mundhir and ‘Abd ibn Ḥumayd, even if they did narrate this hadith from ‘Ikrimah, lived over a century after he did, and therefore had to have heard it from at least two transmitters in between. Nevertheless, it is unimaginable that none of ‘Ikrimah’s multiple students recorded this hadith from him if this was indeed one of his opinions. This quote is also not found in any of the early *tafsīr* works such as that of al-Ṭabarī and the others mentioned earlier, all of whom very frequently quote ‘Ikrimah’s other opinions given the latter’s prolific exegetical narrations. This is particularly remarkable as they all unreservedly quote from ‘Ikrimah’s contemporaries, Qatādah and Ibn Jurayj, on this matter without any hesitation. We can therefore claim with confidence that this also is a spurious tradition.

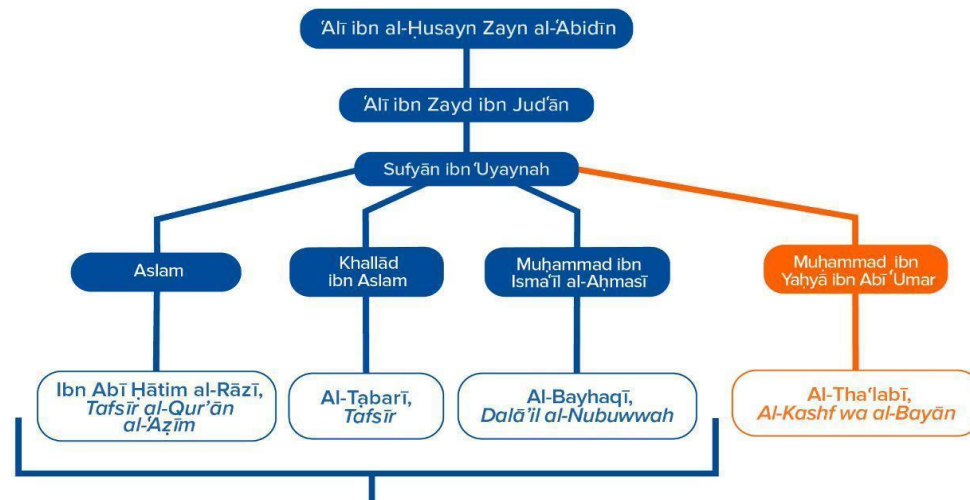
Regarding hadith (14), which is al-Tha‘labī’s variant of al-Ḥasan’s interpretation of the verse in *al-Aḥzāb*, the unique narrator from Sufyān ibn ‘Uyaynah is Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Abī ‘Umar (d. 243/857). Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā is the only transmitter from Sufyān who narrates that al-Ḥasan interpreted the verse in *al-Aḥzāb*, 37 to refer to the Prophet’s ﷺ love for Zaynab (rA), as the other variants from other transmitters from Sufyān remained silent about al-Ḥasan’s interpretation (Figure 2). About Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī stated, “He was a righteous man, but he was careless (*wa kāna bihi ghaflah*), and he would narrate fabricated hadiths attributed to Ibn ‘Uyaynah. However, he was truthful.”⁶¹ There are additional issues with this *isnād* including the presence of Ṭalḥah ibn Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far al-Shāhid (d. 308/920) who was considered weak and poor in hadith narrations, as well as Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn Fanjawayh who,

⁶⁰ ‘Abd ibn Humayd authored two works: his *musnad* and a *tafsīr* work. The former is contained entirely within Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī’s compendium of eight lesser known *musnads*, entitled *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliyah bi zawā‘id al-masānid al-thamāniya* in which ‘Abd ibn Humayd’s complete *musnad* is incorporated. The hadith of ‘Ikrimah is not found within Ibn Ḥajar’s *al-Maṭālib*, however. That suggests that al-Suyūṭī found it within Ibn Humayd’s *tafsīr* work, and I am not aware of it being currently printed and available. Dr. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, the *tafsīr* expert and manuscript editor of multiple *tafsīr* works, including those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī and al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Dur al-manthūr* seems to not have been able to locate the source of this *mu‘allaq* hadith either: his edition of *al-Dur* includes annotations with cross-references (*takhrīj*) of most the hadiths referred within that are not explicitly referenced to a specific work by al-Suyūṭī within the text of the work, yet he did not do so with this hadith. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliyah bi zawā‘id al-masānid al-thamāniya* (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Asamah and Dār al-Ghayth, 1998); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dur al-manthūr*, 12:60–61.

⁶¹ Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 26:639–42.

despite his own reliability, was known for narrating anomalous hadiths from impugned transmitters (*kathīr al-riwāyah li al-manākīr*).⁶²

Figure 2



All of these 3 narrators and students of Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah transmit the same exact *ḥadīth* from ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿAbidīn as Muḥammad ibn Yahyā ibn Abī ʿUmar with the difference that not a single one of the first three directly quote al-Ḥasan’s interpretation of the verse of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb that the Prophet was attracted to Zaynab bint Jahsh. Undoubtedly, Muḥammad ibn Yahyā ibn Abī ʿUmar interpolated the statement into al-Ḥasan’s interpretation anachronistically from other disreputable sources. Abu Ḥatīm al-Rāzī’s critique of Muḥammad ibn Yahyā ibn Abī ʿUmar that he would inaccurately narrate from fabricators and attribute them to Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah is most impressive, given how precisely he was able to identify his failings as a *ḥadīth* transmitter. Note also that ʿAlī ibn Zayd ibn Judʿān himself was deemed very weak as a transmitter (by Ibn Maʿīn, Abu Ḥatīm al-Rāzī, Abu Zurʿah al-Rāzī, al-Nasāʾī, and others) and even the more reliable transmissions of this *ḥadīth* from al-Bayhaqī and Ibn Abī Ḥatīm al-Rāzī would only provide ancillary support.

The social background necessitating the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab (rA)

صلى الله عليه وسلم

⁶² Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tārīkh madīnat al-salam*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islami, 2001), 10:40; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf*, 21:460; Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlam al-nubalaʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-ʿArnaʿūt (Beirut, Muʿassasat al-Risālah, 1982), 17:383–84.

It may appear, despite the increasingly apparent fictional components of the lovestruck narrative, that the more benign narrative of the Prophet ﷺ marrying Zaynab (rA) reluctantly to abolish the ancient Arab proscription of marriage to one's adopted sons' ex-wives is contrived and at least somewhat convenient. (It should be noted, however, that suspicion of convenience can only emanate from the debunked lovestruck narrative without which there would be no convenience to be had). After all, why is this issue, among so many others that afflicted Arabia at that time, so noteworthy as to warrant not only a Qur'anic imperative for its abolition, but also that the Prophet ﷺ himself flouted the pre-Islamic rule so as to establish its precedent? These misgivings stem from a lack of recognition of the Prophet ﷺ as not solely a religious figure, but the head of a state as well as a social reformer who sought to upend the social malaise that had set into pre-Islamic Arabia—of which adoption and the subsequent regulations associated with it were just one critical aspect. It also originates from a failure to situate the attack against this one specific norm within the larger multi pronged attack that the Prophet ﷺ discharged against a myriad of communal and social practices that were seen as sacrosanct in Late Antique Arabia. These practices, which frequently dictated marital relationships, often infringed on the rights of vulnerable members of society such as women and orphans.⁶³ Examples of this principle include the pre-Islamic sanctioning of the coercive marriage between a son and his step-mother on the death of his father, without consideration of the consent of the step-mother. In fact, not just the son but all of the deceased male's heirs were given *carte blanche* to wed any female member of the deceased's household, including wives and daughters.⁶⁴ Prior revelation in *al-Nisā'* 19-23 had already inveighed against and proscribed this practice just a short while prior to the Prophet's ﷺ marriage with Zaynab (rA).⁶⁵ Although the Qur'an addresses specifically the issue of in-laws taking advantage of female family members, the issue also extended in general where women were seen as the property of their guardians who could be

⁶³ Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 282–83.

⁶⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-tafsīr*, 6:86–87 and 9:62, hadiths 4558, 6945; Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, ed. Shu'ayb al-'Arna'ūṭ (Beirut, Dār al-Risālah al-'Ālamiyyah, 2009), 3:431, hadith 2089.

⁶⁵ *Sūrat al-Nisā'* was likely revealed over a period of a few years ranging from 3/624 to 4/625, as is obvious from the various topics it addresses, which include instructions regarding the inheritance of the martyrs of Uhud which occurred in 3/624; instructions regarding prayer during war, which was revealed during the Expedition of *Dhāt al-Riqā'* which occurred in 4/625; and a warning given to the members of Banū Naḍīr, prior to their exile also in 4/625; see also, 'Abd al-Razzāq Ḥusayn Aḥmad, *Al-makkī wa al-madanī fī al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, (Cairo: Dār Ibn 'Affān, 1999), 55, 77, 150, and 174

married at whim. The Prophet ﷺ himself had occasion to restrict this when a woman approached him complaining that her father had strong-armed her into marrying her cousin, and the Prophet ﷺ voided the marriage.⁶⁶ On a similar note, the Prophet ﷺ significantly circumscribed the payment of dowers to the family of the bride in lieu of the bride herself. Previous marriages allowed for the dower to be given to the father or guardian of the bride, and the Qur'an had already commanded that women directly be granted their dowries in *al-Nisā'*, 4. The Prophet ﷺ had also forbidden the practice of *shighār* where two males exchanged daughters or sisters for marriage, without any dowry, as this would benefit the family at the cost of the woman.⁶⁷ Another prohibition that is more akin to the issue at hand regards the pre-Islamic practice of *ẓihār* in which a man would irrevocably divorce his wife by undertaking an oath that he regarded her as his mother. This was similarly condemned on the similar grounds that an artificial and fictitious relationship was contrived so as to violate the rights of another who had no means of redress.

The verse in the Qur'an that prohibits *ẓihār* is the same verse that prohibits “adoption,” underscoring the shared injustice of both customs. The use of the word “adoption” however is inexact and does not do justice to the multitude of institutions that fell under that term that existed then. Although the full details of these complex practices fall outside the scope of this article, it does appear that at least two distinct but interconnected practices were in vogue: acknowledgment of genuine biological paternity that had not previously been established (*istilḥāq*) and ascribing one's name to a non-relative (*tabannī*).⁶⁸ The former occurred within the licentious backdrop of pre-Islamic Arabia wherein practices such as prostitution, temporary marriages, and divorce, along with the concomitant expected disputations over the lineage of newborns, had fostered an atmosphere of suspicion

⁶⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, 7:48, hadith 5128; al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, 3:436, hadith 2096; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-nikāḥ* (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'ṣīl, 2014), 286–87, hadiths 1860–63.

⁶⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, 7:33, hadith 5102; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, 3:290–91, hadiths 1871–73.

⁶⁸ For a contemporary examination of pre-Islamic adoption, see Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-istilḥāq wa al-tabannī fī al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah*, (Cairo: Maktab al-Wahbah, 2000).

in which aspersion was cast upon even legitimate births.⁶⁹ This is seen in the case of Zayd's own son Usama, who being of a darker tone than Zayd, was accused of being illegitimate, until a specialist in family resemblances (*qā'if*) confirmed their relationship.⁷⁰

The Islamic solution to this problem was multifold, but relevant to the issue of adoption was the attempt to limit the prevalence of cases in which disputes over lineage could occur. Apart from the obvious prohibitions on prostitution and other extra-marital relationships, the Qur'an established a waiting period (*'iddah*) after a woman's divorce or the death of her husband, during which she could not remarry.⁷¹ This allowed for any pregnancy from the prior marriage to become manifest and ascribable to the rightful paternity. Moreover, any source of artificial lineages that could further complicate the situation, including the common practice of false genealogical claims or adoption whereby a non-biological "son" took on his adopted father's patronym, was prohibited.

Quite separate from the interconnectedness between the social reform the Prophet ﷺ effected and the need to restrict pre-Islamic adoptive practices is the evidence that *tabannī* was potentially inherently oppressive, even without its pernicious byproducts. The term used for adopted children, *ad'iyā'*, does not invoke the meaning of adoption in vogue today at all, but rather involved the appropriation by coercion of someone else's name.⁷² There was undoubtedly oppression of vulnerable groups under the guise of adoption which allowed for the attribution of usually beleaguered individuals to nonbiological "guardians" who could then forfeit their rights at whim as they could their own biological children. The latter is

⁶⁹ 'Ā'ishah detailed the various forms of sexual relationships that were commonplace in Arabia during the pre-Islamic epoch. This included a man dispatching his wife to have relations with a nobleman so that she could become pregnant with a child of noble birth to which he could lay claim. Additionally, a woman would engage in sexual relations with up to ten men collectively and if she gave birth to a child, she would ascribe its lineage capriciously to any one of them. Lastly, a woman would prostitute herself and subsequently would select any of the men who called on her as her child's father; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, 7:41–43, hadith 5117.

⁷⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-farā'id*, 8:432–33, hadiths 6777–78; also in *Bāb al-manāqib*, 4:499, hadith 3551; Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:89–90, hadith 1481; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Shu'ayb al-'Arna'ūt (Beirut: al-Risālah al-'Ālamiyyah, 2013), 21:402.

⁷¹ Qur'an 2:228.

⁷² The Arabic Language Academy defines "*da'ī*" as "someone whose lineage is suspected, someone whose lineage is ascribed to someone other than his father." Edward William Lane defines it as "one who makes a claim in respect of a relationship, one who claims as his father a person who is not his father; or one who is claimed as a son by a person who is not his father." *Al-Mu'jam al-wasit* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Shurūq al-Dawliyyah, 2004), 287; Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003), 3:885.

clear in the case of Khālīd ibn Saʿīd whose biological father Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀs tortured him, and subsequently disowned and disinherited him after he refused to apostatize after accepting Islam.⁷³ In the case of an “adopted” child, however, there would be no shared bloodline whatsoever to provide any protection to mitigate damages incurred. An illustration of this principle is provided by al-Miqdād ibn ʿAmr, who was adopted as well as taken on as a confederate (*ḥalīf*) by al-Aswad ibn ʿAbd Yaghūth of the Banū Zuhrah ibn Kilāb clan of Quraysh. Al-Miqdād, like Khālīd, was compelled to migrate to Abyssinia to escape the persecution of his adopted father and clan.⁷⁴

The power dynamic of a powerful individual taking on an adopted son is suggested by the Qurʾan, where it instructs the adopted *fathers* not to address their adopted sons by their own names: “Call them by their [real] fathers,” immediately after stating, “[Allah] does not regard your adopted sons [*ad ʿiyāʾukum*] as your [real] sons.”⁷⁵ The Qurʾanic charge directed to the adopted fathers suggests that it was more prevalent that the appropriation occurred when an individual took on a “son” instead of a mutual decision that fostered common benefit. Although more emphasis has been traditionally given on the literal imperative to avoid naming adopted sons by their adopted fathers, the directive denounces the repressive institution of adoption, which it refers to by metonymy. This explains why the aforementioned al-Miqdād was known by his adopted patronym, al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad many years after this verse was revealed.⁷⁶ The subsequent exhortation in the Qurʾan, “That is more just in the sight of Allah,” renders this entire concept all the clearer, as it establishes the injustice that had been associated with adoptive practices.

The well-known example of the Prophet’s ﷺ complete integration of Zayd (rA) in his own household may lead to the assumption that his upright conduct was the standard practice and that adopted children attained full integration and legal equality with biological sons, particularly based on anachronistic notions of modern-day adoption as a charitable institution. But closer examination reveals

⁷³ Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 4:88–89.

⁷⁴ Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 3:149.

⁷⁵ Qurʾan 33:4–5.

⁷⁶ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾan*, 17:58.

that far from being mainstream, few if any of the privileges of a biological son were conferred on adopted children whatsoever, whether by their adopted fathers or by society. The obvious example is Zaynab's (rA) initial refusal to marry Zayd (rA) because she estimated him to be of inferior stock, even though as the Prophet's صلى الله عليه وسلم son and a Hāshimī, he should have been regarded as having the superior pedigree. A similar example is found with al-Miqdād, whose marriage proposals were contemptuously repudiated by multiple Qurayshī families, and this despite the fact that he was additionally a *ḥalīf* of Banū Zuhrah, and *ḥalīfs* were married by Qurayshīs to their women. (As he did with Zayd (rA), the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, ever the social benefactor, assumed the responsibility personally by wedding al-Miqdād to his own paternal cousin, Dubā'ah bint al-Zubayr ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib).⁷⁷ Additionally, the Prophet's صلى الله عليه وسلم detractors would heap abuse on him by referring to him as *al-abtar*, or someone with no male offspring to inherit from him and carry on his legacy, and the Qur'an responded in defense of him.⁷⁸ Clearly, the Quraysh (and by extension, pre-Islamic Arabs) did not deem an adoptee to be an adequate substitute for a biological child, and this despite the Prophet's صلى الله عليه وسلم public address to the Quraysh when he took on Zayd (rA) as his own son, pronouncing "Zayd is now my son. I will inherit from him, and he will inherit from me." Even the wording here suggests that inheritance was not the norm with adopted children, and therefore had to be spelled out.⁷⁹ This is evident in the case of al-Miqdād, who predictably appears to not have inherited from al-Aswad ibn 'Abd Yaghūth on the latter's death. Similarly denied inheritance was Sufyān ibn Ma'mar who had been adopted by Ma'mar ibn Ḥabīb of Banū Jumah ibn 'Amr of Quraysh. Far from inheriting from his adopted father after the latter's death, Sufyān could not even reside in Mecca and had to return to his biological tribe with his sons despite retaining Ma'mar's patronym.⁸⁰ All of this accounts for the lack of any historical record of litigation or conflict over inheritance between biological and adopted children, which would otherwise have inevitably been present.

⁷⁷ Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 3:149.

⁷⁸ Qur'an 108:3.

⁷⁹ Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 3:40. It is possible that the Prophet's wording was a point of emphasis rather than to highlight an exception to the rule, but the lack of any other examples of inheritance bequeathed to adoptees suggests this not to be the case.

⁸⁰ Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 22:471–72; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Iṣābah fī tamyīz al-ṣahābah*, ed. Al-Turkī, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin (Cairo: Markaz li'l Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-'Arabīyyah wa al-Islāmīyyah, 2008), 2:114–15.

The fact that almost all adoptees were both confederates (*ḥulafāʾ*) and clients (*mawālī*) of their patronyms only further underscores the differences in societal estimation of biological versus adopted sons, as the former had no need to be confederates of their own biological parents.⁸¹ More importantly, it establishes the adoption of pre-Islamic Arabia as otiose and superfluous. Adoption provided no added social benefit to individuals who could realize far more gain by simply becoming confederates of tribal leaders without the associated social encumbrances.⁸² In this context, it was imperative to entirely abolish an institution that at best was inherently functionless and at worst fostered oppression, and for a practice that was as deeply entrenched in society, this could not have been successful without Prophetic precedent.

A historiographic assessment of the evolution of the lovestruck narrative

If the lovestruck narrative is entirely irreconcilable with Qurʾānic and other textual evidence, then how can we explain the origins of the story and the handful of transmissions that allude to it? Shuʿayb al-Arnaʿūṭ, the late hadith expert and editor of Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Musnad*, suggested one possibility in his gloss on the hadith of Anas (rA). He speculated that the lovestruck narrative was conflated with the report of Zayd ibn Ḥārithah’s (rA) visit to Zaynab’s (rA) house after his divorce to propose for the Prophet ﷺ in hadith (12). Multiple sound accounts of this event allude to the awe and reverence Zayd experienced in the presence of Zaynab after the Prophet ﷺ proposed to her (interestingly, despite their own disagreements

⁸¹ Apart from al-Miqdād ibn ʿAmr, other examples of individuals who were both adopted and confederates or clients include ʿĀmir ibn Rabīʿah, the adopted son and confederate of al-Khaṭṭāb ibn Nufayl (the father of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb); Wāqid ibn ʿAbd Allah, the client and adopted son of al-Khaṭṭāb; and Sālim, the adopted son and client of Abū Ḥudhayfah ibn ʿUtbah.

⁸² It has been suggested by Ella Landau-Tasseron that adoption could assist in the procurement of confederacy for one’s family, as the children of adoptees were almost always confederates of the adopter. Regardless of whether this is true, the vast majority of confederates were not children of adoptees and had attained confederacy through other avenues, and this highlights the redundancy of *tabannī*. Ella Landau-Tasseron, “Adoption, Acknowledgement of Paternity and False Genealogical Claims in Arabian and Islamic Societies,” *School of Oriental and African Studies* 2 (2003): 169–92.

that had culminated in their divorce just a few months earlier), and that such was that awe present within him, that he could not bring himself to even look at Zaynab. Al-Arna'ūṭ drew a parallel between the stories, and noted their resemblance: in one Zayd visits Zaynab and is filled with wonderment, and in the other, the Prophet ﷺ visits Zaynab and is in turn awestruck. Because the version of Zayd's visit to Zaynab is sound and reported through Anas in multiple authentic works of hadith, he believed the narratives to have become confused.⁸³ Although this explanation is somewhat plausible, there is no direct evidence that supports this conflation, and additionally it cannot entirely explain the widespread circulation of this narration, nor of the other narrators who also report the event, with entirely distinct chains of narration.

The first hint as to its origin is the historical time period when it suddenly appeared in circulation, and that too among primarily raconteurs (*quṣṣās*) known for exegesis rather than among the more rigorous hadith critics and transmitters. This occurred about a century or so after the time when the event is purported to have taken place. Additionally, it is also quite apparent that there was a gradual evolution of the story, first from a pithy observation that what the Prophet ﷺ concealed was a desire to wed Zaynab (rA), proffered in explanation to the reference of a secret in the verse of *al-Aḥzāb*, to a full-blown dramatization of the event with exhaustive details freely added. (In different narrations, Zaynab (rA) jumped with excitement upon knowledge that the Prophet ﷺ was visiting, or she rushed to him without properly covering herself, and hastily threw on a cloth that she used *ad hoc* to cover her hair, or even followed the Prophet ﷺ out to listen to his statement, among other vivid details). The third hint that we become aware of is the linking of the Prophet's ﷺ story to a peculiar story of Dāwūd which is not found in Islamic sources but instead is rooted entirely in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is in fact the subsequent verse of *al-Aḥzāb* where that link was forged. The verse, which states, "There is no harm for the Prophet in doing what Allah has obligated for him; [that has been] the way of Allah with those who have preceded him" was first used to refer specifically to Dāwūd by Muḥammad ibn Ka'b al-Qurazī, a senior Follower (*tābi'ī*) who was a Jewish convert from Banū Qurayzah, and therefore quite familiar with the Judeo-Christian depiction of

⁸³ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal*, 19:492, hadith 12512.

Dāwūd. Rather than understand the verse based on its apparent meaning—that there could be no impugning of the Prophet ﷺ, as was transpiring as per ‘Ā’ishah’s (rA) report in *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, for fulfilling an obligation that Allah had commanded of him, and that his fulfilling of the command was similar to the fulfillment of their divine obligations by other prophets—Muḥammad ibn Ka‘b adumbrated instead that the verse alluded to the customary practice of prophets marrying multiple wives. Ibn Ka‘b even specifically furnished Dāwūd’s marriage to 100 women and Sulaymān’s marriage to 1000 as maintained in the Bible as an example of this practice.⁸⁴ He therefore suggested that the Prophet’s ﷺ marriage to Zaynab (rA), despite his marriage to multiple other wives at that time, was merely the fulfillment of a prophetic practice that had existed from prior centuries.⁸⁵ He made no further extrapolations, and nor did he provide a reference to a higher authority, such as a Companion, for his reading of the verse. It is noteworthy that Ibn Ka‘b lived during the Rāshidūn Caliphate and passed away in 108/726. No other commentators had previously ever interpreted the verse as Ibn Ka‘b did, and nor was the lovestruck narrative in circulation during his lifetime, except for an undeveloped prototype during the later years of his life.

Why would Ibn Ka‘b interpret the verse in such a singular and unprecedented manner? The historical record does not provide any direct evidence for the motivation or source of his exegesis. However, we can still speculate, because of the concomitant development of anti-Islamic rhetoric that had begun to mature, of which the Prophet’s ﷺ marriage with Zaynab (rA) played a pivotal role. With increasing interaction between Muslims and Christians, the latter undertook a spirited defense of their theological doctrines, which had directly been confronted head-on in the Qur’an. The quintessential apologist was John of Damascus (d. 143/749), who launched his own offensive against Arabs collectively (whom he contemptuously designated as “Ishmaelites”), Islamic tenets, and the Prophet ﷺ in particular. Central to his argument was his denunciation of the Prophet ﷺ as a philanderer and imposter who concocted revelations as a pretext to realize his carnal desires. He inveighed on the Islamic sanctioning of polygyny, lambasting the Prophet ﷺ as its most guilty perpetrator. John, however, went further, and

⁸⁴ These numbers are provided by Muḥammad Ibn Ka‘b; in fact, the Bible attributes 700 wives and 300 concubines to Solomon and multiple but unnumbered wives to David. 1 Kings 11.

⁸⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dur al-manthūr*, 12:58.

specifically alluded to the Prophet's ﷺ marriage with Zayd's (rA) wife. John did not name Zaynab explicitly, as he seems unaware of her identity, nor did he refer to the final version of the lovestruck narrative in which the Prophet ﷺ visited her dwelling only to become infatuated with her. His depiction of the event was simultaneously less developed but far more vitriolic, for in his canard, the Prophet ﷺ did not only fall in love with Zayd's wife, but instructed Zayd to divorce her so that he could take his place. John entirely ignored the verses in the Qur'an in which the Prophet ﷺ is quoted as earnestly advising Zayd instead to keep his marriage intact.⁸⁶

John's chronicle, whether due to willful prevarication or ignorance, was instrumental in bolstering Christian apologetics in the face of Islamic theological objections, and was taken up by other Christian polemicists.⁸⁷ Other Christian indictments of the Prophet's ﷺ concupiscence, albeit less well-documented and developed, are referenced even earlier in the historical record. 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 101/720) is recorded to have corresponded with the Byzantine emperor Leo III (d. 124/741) who had accused the Prophet ﷺ of seducing a woman named Zeda.⁸⁸ That this woman's name was so like Zayd's is too coincidental to be dismissed out of hand, and likely is a botched reference to Zayd himself. This suggests that the Christian narrative itself was undergoing its own evolution where early Christians who were not fully familiar with the Qur'anic text and whose knowledge of it was inchoate, were aware that Zayd had played some but yet imprecisely recognized role in one of the Prophet's ﷺ marriages. John's version, which was composed some decades later, appears to be a more evolved variant, where he identifies that the Prophet ﷺ married not Zayd, but his former wife, yet does not appear cognizant of the woman's name. Regardless, it may be

⁸⁶ In an account riddled with factual errors and contempt, John of Damascus writes "Muḥammad had a friend named Zayd; this man had a beautiful wife with whom Muḥammad fell in love. Once when they were sitting together, Muḥammad said: 'Oh, by the way, God has given me the command that you divorce your wife.' And [Zayd] did divorce her. Then several days later, [he said to Zayd]: 'Now, God has commanded me to take her.' Then after he had taken her and committed adultery, he [invented] laws" justifying his adultery. John, *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 157.

⁸⁷ John's works do refer to quite a number of Qur'anic chapters, which he ostensibly derides and mocks. This suggests that he had read the Qur'an and his canard about the Prophet's adultery was willful and malicious. However, some Byzantine scholars have raised doubts about whether John had indeed referenced the Qur'an, and suggest that it may have been interpolated by later Christians. Michael Bonner, *Arab-Byzantine Relations in Early Islamic Times* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 223.

⁸⁸ Arthur Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 37/4 (1944), 324. Leo III only appears to be partially familiar with *al-Aḥzāb*, 37 in this correspondence.

tempting to attribute the complete lovestruck narrative to these fabrications, especially since they seem to be the first known prototypes of it in the historical record. However, the lovestruck narrative found in Islamic texts is far more specific and detailed, and its presence in the Islamic exegetical and historical corpus needs to be further explored. This is especially true since devout Muslims would have been unlikely to incorporate such an unflattering depiction of the Prophet ﷺ in their own works. More likely than these narratives finding their way in Muslim works is that it may have led to certain Muslim rejoinders that indirectly inspired the very story they were attempting to disclaim. As an example, these accusations would be a plausible incentive for Ibn Ka'b's exegesis: his explanation of the Prophet's ﷺ marriage with Zaynab (rA) as analogous with Dāwūd and Sulaymān's, could have been intended to draw attention to the fact that the Prophet's ﷺ polygynous marriages were no different than the marriages depicted of Christianity's own venerable patriarchs. I am not aware of any direct evidence establishing that Ibn Ka'b was aware of either Leo III or John's allegations, or that his exegesis was a direct response to him or other Christians. However, Ibn Ka'b was keenly aware of contemporaneous Jewish and Christian theological claims, and as a welcome member within Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz's court, he would have been all too cognizant of these polemics, and attempted to refute them as he was known to do with other Judeo-Christian allegations.⁸⁹ Additionally, there is evidence that other early Muslims were aware of Christian claims against the Prophet ﷺ, and it would certainly explain the bizarre commentary of *al-Aḥzāb*, 38 that Ibn Ka'b proffered.

Regardless of the source of inspiration of Ibn Ka'b's exegesis, it did serve as the foundational substrate for the subsequent step in the hermeneutical evolution of *al-Aḥzāb*, 38 which is seen in both Qatādah's and Ibn Jurayj's exegeses. Both went considerably further than Muḥammad ibn Ka'b, as they understood the verse to refer to not just Dāwūd's and Sulaymān's marriages to multiple women, but specifically to the sordid affair that Dāwūd is accused of having in Judeo-Christian sources. The Biblical narration of Dāwūd's affair with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, was already known to Muslims who had settled in Byzantine lands during the caliphate of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (rA), and it appears that proliferation of the account

⁸⁹ See for instance, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dur al-manthūr*, 12:436.

had led to some level of its acceptance among Muslims. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (rA) is reported to have become cognizant of the pervasive recounting of the tale, and attempted to curb its dissemination, warning that those involved in such transmission would be lashed 160 times—80 for the false accusation of adultery (*qadhf*) and 80 for vilifying a prophet of Allah.⁹⁰ The full Biblical account is as follows: Dāwūd was once walking on the roof of his palace, and observed a beautiful woman bathing. Smitten by her, he enquired as to her identity and was informed that she was Bathsheba (or Bath-shua in another book within the Bible), the wife of Uriah who was one of Dāwūd’s top lieutenants. Dāwūd had Bathsheba brought to his chambers and an affair ensued in which Bathsheba became pregnant. Fearful of Uriah’s discovery of the adulterous affair, Dāwūd summoned Uriah from the army, hoping that Uriah and his wife would have relations to which the pregnancy could be attributed. However, Uriah refused to leave his soldiers without a commander, despite repeated efforts by Dāwūd to convince him otherwise. Desperate, Dāwūd had Uriah placed on the front lines of a battle where Uriah would be killed. Uriah was slain during the campaign, and Dāwūd was able to avert discovery, and he subsequently married Bathsheba once news of Uriah’s death arrived.⁹¹

As exposure to this Judeo-Christian sequence of events expanded, a number of Qur’an commentators advanced it as the explanation for a far more unassuming event that is found in *Sūrat Ṣād*: in it two litigants suddenly appear in the chambers of Dāwūd, and present a case for him to arbitrate. One of the litigants possesses 99 ewes and the other possesses only one. The destitute one objects that his wealthier partner sought to take his single ewe, and had overwhelmed him with his speech. Dāwūd adjudicates in favor of the destitute litigant. For reasons unspecified in the Qur’an, Dāwūd realizes that Allah had tested him, and falls down in prostration,

⁹⁰ The report of ‘Alī’s verdict on transmitters of the Bathsheba affair is advanced in multiple exegeses, including that of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Tha‘labī, al-Qurtubī, and al-Alūsī. It is alleged that it was narrated through Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyab and al-Hārith al-A‘war from ‘Alī, both of whom were august hadith transmitters. Yet Jamāl al-Dīn al-Zayla‘ī does not trace the original source of this report in his *takhrīj* (hadith sourcing) work on al-Zamakhshari’s *tafsīr*, though he does not deny knowledge of it either. Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, however, states unequivocally in his abridgement of al-Zayla‘ī’s work that he had been unable to locate the original source of this report. Al-Zayla‘ī, *Takhrīj al-ahadīth wa al-athār* (Saudi Arabia: Wazarah al-Shu‘un al-Islāmiyyah wa al-Awqāf wa al-Da‘wah wa al-Irshād, 2003), 3:188; Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *al-Kāfī al-shāf* (Beirut: Dār Alim al-Ma‘rifah, 2017), 142; al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-kashshāf* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘arif, 2009), 922; al-Alūsī, *Rūh al-ma‘āni* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2014), 12:178.

⁹¹ 2 Samuel 23:34; 2 Samuel 12:1–6.

supplicating for Allah’s forgiveness for his failure. Muslim commentators on these verses applied the Bathsheba narrative to this event, as a similar parable existed in the Bible, in which the Biblical Prophet Nathan appeared before Dāwūd and presented a case for Dāwūd to judge. Nathan’s case was the same as the Qur’anic one in which a wealthier man with many ewes appropriates a poorer man’s single ewe. However, the Biblical narrative was more unequivocal in its reference to the Bathsheba affair, as when Dāwūd judged in favor of the poorer man, Nathan chastised Dāwūd for his hypocrisy and specifically mentioned the Bathsheba affair: “You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it was I who saved you from the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives in your lap, and I gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if that be too little, I would give you even as much again.’ Why did you despise the command of the Lord to do what is evil in His eyes? Uriah the Hittite you struck down with the sword, and his wife you took for yourself as wife, and him you have killed by the sword of the Ammonites?”⁹² Thus, some Muslim commentators expanded the Qur’anic parable with the additional details provided in the Biblical account, and they viewed the parable of the 99 ewes as representing Dāwūd’s 99 wives, despite which he sought the one wife of another man.

The parallels between the tale of Dāwūd’s purported improprieties with Bathsheba and the final version of the tale of the Prophet’s ﷺ visit to Zaynab’s (rA) house are obvious (though at this stage, neither Qatādah nor Ibn Jurayj specifically quote the entire account of the Prophet’s ﷺ visit): both are married to multiple other wives, but despite that, are smitten with another woman. In both situations, that woman happens to be the wife of one of their trusted lieutenants. Likewise, the love affair is elicited by the inadvertent glimpsing of the woman who happens to be inadequately clothed—in Dāwūd’s case while observing Bathsheba taking a bath, and in the Prophet’s ﷺ case, when Zaynab (rA) rushes to welcome him without adequate covering. Even the hasty efforts of Bathsheba to cover herself when she became cognizant of Dāwūd’s gazing at her, noted in some narrations of the event, are mirrored in Zaynab’s (rA) analogous attempt to hurriedly cover her hair with an improvised veil, mentioned in hadith (4). The major difference is that in the

⁹² 2 Samuel 12:1–13.

lovestruck narrative, the Prophet ﷺ immediately leaves and maintains a display of absolute decorum, though he does internally covet Zaynab—as opposed to the Biblical Dāwūd who fully realizes the adultery, and then further has an innocent man murdered to cover up his crime. But even this difference is only limited to the Biblical narrative, for the Qur’an commentators who quoted this tale left out the adulterous aspect (for instance al-Ṭabarī who comments on *Sūrat Ṣād*, 24 by citing a report all the way back to Ibn ‘Abbās). In the moderated “Islamic” version of the commentators which had increasingly been introduced in the commentary of *Sūrat Ṣād* as knowledge of Judeo-Christian traditions expanded, Dāwūd is indeed depicted as someone who is infatuated with the woman, but rather than commit adultery with her, he first attempts to have her husband killed, and only then when his plan is successful, weds and has relations with her. Whether the absence of any mention of adultery was because these commentators were not cognizant of the accurate Biblical representation or if there was intentional whitewashing is irrelevant. What is important is that the version of the Bathsheba affair that was in circulation among the Qur’an commentators, without its mention of adultery, is almost entirely analogous to the lovestruck narrative that subsequently developed some years later.⁹³

⁹³ The Bathsheba affair’s parallel with the lovestruck narrative is so compelling that it has not failed to attract the recognition and attention of a number of Western scholars such as Peter Jensen, Ze’ev Maghen, Andreas Görke, and David Powers. Jensen, “Das Leben Muhammads und die David-Sage,” *Der Islam*, 12/1-2 (1922), 84-97; Maghen, “Intertwined Triangles: Remarks on the Relationship between two Prophetic Scandals,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 33 (2007), 17-92; Görke, *Between History and Exegesis: the Origins and Transformation of the Story of Muḥammad and Zaynab bt Ḡaḥṣ*, *Arabica*, 65(1-2), 31-63. David Powers, in particular, emphasizes the special appreciation of the resemblance of Zayd with Uriah the Hittite as represented in the Bible. However, he goes significantly further than I argue for here and argues quite unconvincingly that Zayd’s *entire biography*, as depicted in Muslim historical sources, was concocted for various political and theological objectives. He provides a multitude of parallels and tropes from which Muslims drew—not just with Uriah but also with other Biblical figures such as Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph, and Dammelek Eliezer throughout various episodes in Zayd’s life. Though Powers does not concern himself with the *historical* Zayd (insofar as that can even be ascertained based on Powers’ revisionist approach), as he is concerned with the historiographic development of Zayd’s persona, his contentions merit some appraisal here. First, Powers does not provide any direct connection between the Biblical parallels that Muslim historians purportedly drew from. The Uriah parallel is compelling as a source of the lovestruck narrative because Ibn Jurayj, Qatādah, and Muqātil (on whom more later) unequivocally confirm the connection in their exegeses, a connection which is glaringly absent in Powers’ other parallels. Moreover, many of those connections are contrived and overstated. For instance, Powers likens Zayd’s rejection of his biological family in favor of the Prophet when his father discovers him in Mecca to the Biblical Joseph who was similarly sold into slavery but sought to and eventually reunited with his family. Is Zayd’s resolve to remain with his master not a fundamental distinction between his account and Joseph’s? On the other hand, Uriah and Bathsheba’s resemblance is indistinguishable with Zayd and Zaynab in the lovestruck narrative. Last, Powers spends considerable efforts postulating on the motives Muslim historians had for their fictional output. For a critical reading of these motives, the interested reader is referred to Walid Saleh’s and Sean Anthony’s reviews. David Powers, *Muḥammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Powers, *Zayd*; Walid Saleh, “Review Article:

Ibn Jurayj and Qatādah were not the sources that al-Ṭabarī and the other commentators referred to when they recounted the Bathsheba affair. Nevertheless, it is obvious that this is the story Ibn Jurayj and Qatādah were referring to when commenting on *al-Aḥzāb*, 38 in that there was no blame on the Prophet ﷺ for doing what Allah had decreed, since the Prophet's ﷺ conduct was similar to Dāwūd's purported conduct, whose *sunnah* he was merely following. If there is any doubt that Ibn Jurayj and Qatādah envisaged this particular story, Qatādah's statement that the Prophet's ﷺ actions were "similar to the Prophet Dāwūd [who] desired the woman upon whom his gaze fell upon" leaves no doubt that it was Bathsheba he had in mind. Ibn Jurayj also named the woman—al-Yasyah—which may have been an Arabized version of Bath-shua or a scribal error by a copyist who was not familiar with the pronunciation: as the names essentially share the same consonantal skeleton, the differences can be accounted by the addition of a dot to the ب (*b*) into a ي (*y*).⁹⁴ Regardless of the precise name given to the woman Dāwūd is captivated by, Ibn Jurayj clearly was referring to this specific Biblical account.

It is interesting to note that once again, as in Muḥammad Ibn Ka'b's case, direct knowledge of Biblical accounts is a prevailing theme, this time with Ibn Jurayj who hailed from a Byzantine background—and even his father's name Jurayj was the Arabic rendition of the Christian name Georgios.⁹⁵ Ibn Jurayj's reliability as a *transmitter* of hadith is undisputed and his hadiths are included in all six canonical Sunni hadith compilations, but his own opinions, of which this is an example, never received the same level of acclaim.⁹⁶ This becomes particularly striking because both Ibn Jurayj and Qatādah studied with a multitude of senior Followers through which they often narrated with *isnāds* directly back to the Prophet ﷺ, but which they do not do here in their interpretation of *al-Aḥzāb*, 38: this exegesis of Ibn Jurayj and Qatādah's is theirs and theirs alone, and both tendered their

Muḥammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6, no. 6.1–6.2 (December 29, 2011); Anthony, *Review of Qur'anic Research*, 1–5.

⁹⁴ The name of the woman varied in Muslim accounts—'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn 'Asākir's account which he traced back to Wahb ibn Munabbih, for instance, referred to her as Sābi' bint Ḥanānā; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 17:100.

⁹⁵ Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 18:338.

⁹⁶ For instance, his views on and practice of temporary marriage (*mut'ah*). See Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirāt al-huffāz* (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Uthāniyyah, 1954), 1:170–71.

interpretation without attributing it to a higher authority. Interestingly, when they did provide exegesis on *al-Aḥzāb*, 38 by transmitting the commentary of a more senior figure, such as Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, this anomalous and explicit reference to love was absent in those transmissions.⁹⁷ Of note, both are known to heavily rely on Judeo-Christian sources (known as *Isrāʾīliyyāt* in medieval Muslim texts) for their own positions, a fact long recognized by hadith specialists.⁹⁸ Ibn Jurayj lived from 80-150/699-767, and therefore succeeded Muḥammad Ibn Kaʿb, as was true of Qatādah who died in 120/737, during which further development of the Zaynab account undoubtedly had taken place. Neither Qatādah nor Ibn Jurayj furnished all of the vivid details present in the full version of the lovestruck narrative, for they merely commented that the Prophet ﷺ had desired that Zayd (rA) divorce Zaynab (rA) so that he could marry her. Nevertheless, they do appear to be responsible for being the first to take the leap in expanding the interpretation for *al-Aḥzāb*, 38 by applying the Bathsheba narrative to it, and more importantly, applying the verse to the Prophet's ﷺ marriage with Zaynab (rA). The latter likely occurred because the reality of the Prophet's ﷺ fear of people learning of his upcoming marriage with Zaynab (rA) was mistakenly conflated with an actual *desire* to marry her, and the fear of the public's learning of said desire. And that error was rendered all the easier because of their mistaken ascription of *al-Aḥzāb*, 38 to the Bathsheba affair.

The final development of the story was the brainchild of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. Muqātil is an interesting historical personality, but it is his rank as a hadith teller that we are concerned with. He cannot be deemed a bona fide hadith narrator, because he didn't reveal most of his sources in the form of *isnād*, but he was quite aware of a considerable number of circulating hadiths, which he merrily embellished. It was likely because of these embellishments that critics such as Yahyā ibn Maʿīn, Wakīʿ ibn al-Jarrāḥ, al-Nasāʾī, and al-Dāraquṭnī openly labeled

⁹⁷ Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, *Maʿrifat al-ṣahābah*, 3205, hadith 7368. Abū Nuʿaym unfortunately bundles Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab's transmission from Qatādah with a potpourri of other narrators, and so it is difficult to tease out which part is his. Abū Nuʿaym does state, however, that the essential construction of the report (*ṣulb al-ḥadīth*) arises from the report of those two. In this report, Ibn al-Musayyab states that *al-Aḥzāb*, 38 was revealed because the Prophet kept some thought or emotion within himself, essentially paraphrasing the verse, as he does not explicitly state what it was that the Prophet concealed. In Qatādah's report through Ibn al-Musayyab's authority, there is no explicit reference to love having any role in the marriage, as with Qatādah's transmission when he tendered his own exegesis.

⁹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAdhīm*, 1:360; Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrāʾīliyyat fī al-tafsīr wa al-hadīth* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1990), 87–88.

him a liar, though a jurist of the caliber of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī nonetheless, deemed his exegesis a formative work in the field.⁹⁹ His sensationalization of stories not infrequently drew inspiration from the Judeo-Christian doctrine, a fact recognized and taken exception to by Ibn Ḥibbān, who also categorized him as a fabricator.¹⁰⁰

Muqātil is the earliest Muslim relater of the complete version of the lovestruck narrative as we now know it, and indeed his version is by far more meticulously detailed and crass than any of the others that followed him. In the full account of his tale, we find details that are not found in the narrations of others as he built on Qatādah and Ibn Jurayj's account and provided a highly dramatized tale which in fact begins earlier than the extract reproduced above in hadith (8).¹⁰¹ Muqātil provides a full chronology with the Prophet's صلى الله عليه وسلم supposed fascination with Zaynab (rA), which he maintains had in fact been blossoming earlier when he had visited Zaynab to provide counsel over her domestic disputes with Zayd. During that conversation, the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was enamored by her attractiveness (*ḥusnuhā*), beauty (*jamāluhā*), and charm (*ẓarfuhā*). It was only sometime later, when he

⁹⁹ Al-Dāraqutnī, *al-Ḍuʿafāʾ wa al-matrūkūn* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1984), 371; Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl fī naqd al-rijāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 4/173-174; Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Majrūḥīn min al-Muḥaddithīn* (Riyadh: Dār al-Samīʿi, 2000), 2:347-49.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Majrūḥīn min al-muḥaddithīn*, 2:347-49. Zeʿev Maghen speculates that the widespread criticism of Muqātil as a hadith transmitter was *because* of his narrating the lovestruck narrative in the first place and, as such, could be characterized as unwarranted animus. Yet, Maghen provides no evidence to support this contention. He also fails to account for the authentic grading of other transmitters who also advocated for the Prophet's infatuation with Zaynab, such as Qatādah and Ibn Jurayj, and that too by the consensus of hadith critics. Similarly, Ibn Ḥibbān graded the unknown hadith transmitter ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Musayyab as trustworthy despite his being a transmitter of the lovestruck narrative (see Footnote 56). Yet he labeled Muqātil a forger and liar. Why were these other hadith transmitters not similarly regarded with the cynicism afforded to Muqātil? After analyzing Muqātil's oeuvre and comparing his narrations with those of other hadith transmitters, including those relevant to the lovestruck narrative as well as scores of others, it can be stated with confidence that those who attributed forgeries to him were entirely justified in doing so. Zeʿev Maghen, *Virtues of the Flesh: Passion and Purity in Early Islamic Jurisprudence* (London: Brill, 2005), 75-110.

¹⁰¹ Muqātil relates: Zayd ibn Ḥāritha requested, "Prophet of Allāh, propose on my behalf." The Prophet asked him, "Does any woman interest you?" He replied, "Zaynab bint Jaḥsh." The Prophet warned him, "I do not imagine that she will accept because she is nobler than that (*lā arāhā taf alu annahā akramu min dhālika nafsan*)." Zayd insisted, "Prophet of Allāh, perhaps if you speak to her and tell her that I am the one whom you cherish the most. She is such a beautiful woman that I fear she would decline my proposal, and that would weigh heavily on me!" Zayd then proceeded to ʿAlī and entreated him to also speak [on his behalf] to the Prophet. He appealed, "Please go to the Prophet, for I do not think he would ever refuse a request from you!" So ʿAlī went with Zayd to the Prophet, [and the Prophet yielded, saying]: "I will do [what you ask] and be your representative to her family, ʿAlī." . . . He went to them and submitted, "Truly, it would please me that you marry Zayd, so [accept him] for marriage." The Prophet then delivered to them [a dowry proposal] of ten gold coins, sixty silver coins, cloaks, bedding, coats of mail, shawls, fifty loads (*mudd*) of food, and ten loads of dates, which he sent with Zayd. Ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, 3:491-93.

inadvertently glimpsed a lightly clad Zaynab (rA), that his infatuation with her matured to completion, as her physical appearance stimulated within him a most potent and immediate attraction. In his version, Zaynab (rA) is uniquely described with a plethora of images regarding her beautiful, striking appearance, and even the fairness of her skin tone and shapely appearance of her figure.

Muqātil was the first (and only narrator I am aware of) to explicitly state that the Prophet ﷺ lusted after her (*hawayahā*); other narrators who would later adopt this story would contrastingly use far more restrained terminology, stating instead that the Prophet ﷺ wished to wed her, or at most admired her. Zayd's critique of Zaynab is also sharp and overstated, particularly when compared to the versions of other narrators in which he devoutly refrains from criticizing her and acknowledges her virtues. Muqātil's source for this narrative was once again the Bathsheba narrative of which he was aware and to which he ascribed, and he confirms the connection in his exegesis on *al-Aḥzāb*, 37, where he drew the same disreputable parallel. Further, just as he developed the lovestruck narrative with meticulous details, he also adorned the Dāwūd and Bathsheba narrative far more than Ibn Jurayj and Qatādah's relatively restrained version. Regarding the verse, "The way of Allah with those who have preceded him," he commented, "This is the practice of those who came before Muḥammad, that is the Prophet Dāwūd when he coveted (*hawaya*) the woman with whom he was tempted (*futina*). She was the wife of Ūriyah ibn Ḥanān and Allah united Dāwūd with the woman whom he coveted similar to Allah's uniting Muḥammad with Zaynab when he [also] coveted her."¹⁰² A close comparison of Ibn 'Abbās's exegesis on *Ṣād*, 24 with Muqātil's is quite instructive. Whereas Ibn 'Abbās stated simply that Dāwūd glimpsed a woman bathing, Muqātil described, "He perceived a woman bathing, and he was attracted by her beauty. The woman saw his shadow, and she dropped her hair to cover her body with it. This only increased [Dāwūd's] desire for her."¹⁰³ Although Muqātil cannot be held responsible for the creation of this story, which is Biblical in origin where the details are significantly more graphic than even in Muqātil's, and which was in circulation among Muslims before him, his propensity

¹⁰² Ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, 3:496.

¹⁰³ Ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, 3:639–40; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 20:64–65.

for sensationalizing his reports is obvious.¹⁰⁴ That tendency involved a heavy reliance on Judeo-Christian sources for his accounts, and it is because of this reliance that one has to question whether Muqātil borrowed, apart from Qatādah and Ibn Jurayj, also from Christian polemicists, embellishing his story based on the source material which they had manufactured, but also expunging material that he knew would never be acceptable to his Muslim readership and presenting it in a more palatable fashion. In his commentary on *al-Aḥzāb*, for instance, he then attempts to mitigate culpability of both prophets for their actions by attributing their infatuation to destiny which Allah essentially fulfilled by legalizing their marriages with the women they loved. Clearly Muqātil has overreached here, and forgotten his own application of the Bathsheba affair to *Ṣād*, 24 in which Allah upbraids Dāwūd for his oversight.

Despite the widespread recognition of Muqātil's unreliability within Muslim scholarship, Muqātil's influence on this story and in *tafsīr* in general, cannot be understated. As just one example, no less an exegete and hadith expert than al-Baghawī, the author of the popular *tafsīr*, *Ma'ālim al-tanzīl*, included Muqātil's version of the lovestruck narrative with all its lurid details *verbatim* in his commentary on *al-Aḥzāb*. Al-Baghawī no doubt drew from al-Tha'labī, whose *tafsīr* al-Baghawī abridged, and who also quoted Muqātil's account *verbatim* himself. Neither of the two cited the source of the quote as Muqātil, which obfuscates his fundamental role in the narrative's transmission. And this is not the only one of Muqātil's tales that found their way perniciously into otherwise reputable works.¹⁰⁵

After Muqātil's fabrication became popularized among the Qur'an commentators, it was a simple matter of innocent but inattentive hadith narrators interpolating this tale forgetfully into authentic narrations. It is not an accident that *every single one* of the other hadiths that relate the full story include transmitters that specifically were criticized for their memories, and that inevitably the forgetful transmitter in question came *after* Muqātil's account went into circulation. It is also for this

¹⁰⁴ Muqātil likely took his variant of the Bathsheba affair from al-Suddī who reports the story with the same details as Muqātil. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rasūl wa al-mulūk*, 20:66-67.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 6:355. There are multiple examples of Muqātil's wording being reproduced by later historians and exegetes *verbatim* without attribution to him. See, for instance, al-Ḥalabī, *Insān al-ʿayn fī sirat al-Amīn al-Ma'mūn* (Egypt: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964), 3:427.

reason that we find hadiths that had been passed on for centuries by more authentic narrators in a benign form, but which in these variants have been muddled. A straightforward example of this is the variant of Anas in hadith (1), and in which Mu'ammal ibn Ismā'īl, the weak link in this chain, clearly stated that he had forgotten the details of who said precisely what in the hadith. Mu'ammal, not coincidentally, died in 206/821, sometime after Muqātil, and also was known for poor retention, which led to his inadvertent interjecting of the questionable features in the hadith in question. It is not surprising that over seven other hadith narrators recount the same exact hadith from Mu'ammal's source, Ḥammād ibn Zayd, and not a single one so much as suggests Mu'ammal's account (see Figure 1). Tellingly, Mu'ammal had acknowledged his poor memory to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, admitting that he did not remember whether the account was Ḥammād's opinion or included in the body of the hadith. In reality, it was neither, as seven other august and retentive narrators all heard the same hadith without including the account as either Ḥammād's opinion or within the body of the hadith from Anas.

Another example is that of al-Tha'labī's report of 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn in which al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī also interprets the Qur'anic verse to mean that the Prophet ﷺ was concealing love for Zaynab (rA). However, we find that multiple hadith experts such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Bayhaqī had collected the hadith from different transmitters than al-Tha'labī did, and neither of the two other transmitters ever reported that al-Ḥasan had made such an interpretation. Al-Tha'labī also has questionable narrators known for forgetfulness and poor memories, and the narrator from where al-Tha'labī's link diverges from the other sounder narrations is with Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Abī 'Umar, a narrator known for his carelessness, and who died in 243/857—once again after Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (Figure 2). The mistaken attribution to al-Ḥasan was probably made because immediately after every one of the multiple transmissions of hadith (6) (Qatādah's statement that the Prophet ﷺ concealed in himself a desire that Zayd (rA) divorce Zaynab (rA) so that he could marry her), Qatādah immediately referred to al-Ḥasan's statement that if the Prophet ﷺ were to have hidden a verse in the Qur'an, he would have that verse. (The immediate quoting of al-Ḥasan's opinion by Qatādah is prolifically transmitted by 'Abd al-Razzāq, 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Ṭabarānī; Qatādah ostensibly did this because he likely thought that al-Ḥasan's statement—which was in fact 'Ā'ishah's (rA)—supported his account of events,

though ironically it gainsayed it). Because Qatādah always quoted al-Ḥasan's innocuous statement after his own exegesis, al-Ḥasan's commentary was confused with Qatādah's by one inattentive narrator.

To validate this principle, if we use the year of death of the impugned narrators of the hadiths as an inexact marker for the period when the hadith originated, the evolutionary process becomes more evident. We begin with Muḥammad Ibn Ka'b, Qatādah, and Ibn Jurayj as the originators of the concept linking the Judeo-Christian story of Bathsheba with the Prophet ﷺ. They died in 108/726, 120/737, and 150/767 respectively. The list of the earliest weak or forgetful narrator in each *isnād* of hadiths available that mention the lovestruck narrative, along with the year of death is listed chronologically, along with a summarized version of the hadith. Muḥammad Ibn Ka'b, Qatādah, and Ibn Jurayj are included for comparison because of their roles in the narrative's historiographic development, though not considered weak or forgetful. Hadiths (9) and (10) have no *isnād* and are therefore excluded here.

Hadith Narrator and date of death in chronological order	Description of hadith
Muḥammad Ibn Ka'b al-Quraẓī (d. 108/726)	The Prophet ﷺ followed the sunnah of Dāwūd and Sulaymān in their marriages to multiple wives, for Dāwūd had wed 100 women, and Sulaymān 1000
Hadith (6) Qatādah (d. 120/737)	What the Prophet ﷺ concealed in himself was a desire that [Zayd] divorce her.
Hadith (7) Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767)	What the Prophet ﷺ concealed in himself was a desire that [Zayd] divorce her and that he marry her instead.
Hadith (8) Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767)	Complete narrative*
Hadith (2) 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir al-Aslamī (d. 150/767)	Complete narrative*
Hadith (4) Muḥammad ibn Khālīd ibn 'Athmah (d. 158/775)	Complete narrative*
Hadith (5) Sulaym mawlā al-Sha'bī (d. circa 164/781) ¹⁰³	The Messenger of Allah ﷺ caught sight of Zaynab bint Jahsh and said, "Glory be to Allah, who causes hearts to turn!"
Hadith (3) 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 182/798)	Complete narrative*
Hadith (1) Mu'ammal ibn Ismā'īl (d. 206/821)	The Prophet ﷺ visited the house of Zayd ibn Hārithah and he glimpsed his wife Zaynab, and something entered into him.
Hadith (14) Muḥammad ibn Yahyā ibn Abī 'Umar (d. 243/857)	When Zayd went to the Prophet ﷺ and said, "O Prophet ﷺ, I want to divorce Zaynab," that attracted him.
*The complete narrative includes all of the full details of the Prophet's ﷺ visit to Zayd's house: that Zaynab was dressed minimally, that the Prophet ﷺ saw her and was taken by her radiant appearance, and uttered the invocation, "Glory be to Allah who causes hearts to turn."	

The pivotal role of Qatādah, Ibn Jurayj, and Muqātil in the development of the lovestruck narrative is obvious from the above graphic, as *not a single narrator*

preceded them in referring to or narrating the account for over a century after the Prophet's صلى الله عليه وسلم passing. It is hardly surprising that of the distinguished earliest compilers and doyens of the *sīrah* and *maghazī* literature who would have preceded the invention and dissemination of this story, such as ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/713), Mūsā ibn ‘Uqbah (d. 141/758), Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741), Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770), and most prominently Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), none were cognizant of it, and all of their extant works fail to mention it. This is also true of early exegetes who preceded the narrative such as Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104/722), and even exegetes who were recognized as lax transmitters who indiscriminately reported unsound exegetical material, such as al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn al-Muzāḥim (d. 105/724).¹⁰⁶ These omissions are particularly stark since these compilers meticulously collected many other details of the Prophet's صلى الله عليه وسلم marital life, including the events surrounding his marriages with other wives.¹⁰⁷

The narrative's evolution can be studied, from an unassuming though critical reflection by Qatādah and Ibn Jurayj that the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم concealed his desire to marry Zaynab (rA), grounded entirely in their understanding of the subsequent verse which they applied to Dāwūd, to Muqātil's open forgery of the full version of the narrative. That he was the first narrator of the complete narrative provides *prima facie* evidence of his work, though his notoriety as a known fabricator of

¹⁰⁶ Mujāhid ibn Jabr, *Tafsīr al-Imām Mujāhid ibn Jabr*, (Dār al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Ḥadīthah, 1989), 555; Al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn al-Muzāḥim, *Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1999), 1:675.

¹⁰⁷ In his promotion of the historicity of the lovestruck narrative, Yasir Qadhi does not address its glaring omission by early authorities such as Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī and Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid, but he does explain away Ibn Ishāq's omission of it by accusing him of not devoting sufficient attention to women and by extension the Prophet's marital life. This is a mischaracterization of Ibn Ishāq by Qadhi, as Ibn Ishāq actually does refer to the Prophet's *marriage* with Zaynab but not the lovestruck narrative. Ibn Ishāq (in multiple recensions in addition to that of Ibn Hishām's) notes that the Prophet married Zaynab, who was previously wed to Zayd, and then refers to *al-Aḥzāb* as the verse in which the story is mentioned. His terse accounting of the marriage is telling because it confirms that early Muslims felt that *al-Aḥzāb* fully explained the circumstances surrounding the marriage without the need for additional details. Additionally, Ibn Ishāq actually does pay scrupulous attention to other marital issues that affected the Prophet, including an *entire section* on the wives of the Prophet, as well as a detailed exposition of the incidents that led to the Prophet's marriages with wives such as Khadija bint Khuwaylid, Juwayriya bint al-Hārith, Ṣafīyyah bint Ḥuyay, and Maymūna bint al-Hārith. He also reproduces details regarding the slander against ‘Ā'isha, as well as specifics regarding his daughters, such as the migration of the Prophet's daughter Zaynab to Medina and Banū ‘Abd al-Shams's attempts to thwart her from doing so. These are just a few of the incidents Ishāq furnishes, and many other incidents can be cited involving prominent women in the Prophet's life. The allegation that Ibn Ishāq eschews acknowledging the Prophet's marriage with Zaynab and women in general lands far from its mark. Qadhi, “Mothers of the Believers pt. 12 Zaynab bint Jaḥsh”; ‘Abd al-Mālik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2009), 661.

hadiths affords identification of his work all the easier. His account provided all subsequent narrators the foundational elements of the lovestruck narrative, which appears to have been in circulation thereafter. All other hadiths relating the tale were influenced by it, even if the complete narrative was not recounted by all of them. Mu'ammal's hadith for instance, does not include all the details, but does mention the Prophet's ﷺ glimpse of Zaynab (rA) and his subsequent emotional angst, an obvious vestige of Muqātil's tale.

Muslim responses regarding the historicity of the lovestruck narrative

Given this historical evolution of the narrative, a brief appraisal of the development of Muslim *responses* to the lovestruck narrative once it was popularized is merited, as it is often brought up in reference to the historicity of the event itself. This topic has featured prominently in works by academics such as Kecia Ali and Ze'ev Maghen.¹⁰⁸ The latter suggests the opposite evolution to that suggested here: he takes the historicity of the event for granted, and then traces the evolution of Muslim historians' responses by arguing that earlier Muslims accepted and indeed celebrated the Prophet's ﷺ carnality—a fact which he uses to explain the prevalence of the casual quoting of the lovestruck narrative by the transmitters of the story. This, however, quickly metamorphosed into the depiction of *al-insān al-kāmil* “the perfect man” as one who was liberated from the temptations of the material world. It is not clear from reading Maghen's work over what time frame he is suggesting this development and subsequent expurgation of the lovestruck narrative took place, but he does furnish examples in Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350), and Isma'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) as leading exegetes who rejected the narrative. This would suggest that by the end of the 8th/14th centuries, the bowdlerization process had already taken place.

¹⁰⁸ Maghen, *Virtues of the Flesh*, 75–110; Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muḥammad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 124–44. This ahistorical development is also explicitly advocated by Yasir Qadhi in his lectures, in which his contention regarding the gradual development of a prudish Muslim response to the lovestruck narrative suffers from the same sampling bias as Maghen's and Ali's. Qadhi, “Mothers of the Believers: Zaynab bint Jaḥsh.”

It should be stated from the onset that even if such an evolution of the Muslim reaction took place, it would only inform Muslim constructions of the Prophet's ^{صلى الله عليه وسلم} human nature and infallibility as well as cultural sensibilities that shape the Muslim tradition—not the historicity of the event itself regarding which it bears no relevance. Second, implicit in studies that argue for the gradual development of a more prudish Muslim response to the lovestruck narrative is the assumption that earlier works that transmitted the narrative were more authentic than later works that refuted or did not reproduce it. However, this line of reasoning is flawed, first because as demonstrated previously, the earliest historical works did *not* include the details of this event (as the event had not been conceived at the time of the composition of those works). It is also faulty because the assumption that later works that had been refined by cumulative historical research were ahistorical is itself an ahistorical presupposition. Historical research by its very nature involves a process of revision, and indeed it was because of “early” hadith fabrications that hadith narrator criticism originated as a discipline.¹⁰⁹ If there were a gradual evolution in which Muslim scholarship came to cull this narrative from their works, it is not necessary that this ensued from the development of prim sentiments anachronistically applied to the Prophet ^{صلى الله عليه وسلم}. It could be contended instead to have resulted from the pervasive recognition of the ahistorical nature of the account.

The question remains as to how Muslim scholarship could ever give credence to the lovestruck narrative. If there were a development in the outlook towards this event, it was specifically within the exegetical genre: it appears that once the narrative gained popularity, it was far more commonly referenced within the early exegetical literature as opposed to the more rigorous hadith compilations.¹¹⁰ Quite a

¹⁰⁹ I am indebted to Dr. Ovamir Anjum for drawing my attention to this point.

¹¹⁰ Andreas Görke divides early Islamic literature into three genres: *sīrah*/maghāzī, *tafsīr*, and *ḥadīth*. He employs this paradigm to the Prophet's marriage with Zaynab as a case in point to study the origins of the Prophet's biography, and how earlier genuine recollections of it can be differentiated from subsequent “tendentious shaping.” Though the broader concerns of Görke's paper lie outside the scope of this piece, his conclusions regarding the lovestruck narrative specifically are similar to mine, and warrant a brief discussion here.

Görke assigns each of the traditions recollecting the lovestruck narrative to the literary genre of which its putative transmitter was an adherent. Sometimes this leads to an obvious designation—*ḥadīths* (1) and (4) transmitted by Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Ṭabarānī, for instance, clearly belong to the *ḥadīth* genre, and *ḥadīth* (8) narrated by Ibn Sulaymān clearly belongs to the *tafsīr* genre. Occasionally, the designation is not as obvious—should al-Wāqidi's narration transmitted by al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Sa'd and al-Ḥākim belong to *sīrah*, *tafsīr*, or *ḥadīth*?

few early exegetes were quite lax in the reports they drew on to interpret the Qur'an, and many were not well-versed in the hadith sciences. In fact hadith experts often differentiated between exegetical prowess and hadith transmission, despite the former's reliance on the latter for interpretation (such as al-Shāfi'ī's aforementioned acknowledgement of Muqātil's skill in exegesis despite the latter's well-known weakness in hadith).¹¹¹ Ibn Ḥanbal is quoted to have claimed disapprovingly that the *tafsīr* genre had no basis (*uṣūl*), ostensibly because of the dubious reports transmitted within the genre during his time.¹¹² As a result, later hadith masters would attempt to source-identify the many popular but weak (and even fabricated) reports included without proper referencing in popular Qur'anic commentaries, such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Zayla'ī's and Ibn Ḥajar's *takhrīj* works on Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī's popular *al-Kashshāf*. As recognition of the critical role hadith played in Qur'anic hermeneutics heightened, later

Nevertheless, inasmuch as the distinct genres that Görke adumbrates may be somewhat overstated in view of the overlapping spheres these genres occupied, it remains as a useful paradigm to assess the provenance of the lovestruck narrative—particularly since such events bear little of the legal or direct theological implications which often lead to the the boundaries of the genres becoming blurred.

Görke's thesis is quite compelling in establishing the *tafsīr* literature as being the *earliest and predominant* genre in disseminating the narrative. In his review of the report of the lovestruck narrative, Görke is able to shed light on certain crucial characteristics of the lovestruck narrative—the lack of an eyewitness and its utter absence in the first one and a half centuries after which it suddenly cropped up amongst transmitters of *tafsīr* literature. He notes its absence in any of the recensions of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrah*, and that none of the early authorities in the *sīrah*/maghāzī literature, such as Abān ibn 'Uthmān, Shuraḥbīl ibn Sa'īd, Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab, Wahb ibn Munabbih, 'Āṣim ibn 'Umar and many others failed to so much as hint at the report. He similarly demonstrates that it remained absent in the early *ḥadīth* works as well. He instead traces the earliest variant of the complete story to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, and from him to a number of other authorities in the fledgling *tafsīr* literature such as Yahyā ibn Sallām, Hūd ibn Muḥakkam al-Hawwārī, and al-Qummī. Görke makes an interesting observation—that unlike many narrations of Prophetic biography where there are multiple variants of the same tradition, the traditions relating the lovestruck narrative exclusively had only one line of transmission; this indicated that these were not widely circulating after the narrative's development in the second hijrī century, except amongst these *tafsīr* authorities—for if they were, there would have been more variants of the same tradition.

What is lacking from Görke's is a systematic account that relates the development of the narrative. Görke does note its parallel with the Bathsheba affair and uses it as a scaffold for the narrative's provenance, but it is not sufficient to merely demonstrate similarities with two narratives, and a holistic and systematic approach to demonstrate the convergence of the two narratives is constructive in linking them. Because Görke does not concern himself with the *opinions* of early Muslim scholarship—as opposed to transmissions directly relating the lovestruck narrative—he overlooks Qatādah and Ibn Jurayj's role in the origins of this narrative. Görke correctly identifies Ibn Sulaymān's exegetical material on *al-Aḥzāb* as the first complete report of the lovestruck narrative chronologically. But it was actually Qatādah and Ibn Jurayj's exegesis which provided the narrative substrate for Ibn Sulaymān's final variant; Görke, *Between History and Exegesis: the Origins and Transformation of the Story of Muḥammad and Zaynab bt Ḡaḥṣ*, *Arabica*, 65(1-2), 31-63.

¹¹¹ There are a number of such examples that can be furnished. Yahyā ibn Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān, for instance, noted that one could take and write exegetical reports from individuals such as the aforementioned al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn al-Muzāḥim as well as al-Layth ibn Abī Sulaym, who were not the most reliable hadith transmitters but were known for exegesis. Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, 1:36–37.

¹¹² Ibn 'Adī, *al-Kāmil fī al-du'afā'*, 1:298.

commentators gradually became more comfortable and familiar with technicalities of hadith criticism; by the medieval period, the most popular exegeses were penned by some of the greatest hadith masters in Islamic intellectual history. It is not surprising that the exegetes who *were* rigorously trained in hadith criticism often rejected the narrative, such as Ibn al-‘Arabī, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Kathīr, and others. Thus, if there was a gradual rejection or expunging of the lovestruck narrative from exegetical works, claims that this was because of an evolution in the understanding of the Prophet’s ﷺ infallibility fail to account for the concomitant growth of hadith expertise in the genre as a confounding variable.

Lack of familiarity with the hadith discipline still does not explain how early Qur’an commentators could accept the lovestruck narrative on theological grounds. However, it should be recalled that exegetes often brought forth every possible report available—often antithetical—for hermeneutical objectives. If a number of exegetes referred to the lovestruck narrative nonchalantly, it was simply because they were attempting to be encyclopedic in scope, and simply were in possession of a report available to explain *al-Aḥzāb*. In reality, they often presented ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s alternate to the lovestruck narrative, if they were in possession of the report, concomitantly with reports of the lovestruck narrative.¹¹³ In an era where Islamic thought reigned supreme, there was no need to defend the Prophet’s ﷺ honor or engage in academic discussions regarding the weaknesses of the narrative to ascertain the factual account. Even the rigorous hadith experts felt no need to engage in the meticulous hadith appraisals they were famed for. *Isnād* criticism provided only probabilistic certainty in most cases, whereas the argument based on the Prophet’s ﷺ incorrigibility was based on definitive certitude. With this epistemological worldview it was more sensible to dismiss the reports summarily based on their violation of the latter precept. This explains why even hadith masters such as Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr cast aspersions on the narrative with merely the laconic response that such conduct would be unbecoming for the station of a prophet. Additionally, as this event dealt with the pre-Islamic and abrogated norm of adoption, the event held no obvious legal, social, or linguistic import—matters that exegetes were far more concerned about. Some gifted jurists such as al-Shāfi‘ī were still able to extract various legal rulings related to marriage

¹¹³ This is true of al-Ṭabarī, for instance, who provided both alternative reports to the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab and did not clarify his own preferred version, unlike other topics where he does.

and matters of emancipation from the pertinent verses in *al-Aḥzāb*, but to the exclusion of any commentary regarding the actual event chronicled within.¹¹⁴ So even though many exegetes would have recognized the shortcomings of the narrative, they failed to provide any commentary on it, to all appearances tacitly endorsing it.¹¹⁵ It is this lack of necessity and the relative lack of significance given to this specific event in the Prophet's ﷺ life that led to the seemingly blasé transmission of the narrative—as opposed to a gradual evolution and recognition of the Prophet ﷺ as *al-insān al-kāmil*.

Despite these caveats, the fact remains that no evolution is obvious in the historical record prior to the modern era in the wider Islamic intellectual tradition. Even if we ignore the fact that the earliest *sīrah* compilers fail to mention the lovestruck narrative, this account still remains glaringly absent in a large number of Muslim historical works even immediately after it was entered into circulation by Muqātil. In actuality, it was never even hinted at by a large number of Muslim historians, many of whom were cognizant of it.¹¹⁶ Examples of works that omit it include almost all of the early prominent historical works detailing the life of the Prophet ﷺ by illustrious authorities such as Khalīfah ibn Khayyāt (d. 239/854), al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870), Abū Bakr ibn Abī Khaythamah (d. 279/892), Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897), Ibn Hibbān al-Bustī (d. 354/965), and Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996).¹¹⁷ Additionally, even some early exegetes, such as Abu Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), rejected the lovestruck narrative based on a critical reading.¹¹⁸ While a small number of later *sīrah* and *tafsīr* authors did include and unabashedly accept the lovestruck narrative, these few references were transhistorical, present even after the narrative's purported expurgation by Muslim historians and exegetes such as al-Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr in the 8th/14th century.

¹¹⁴ Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *Tafsīr al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī*, (Riyadh: Dār al-Tadmuriyyah, 2006), 1199.

¹¹⁵ This is not to say that no commentator gave credence to the lovestruck narrative. Some, as will be mentioned below, did endorse it categorically without mentioning the alternative narrative.

¹¹⁶ For instance, Ibn Hibbān provides an example of the lovestruck narrative as a transmission of the unknown narrator Abū Bakr ibn Sulaymān ibn Abī Ḥathmah, but he does not relate the account in his own *sīrah* work. See Footnote 56 for further details. Ibn Hibbān, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah wa akhbār al-khulafā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqafiya, 1987).

¹¹⁷ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh Khalīfah ibn Khayyāt* (Riyadh: Dār Taybah, 1985); al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, ed. Akram Diyā' al-'Umarī, *al-Muntakhab min kitāb azwāj al-nabī*, (Medina: Maṭba'ah al-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah, 1981); Ibn Abī Bakr al-Khaythamah, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, (Cairo: al-Farūq al-Hadīthah li al-Tabā'ah wa al-Nashr, 2006); Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī* (Beirut: Sharkah al-'Alamī li al-Matbu'āt, 2010); al-Qayrawānī, *al-Jāmi' fī-l-sunan wa-l-ādāb wa-l-maghāzī* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990).

¹¹⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlat Ahl al-Sunnah*, 8:393.

For instance, it is presented as historical fact in the works of Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 691/1319), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1460), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), Nūr al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī (d. 975/1568), Abū al-Su‘ūd Efendi (d. 981/1574), and Martin Lings (d. 1425/2005).¹¹⁹

Given the difficulties in identifying the stance of all or even the preponderance of Muslim historians, exegetes, and theologians as well as their relative impact on Muslim thought, it is difficult to make any broad conclusions about the dominant Muslim scholarly outlook regarding the lovestruck narrative in any given era without substantial further research. Nevertheless, it can be said with confidence that Muslim intellectuals supporting and opposing the historicity of the lovestruck narrative were present throughout all periods spanning Islamic history, and this explains Ibn al-Qayyim’s cutting reference to “ignoramus”—ostensibly contemporary—who failed to revere the Prophet as his station warranted.¹²⁰ Moreover, although isolated examples such as Ibn al-Qayyim’s can be found during the medieval and pre-modern periods, there is no discernible evidence for the widespread defense of the Prophet’s ﷺ chastity and virtue specifically with regards to the lovestruck narrative until recent years. The frequency of refutations and apologetics has only increased drastically in recent times given the blistering opprobrium of multiple Western critics directed towards the Prophet ﷺ for this marriage. It is almost exclusively these contemporary defenses of the Prophet ﷺ that are advanced by Maghen and others to support the thesis of a homogenous Muslim front rising in defense of the Prophet’s ﷺ virtue. As such, they suffer from sampling bias in their limited and non-representative sampling of the entirety of the *sīrah* corpus of which modern works are hardly an adequate representation. And the erroneous conclusions that ensue are entirely predictable as a result of this bias.

¹¹⁹ Notably, the preponderance of these authors are once again exegetes, but apart from al-Suyūṭī, they are not masters in the hadith disciplines. Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta’wīl* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth, 1997), 4:232; al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Riyadh: Madar al-Waṭni li al-Nashr, 2015), 423; al-Ḥalabī, *Insān al-‘uyun fī sīrat al-Amīn al-Ma’mūn*, 3:427; *Tafsīr Abī al-Su‘ūd*, (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2010), 7:105; Lings, *Muhammad*, 212–13.

¹²⁰ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zād al-ma‘ād fī ḥadī khayr al-‘ibād*, 4:244–46.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that this event has been so prolifically and irresponsibly narrated, particularly when the Prophet's ﷺ marriage with Zaynab (rA) had its roots in specific sociological, legal, and theological concerns which were then successfully implemented. It is even more regrettable given that those aims are unambiguously laid out in the Qur'an. Those aims, including the theological confirmation of the culmination of prophethood without a hereditary mode of succession that could have been mistakenly borne from the hereditary succession of the prophets of old, as well as the abrogation of the unjust practices of pre-Islamic adoption that are detailed above, remain central to this marriage. With this context, it is the admission of other grounds for the marriage, such as the love and infatuation that feature in the lovestruck narrative, that lead to contrived and incongruous inferences that cannot be reconciled with the Qur'anic objectives.

In the context of this incompatibility with the Qur'an's stated objectives, the fictitious elements of the narrative are particularly glaring. The limitations of simplistic explanations that hinge on the axiom that prevalent tales must be authentic are particularly stark. Prevalence is historically relative, as this particular tale was entirely absent from the annals of history in the first century after the Prophet ﷺ. Its presence in "early" *tafsīr* works such as al-Ṭabarī's is inconsequential since these early written works were composed three centuries after the Prophet ﷺ and the narrations chronicling the lovestruck narrative had already been disseminated by then. It is only by taking a more detailed historiographic approach by collecting all available chains of transmission and examining the subtle variants in each report that the narrative's evolution is highlighted: from the Prophet ﷺ fearing censure for his marriage to Zaynab (rA) and doing so only after the Qur'anic imperative categorically performing the marriage, to his desiring the marriage, to his complete infatuation with Zaynab (rA) and joyous welcoming of the Qur'anic endorsement of the marriage—and all because of a single glimpse of Zaynab (rA), that so happened to be precisely

analogous to Dāwūd's glimpse of Bathsheba in the Bible. The account, already circulating amongst credulous raconteurs, was penned and permanently imprinted in the *tafsīr* literature by a handful of less selective Qur'an commentators.

A tale of romance, preserved for eternity and masquerading as reality, was born.