

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

176293 - Was al-Hasan ibn 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) a man who married and divorced a lot?

the question

I read in an article on the web that al-Hasan ibn 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) married more than ninety women. What is your opinion on that?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

More than one of the scholars stated that al-Hasan ibn 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) used to marry and divorce a lot. Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

They said: He used to marry frequently; he never had less than four wives; he used to divorce a lot and marry a lot. It was said that he married seventy women.

End quote from al-Bidaayah wa'n-Nihaayah (8/42).

Something similar was mentioned by adh-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) in Siyar A'laam an-Nubala' (3/253). See also: Tareekh Dimashq by Ibn 'Asaakir (13/251); Tareekh al-Islam by adh-Dhahabi (4/37); Muhaadaraat al-Udaba' by ar-Raaghib al-Asbahaani (1/408).

But we must understand that many historical reports are not sound, therefore we must be cautious regarding them, especially if they have to do with one of the prominent, leading figures of Islam.

Al-Haafiz al-'Iraaqi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Alfiyat as-Seerah (p. 1):

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The student should understand that we may find in books of biography reports that are sound and reports that are odd.

Shaykh 'Abd ar-Rahmaan al-Mu'allimi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

No doubt the need to know the status of narrators of reports is greater in the field of history than in the field of hadith, because lying and leniency occur more frequently in historical reports. End quote.

'Ilm ar-Rijaal wa Ahammiyyatuhu (p. 24)

With regard to the reports about al-Hasan ibn 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) marrying more than seventy women, or ninety, and the like, we found no isnad (chain of narrators) that is strong enough to confirm the validity of such reports. Therefore we should refrain from accepting them and should not rush to accept them and rely on them.

Dr. 'Ali Muhammad as-Sallaabi said in his book about al-Hasan ibn 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) (p. 27) [this book is available in English translation]:

The historians say that his wives included: Khawlah al-Fizaariyyah, Ja'dah bint al-Ash'ath, 'Aa'ishah al-Khath'amiyyah, Umm Ishaq bint Talhah ibn 'Ubaydillah at-Tameemi, Umm Basheer bint Abi Mas'ood al-Ansaari, Hind bint 'Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn Abi Bakr, Umm 'Abdillah the daughter of ash-Shaleel ibn 'Abdillah the brother of Jareer al-Bajali, a woman from the tribe of Banu Thaqeef, a woman from the tribe of Banu 'Amr ibn Ahyam al-Manqari, and a woman from the tribe of Banu Shaybaan from the family of Humaam ibn Murrah. And there may have been a few more. As you can see, this was not a large number according to what was the norm at that time. With regard to the reports which say that he married seventy women or, according to other reports, ninety or two hundred and fifty or three hundred and so on, these are weird reports to a great extent and the claims that he married this great number of women are fabricated. These reports are as follows ...

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Then the author began to list these reports and highlight how weak and flimsy they are. (See: op. cit., p. 28-31)

Then he (may Allah preserve him) said (p. 31):

The historical reports that give exaggerated numbers for the marriages of al-Hasan ibn 'Ali (ra) cannot be proven in terms of their isnads. Hence they are not fit to be relied upon because of doubts concerning their isnads and their weakness.

...

Thus the importance of critical examination of narrators (al-jarh wa'l-ta'deel) and assessment of reports becomes clear, and we see the great role played by the scholars of hadeeth in highlighting the falseness of such reports.

Hence we advise researchers studying the history of early Islam to pay attention to examining these reports so that they can distinguish the sound reports from those which are flawed. Thus they will do a great service to the ummah and will not fall into the same error as some authors, whose intention we do not doubt, did because of relying in their research on weak and fabricated reports. End quote.

Perhaps al-Haafiz Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) was indicating that the reports which were narrated concerning this matter are not sound, when he said: "It was said that he married seventy women." The fact that he introduced it by saying "it is said" suggests that the report is not proven to be sound; at the very least this word may indicate that he could not find a reliable isnad for this report.

And Allah knows best.