

**ON THE REVELATION CIRCUMSTANCES AND GENERAL
EMPHASES OF SŪRAT AL-AḤZĀB:
AN ANALYSIS WITHIN THE SCOPE OF TEXTUAL
AND NON-TEXTUAL CONTEXT**

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Abstract

Sūrat al-Aḥzāb is generally considered to be of Medinah origin. No information is available regarding the date that the origin was revealed during the Prophet's ten years in Medinah. Based on previous biographical references and narrative-based classic exegeses, this study conducts a general assessment of the time of revelation of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb and attempts to date the verses and verse groups by establishing a connection between the verses in the *sūrabs* and the *riwāyabs* in these verses and a method of inference (discourse analysis). Given the historical data, it is presumably said that the chapter al-Aḥzāb was revealed, not at once but in different groups, in AH 5 within a few months, and all verses of the *surab* pertain to the incidents of this period. The occasions of revelation of al-Aḥzāb involved plans by external polytheist groups and inside collaborators. This study concludes that, especially the *ḥijāb* verse and verses that are aimed at his wives, which tell them not to go out and make an appearance as in the Days of Ignorance and to wear garments that will make them recognizable when going out, seek to prevent and obviate the smear campaign against the Prophet Muḥammad, particularly with regard to his marriage with Zaynab and generally about his family and wives.

Key Words: Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, dating the Qur'ānic revelation, Makkī and Madanī, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, Zayd ibn Thābit, Battle of the Trench.

Introduction

The revelation of the Qurʾān lasted for approximately twenty-three years, including the first thirteen years in Meccah and the remaining ten years in Medinah. The chapters (*sūras*) that were revealed during these periods are investigated under the titles Makkī and Madanī in *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* literature. The chapters and verses that were revealed during the Meccan period primarily mention the problems of faith and morality in the context of contrast between monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and paganism (*shirk*). Regarding the Medinan period, the chapters and verses primarily address the tense relations and actual battles between Muslims and polytheists and Ahl al-kitāb and questions about social order and law.

Because verses were revealed in direct connection with historical and social events that involve Muḥammad, polytheists, believers, Jews, and Christians over a twenty-three-year period, the Qurʾān does not have common integrity in terms of text and composition. We suggest that Qurʾān verses have as much systematic integrity as the life experience of a person or a society. The Qurʾān has a thematic integrity that focuses on the cause of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). This integrity, however, is valid for the Meccan period. In Madanī chapters and verses, monotheism (*tawḥīd*) remains intact as a theme. However, the majority of the verses in Madanī chapters generally address legal issues and polemics with Jews and Christians because Muslims had a social structure that enabled them to comment on their living order and multidimensional practical problems emerged due to their new life and coexistence with Jewish neighbors. Consequently, Madanī chapters and verses became more complex in thematic and systematic terms.

According to the renowned narrative by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) from Zayd ibn Thābit in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Qurʾān verses were collected between two covers and transformed into a collection of sheets (*muṣḥaf*) during the caliphate of Abū Bakr, upon suggestion and encouragement by ʿUmar.¹ The content and nature of the collection process is uncertain; with the exception of the theses defended by orientalist such as John Wansbrough (d. 2002),² the activity probably

¹ Al-Bukhārī, “Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān,” 3.

² See John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Foreword, translations, and expanded notes by Andrew Rippin (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 1-52.

comprises the assembly of Qurʾān verses, which were in a scattered condition and written on objects such as stones, bones, leather, and parchment.

Based on the narrative that Muḥammad arranged verses within chapters at the behest of Gabriel,³ Islamic sources accept that the organization of verses was based on religious communication (i.e. it is *tawqīfī*). In addition, the narrative on the mutual lecture about verses and chapters by the Prophet and Gabriel that is revealed every year in Ramaḍān is proposed as evidence of this acceptance. The composition of shorter sūrahs, which were primarily revealed in Meccah, is probably *tawqīfī*, considering the integrity of theme, and interval letters (*fāṣilah*) and rhymes (*sajʿ*). The Qurʾān is recited during common prayers, such as *ṣalāh*, since the beginning of its existence. Therefore, many chapters and verses should be recited in a certain order. Accordingly, the process of organizing verses and/or verse groups in longer sūrahs that were revealed in a longer time span, such as al-Baqarah, Āl ʿImrān, and al-Nisāʾ, may have been realized by the will of the copying commission. Many verses in longer chapters, such as al-Baqarah, Āl ʿImrān, al-Nisāʾ, and al-Māʾidah, such as verses 238-239 in al-Baqarah, lack contextual meaning, which supports this probability. Other disputes during the collection and copying of the Qurʾān, such as the determination of the precise place or singular *sūrah* status of certain verses, such as verses 128-129 in Sūrat al-Tawbah (chapter 9)⁴ can be evaluated within the scope of the same possibility.

In this respect, Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) provides a narrative/report⁵ in his *al-Musnad*. During the dictation of the Qurʾān verses, the Prophet also indicated their place in the composition. However, we have to consider this argument with a grain of salt in terms of certitude; we have to accept that this information only discusses verses. According to books by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875), various narrated verses that were quoted by

³ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, I, 57.

⁴ See Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), I, 43; Abū Bakr ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sulaymān ibn al-Ashʿath Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, ed. Arthur Jeffery (Leiden: Brill, 1937), 30-31; Mustafa Öztürk, “Nuzūl of the Qurʾān and the Question of Nuzūl Order,” *Ilabiyat Studies: A Journal on Islamic and Religious Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015): 197, <https://doi.org/10.12730/13091719.2015.62.131>

⁵ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, IV, 218.

Companions (*ṣaḥābah*), such as ʿUmar and ʿĀʾishah, have a content that may serve as evidence that their composition is not *tawqīfī*. The narrative by ʿUmar on the final two verses of Sūrat al-Tawbah and the narrative by Zayd ibn Thābit on the 23rd verse of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb⁶ on their respective places in the Qurʾān are worth noting.

In the case that these narratives are considered authentic in terms of proof (certitude), the length of these studies are probably approximately several passages or verse groups, especially in the longer chapters. The notion that each verse in greater chapters such as Āl ʿImrān, al-Nisāʾ, al-Māʾidah, al-Tawbah, which are revealed in various periods during the decade in Medinah, are precisely assigned to certain places in the sūrahs prior to the complete formation of these chapters, upon an order such as “Place this verse before or after that verse in the chapter” is improbable and unconvincing. A person can oppose the argument on the practical organization of verse groups in longer chapters by claiming that Muḥammad said that the Qurʾān in *ṣalāb* and unorganized verses cannot be expressed in this practice. Note that all chapters were not revealed at once; therefore, they were not said by Muḥammad and his Companions as a whole in the beginning of the Qurʾān. The claim that Muḥammad, who recommends keeping the recitation as short as possible, especially in a communal *ṣalāb*, thoroughly read chapters of tens of pages, such as al-Baqarah, Āl ʿImrān, al-Nisāʾ, and al-Māʾidah, is unfounded.⁷

Regarding the order of chapters, according to general acceptance among most scholars,⁸ the organization of muṣḥaf, which begins with Sūrat al-Fātiḥah and ends with al-Nās, is established based on the practical opinion of the Companions. In this composition, al-Fātiḥah is placed first as a preface, whereas the following 113 chapters are often aligned by length from longer to shorter or larger to smaller. However, some scholars are convinced that the organization of sūrahs is not *ijtihādī* but is *tawqīfī*. Narratives on classification of sūrahs by the Prophet as “*al-sabʿ al-ṭiwāl* (seven long sūrahs),” “*miʿūn* (sūrahs with approximately one hundred verses),” “*mathānī*

⁶ Al-Bukhārī, “Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān,” 3, 6.

⁷ See Öztürk, “*Nuzūl* of the Qurʾān and the Question of *Nuzūl* Order,” 200-201.

⁸ Abū l-Faḍl Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2006), I, 194.

(with less than a hundred verses)”⁹ seem to support the argument that it is *tawqīfī*. However, these narratives should be cautiously treated. In the case if the organization of the chapters that depend on the notification and determination by Muḥammad, when asked about placing the Sūrat al-Anfāl in the eighth position, even though it is shorter and smaller than al-Tawbah, and the lack of *basmalah* in the beginning of the latter, ‘Uthmān would not have given the following answer, as noted by al-Bāqillānī (d. 403 /1013): “Since the chapters al-Anfāl and al-Tawbah are similar in terms of content, I considered al-Tawbah as a continuation of al-Anfāl; Rasūl Allāh passed away before making us any explanations about these chapters. Therefore, I placed the two consecutively in the muṣḥaf but did not separate them with *basmalah*.”¹⁰

The question of presentation (*‘arḍāb*) is addressed. Every year during Ramaḍān, Muḥammad and Gabriel read to each other the verses and sūrahs that are revealed during the year; this presentation must have occurred in a certain order. The presentation presents many ambiguities. First, the following information remains unclear: when the presentation began, how many times the presentation occurred during the revelation, the positions of the Prophet and Gabriel during this presentation, how Gabriel participated in the presentation, whether the Companions heard the Qur’ān read during this ritual or saw Gabriel and the Companions that attended the final presentation.¹¹ Therefore, accurate deductions about the order of verses and chapters based on *‘arḍāb*, which is already obscure with regard to its true content, are not possible.

The order of the verses in muṣḥaf is neither thematic nor systematic, and the verses are not in chronological order. The first generation of Muslims personally witnessed the historical and social basis surrounding the revelation of Qur’ān verses. Some verses were

⁹ Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām al-Harawī, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān wa-ma‘ālimubā wa-ādābubā*, ed. Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Wāhid al-Khayyāfī (al-Muḥammadiyyah: al-Mamlakah al-Maghribiyyah Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu’ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1995), II, 29.

¹⁰ Al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib ibn Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār li-l-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Isām al-Quḍāh (Amman: Dār al-Fatḥ & Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2001), I, 281-282. Also see Öztürk, “Nuzūl of the Qur’ān and the Question of Nuzūl Order,” 201.

¹¹ For further information and assessments about *‘arḍāb*, see Ziya Şen, *Kur’an’ın Metinleşme Süreci* (Istanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2007), 113-123.

directly addressed or treated in several verses; consequently, they never perceived the Qurʾān as a text that was independent from their life experience or the guidance of Muḥammad. This is why they did not feel the need to organize the Qurʾān in any manner. Because the Qurʾān directly addresses its era and environment and the problems that emerged under these circumstances, they never needed to record the dates of the revelation of verses. Consequently, even the verses about the battles that occurred during the time of revelation, such as Badr, Uḥud and the Battle of the Trench do not comprise a sufficient amount of historical information to clarify how these battles occurred. As a result, contemporary Muslims, whose generation is fifteen centuries from the time of revelation, experience significant difficulty in determining the initial, original, and historical meaning of Qurʾān verses.

Understanding the chronology of the revelation is vital to appropriately understanding the message of the Qurʾān during the formation of the first Muslim community and how Muḥammad and his Companions perceived and practiced this message. Historical references, prophetic biographies, exegeses or ḥadīth sources do not provide satisfactory information to constitute this chronology. Regarding the perception of the Qurʾān by Muḥammad and his Companions, the following remarks by Montgomery Watt (d. 2006) illuminate other reasons for the lack of information on this issue:

To those who were Muslims when the revelation came, the application must have been obvious. Those who only became Muslims much later, however, required to know a little about the historical circumstances. Gradually the more intelligent would have in their minds a rough historical framework into which to fit events and incidents, though, where the Arab episodic conception of history dominated, this framework would be of the simplest. While the commentators preserve some information about the ‘occasion’ on which particular passages were revealed, much less information of this kind has been preserved than one would have hoped for; and there are contradictions in what has been preserved. It is also possible that some of the ‘occasion’ are no more than the conjectures of later Muslim scholars.¹²

¹² W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1969), 71.

According to Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1176/1762), the majority of narratives, which are quoted as revelation motives in exegesis books, does not constitute a valid basis for the revelation; instead, they are “narratives of interpretation” to establish a relationship between the incidents after the revelation of verses and the associated Qurʾān verses or to interpret these events based on the verses.¹³

Despite these problems, this study makes general assessments of the period in which Sūrat al-Aḥzāb was revealed in consideration of the information and opinions in prophetic biographical books and classic exegeses that are based on narratives. We attempt to establish a connection between the verses in the *sūrah* and relevant narratives and between current verses and verse groups via a discourse analysis.

In Islamic exegesis (*tafsīr*) tradition, individual verses are sometimes known by proper names, such as *ḥijāb*, *jilbāb* or *āmanāb*. Although they can be treated under separate titles, this method is not a solid method for separately examining verses with regard to dating. A careful lecture of Qurʾān sūrahs demonstrates that the verses often assume the form of different groups with the integrity of passages. In conventional Islamic sciences, however, the indication of a single reason may be sufficient in regard to proving via the Qurʾān or deriving verdicts from the Qurʾān. Therefore, the question of integrity is reduced to the connection of a verse with the previous or following one. Pursuant to literal *iʿjāz*, each verse and sūrah is believed to have a strong connection under a romantic approach. Accordingly, some compelling and fictional relationships are generated within the scope of a subdiscipline, which is referred to *al-tanāsub bayna l-āyāt wa-l-suwar* or *tanāsub al-āy wa-l-suwar* in *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* terminology.¹⁴ In this regard, the views of ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262) and al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834) are very important. Al-Shawkānī extensively analyzes the relationship between verses and highlights Sūrat al-Baqarah, in which verses 39-40 tell the story of Adam and Heaven; from this point, the passage begins to provide the account of Moses and Israelites. For al-

¹³ Abū ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Quṭb al-Dīn Shāh Walī Allāh Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Dihlawī, *al-Fawz al-kabīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*, trans. Saʿīd Aḥmad al-Bālanfūrī (Damascus: Dār al-Ghawthānī li-l-Dirāsāt al-Qurʾāniyyah, 2008), 69-70.

¹⁴ For more extensive assessment about the subject, see Ömer Özsoy, *Kurʾan ve Tarihsellik Yazıları* (Ankara: Kitâbiyât, 2004), 46-47.

Shawkānī, any reasonable person can discern that a book, which is gradually revealed for twenty-three years in relation to countless events, will evidently comprise contradicting and disconnected verses. In some cases, a forbidden thing can become permissible, or vice versa; some verses are about believers, whereas some verses are about heathens. Certain verses focus on past communities, whereas some verses focus on then-present people and groups. In addition, some verses are about worshipping, practices, frightening, and wrath or award. According to al-Shawkānī, both the long chapters and the medium-sized chapters are revealed after various separate incidents.

According to al-Shawkānī, the quest for a relationship between verses and chapters is based on the assumption that the revelation of the Qurʾān is reflected in the composition of muṣḥaf. Anyone who is slightly informed about the Qurʾān knows that this finding is not valid. Al-ʿAlaq, al-Muddaththir, and al-Muzzammil were the first revealed chapters; they are located in the latter parts of the book. Therefore, the quest for a relationship between verses and chapters is not based on the revelation order of the Qurʾān; it is based on the order established by the Companions during the activities of collection and dictation. Consequently, preoccupation with the problem of *tanāṣub al-āy wa-l-suwar* is futile. Allah characterized the Qurʾān in Arabic and sent His speech (*kalām*) consistent with linguistic traditions of Arabs. For instance, an Arabian speaker addresses various subjects during a speech. The mode of expression and style in the Qurʾān is similar.¹⁵

Place of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb in Revelation Order

In the current muṣḥaf, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb consists of 73 verses. However, some narratives in various sources indicated that the chapter consisted of numerous verses at the time of revelation. For example, according to a narrative by Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb relates that this chapter was as voluminous as al-Baqarah and included the verse known as *rajm*. Afterwards, 73 verses, including *rajm*, were abolished. According to another narrative by ʿUrwah ibn Zubayr, ʿĀʾishah suggested that Sūrat al-Aḥzāb consisted of approximately 200 verses; however, ʿUthmān could identify only 73

¹⁵ Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shawkānī, *Fath al-qadīr: al-Jāmiʿ bayna fannay al-riwāyah wa-l-dirāyah min ʿilm al-tafsīr* (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, n.d.), I, 72-73.

verses during the copying process of the Qurʾān text.¹⁶

al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) evaluates the problem as a type of abrogation,¹⁷ whereas the modern exegete al-Ṭāhir ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1973) considers the narrative by ʿĀʾishah weak in terms of evidence and insists that the narrative would be open to reversion in the following form if it were authentic: “ʿĀʾishah told extinct verses in Qurʾān were present in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb.” Based on the assumption of authenticity of the narrative by Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, Ibn ʿĀshūr provides a brief assessment: Ubayy attached many verses from other similar chapters in terms of theme and addressees, such as al-Nisāʾ, to Sūrat al-Aḥzāb. Then, the Companions did not follow the same path or method in regard to the organization of Qurʾān verses, naming and classification of chapters, and memorization (*ḍabṭ*) of wordings in *mansūkh* verses.¹⁸

The Sūrah is named after the word *aḥzāb* in verses no. 20 and 22. It is the plural of *ḥizb*, which lexically means “part, section, division or group of people.” In Arabic, the expression *ḥizb al-raḥul* signifies the friends of the same mind or advocates of a person.¹⁹ The word *aḥzāb* is also used in the following chapters: Hūd 11:17, al-Raʿd 13:36, Maryam 19:37, Ṣād 38:11, 13, al-Muʾmin 40:5, 30 and al-Zukhruf 43:65. In the verse 30 of al-Muʾmin, *aḥzāb* signifies “Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd people, as well as those destroyed afterwards.” The word *aḥzāb* in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb signifies groups such as the Quraysh tribe, Banū Ghaṭafān, Fazārah, Banū Asad, and Banū Sulaym, who gathered against Muḥammad and Muslims and in the siege of Medinah, which caused the Battle of the Trench.²⁰

¹⁶ See Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, V, 132; al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, 146-147; Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Ḥafnāwī and Maḥmūd Ḥāmid ʿUthmān (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2002), VII, 427; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, II, 718.

¹⁷ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, VII, 427.

¹⁸ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad Ibn ʿĀshūr al-Tūnisī, *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr* (Tunis: Dār Saḥnūn li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1997), XXI, 246.

¹⁹ Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Azharī, *Tabdhīb al-lughab*, ed. Riyāḍ Zakī Qāsim (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 2001), I, 800; Abū I-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2003), II, 420.

²⁰ See Abū Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and ʿAbd al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Shalābī, 5th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 2004), III, 170-171; Muhammed Hamīdullah [Muḥammad Ḥāmid Allāh], *Islām Peygamberi*, trans. Salih Tuğ, 5th ed. (Istanbul:

Sūrat al-Aḥzāb is unanimously considered to be revealed in Medinah.²¹ In exegesis sources, however, no information about when it was revealed during the ten years of revelation in Medinah. Specific information about revelation dating in Islamic tradition is provided via various revelation orders, which are attributed to scholars such as Ibn ‘Abbās, Jābir ibn Zayd, and Ja‘far al-Şādiq. According to the revelation order list quoted by al-Ya‘qūbī (d. after 292/905), the Sūrat al-Aḥzāb was revealed after al-Ḥaṣhr and prior to al-Nūr.²² In another list quoted by Ibn al-Ḍurays (d. 294/906) from Ibn ‘Abbas, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, in the 89th position, was revealed immediately after Āl ‘Imrān and before al-Mumtaḥinah.²³ Al-Aḥzāb is the 89th chapter in the order of revelation according to Jābir ibn Zayd; it was revealed after al-Anfāl and before al-Mā‘idah.²⁴ According to a list quoted by al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/167), al-Aḥzāb is the 84th chapter, following al-Mā‘idah and preceding al-Mumtaḥinah. Al-Shahrastānī quotes another list via Ibn Wāqid and al-Imām Ja‘far al-Şādiq; in this list, al-Aḥzāb is in no. 89, after Āl ‘Imrān and before al-Mumtaḥinah.²⁵

Maulana Muhammad Ali (d. 1951) places al-Aḥzāb among the chapters that are revealed between 5 and 8 AH. For him, al-Aḥzāb was revealed after al-Nūr and before al-Faḥ.²⁶ The revelation

İrfan Yayımçılık, 1993), I, 241-242; id., “Hendeck Gazvesi,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslām Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XVII, 194.

²¹ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥsīr al-kabīr: Maḥātib al-ghayb*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), XXV, 164; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, VII, 427; Ibn ‘Ashūr, *Taḥsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, XXI, 245.

²² Abū l-‘Abbās ibn Wāqid al-Ḥamad ibn Ishāq al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya‘qūbī*, ed. ‘Abd al-Amīr Muḥannā (Beirut: Sharikat al-‘Alamī li-l-Maṭbū‘āt, 2010), I, 362.

²³ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ayyūb ibn al-Ḍurays, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān wa-mā unzila min al-Qur’ān bi-Makkah wa-mā unzila bi-l-Madīnah*, ed. ‘Urwah Badīr (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1987), 34.

²⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, I, 82.

²⁵ Abū l-Faḥ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Taḥsīr al-Shahrastānī al-musammā Maḥātib al-asrār wa-maṣābiḥ al-abrār*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī Ādharshab (Tehran: Markaz al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt li-l-Turāth al-Makḥūṭ, 2008), I, 19-23.

²⁶ Maulana Muhammad Ali, *Introduction to the Study of The Holy Qur’ān* (Lahore: The Aḥmadiyya Anjuman Isha‘at-e-Islam, n.d.), 5; Muhammad Ali, introduction to *The Holy Qur’ān with English Translation and Commentary* (Ohio: The Aḥmadiyya Anjuman Isha‘at-e-Islam, 2002), 27.

occurred in 7 AH.²⁷ Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī (d. 2010) claims that al-Aḥzāb is revealed in 4 AH, in the 95th position, before al-Mumtaḥinah and after Āl ʿImrān.²⁸ ʿIzzat Darwazah (d. 1984) locates it in the 97th position. For him, al-Aḥzāb was revealed after al-Jumʿah and before al-Nisāʾ.²⁹

These revelation orders and dating attempts indicate that Sūrat al-Aḥzāb was revealed at once and as a whole. However, even a superficial and complete reading of the chapter shows that the chapter was probably revealed not as a whole but in passages. Determining the precise chronology of al-Aḥzāb is improbable within revelation order. None of the previously mentioned orders of revelation include specific information about the revelation time of various passages in the chapter; they probably extend the determinations about the revelation of initial passages to all verses. In addition to these problems, the references in various verse groups to several incidents, such as the Battle of the Trench, the Banū Qurayzah Battle, and the marriage of Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, provide a general opinion about the period in which the chapter was revealed. Considering these events, the chapter may have been revealed in 5 AH in the form of passages. This determination remains uncertain.

²⁷ Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qurʾān*, 823.

²⁸ See Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, *Fahm al-Qurʾān al-ḥakīm: al-Tafsīr al-wāḍiḥ ḥasab tartīb al-nuzūl* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-ʿArabiyyah, 2009), III, 183.

²⁹ Muḥammad ʿIzzat Darwazah, *al-Tafsīr al-ḥadīth*, 3rd ed. (Tunis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2008), VII, 345. Orientalists, who accept Qurʾān as a kind of autobiography of Muḥammad and accordingly deal with dating Qurʾān verses in order to analyze his psychology, also accept that al-Aḥzāb was revealed in Medinah. See Gustav Weil, *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in den Koran* (Bielefeld: Velhagen & Klasing, 1844), 68-80; Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qurʾāns: die sammlung des Qurʾāns*, ed. Friedrich Schwally, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909), 164-234; John Medows Rodwell, *The Koran* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2004), 338-485. Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930) and Regis Blachère (d. 1973) place Sūrat al-Aḥzāb to 103rd position (after al-Ḥaṣr and before al-Munāfiqūn). As for J. William Muir (d. 1905), he thinks the chapter was revealed after al-Nūr and before al-Ḥadīd. For Muir, al-Aḥzāb is about incidents that occurred in 5 AH. See Sir William Muir, *The Corān: Its Composition and Teaching and the Testimony It Bears to the Holy Scriptures* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006), 46.

According to Mawdūdī (d. 1979), the chapter does not consist of verses that exclusively address a given subject in terms of the main theme and background; instead, it consists of several verse sequences that are gradually revealed in connection with the events of the time and comprise various judgments.³⁰ Darwazah agrees that the intertextual and non-textual context highlights fragmentary and long-lasting revelation of the verses in the chapter.³¹ We consider these evaluations, especially arguments about the large variety of the themes in the chapter, seem to be based on a superficial viewpoint. As shown in a justified manner, the themes, which are considered to differ, are in a direct or indirect relationship with one or two main themes: the Battle of the Trench and the marriage of Muḥammad with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh.

In conventional exegeses and sources on *asbāb al-nuzūl* (circumstances of revelation), several narratives discuss the reasons behind the revelation of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb. The majority of these narratives address various incidents but do not mention date or time records.³² Based on the general content of the chapter, some exegetes make inferences such as “Sūrat al-Aḥzāb was about how hypocrites hurt the Prophet and talked against him with respect to his marriages or other issues.”³³ Early biographical sources on the Prophet provide information about the date and time of the Battle of the Trench and Muḥammad’s marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh; however, no connection between this information and various verse groups within al-Aḥzāb is established.

Thematic Frame and Dating of the Chapter

The first verse of al-Aḥzāb begins with an address to Muḥammad, in which he is reminded about his duty and responsibility before Allah and was told not to succumb to disbelievers and hypocrites. This command is almost identically repeated in verse 48, in which the Prophet is told not to worry about torments by disbelievers and hypocrites. He is subsequently told to rely on Allah and His support.

³⁰ See Abū l-A‘lā Mawdūdī, *Tefhimu’l-Kur’an: Kur’an’ın Anlamı ve Tefsiri* [Tafhim al-Qur’ān], trans. Muhammed Han Kayanî et al., 2nd ed. (Istanbul: İnsan, 1996), IV, 383-384.

³¹ Darwazah, *al-Taḥsīn al-ḥadīth*, VII, 345.

³² See Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1991), 200-208.

³³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, VII, 427.

The commandment to trust in Allah is also mentioned in the third verse of the chapter. Prior to this chapter, the Prophet is instructed to abide by the divine orders that are revealed to him.

Exegeses include various narratives about the revelation circumstances of the first three verses. According to one narrative, this group of verses was revealed with regard to Abū Sufyān, 'Ikrimah ibn Abī Jahl and Abū l-A'war 'Amr ibn Sufyān. The polytheists, who came to Medinah as guests of 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl after the Battle of Uḥud, wanted to see the Prophet; he agreed to meet them. At the meeting, the polytheists told the Prophet "to give up talking abusively about their gods al-Lāt, al-Manāt and al-'Uzzā so that they no more talk negatively of him and his Rabb." Rasūl Allāh was deeply hurt by these words; 'Umar, who was in his company, said: "Oh the messenger of Allah! Let me kill them right on here." The Prophet, however, said that he forgave them. Then, "Go away with the curse and wrath of Allah on you," said 'Umar, and the Prophet ordered them to leave Medinah. The first verses of al-Aḥzāb were revealed upon this event.³⁴

According to another narrative that was quoted by Ibn 'Abbās, a group of polytheists from Meccah, including Walīd ibn Muḡhīrah and Shaybah ibn Rabī'ah, came to Muḡammad and said: "If you give up your cause, we will bestow you half of our possessions." Shaybah promised to marry his daughter to the Prophet. The hypocrites and Jews in Medinah threatened Muḡammad with death unless he relinquished his cause. The initial verses were revealed upon these occurrences.³⁵

³⁴ Abū Ishāq Aḡmad ibn Muḡammad al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Sayyid Kisrawī Ḥasan, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), V, 76-77; al-Wāḡhidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, 201; Abū Muḡammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas'ūd al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī al-musammā Ma'ālim al-tanzīl*, ed. Khālīd 'Abd al-Rahmān al-'Akk and Marwān Sawār, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rīfah, 1995), III, 505; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, VII, 428. For a similar narrative, see Abū l-Ḥasan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr al-Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Maḡmūd Shaḡḡhātah (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Tārīkh al-'Arabī, n.d.), III, 468-471.

³⁵ Abū l-Qāsim Maḡmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḡaqā'iq ḡhawāmīḡ al-tanzīl wa-'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūb al-ta'wīl*, ed. Muḡammad 'Abd al-Salām Shāḡhīn, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), III, 504; al-Suyūṡī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl al-musammā Lubāb al-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 2002), 205.

Some other narratives describe the motive behind the revelation of the mentioned verse group. Some of these narratives give the impression of a scenario that was created using the content of the first verse, whereas other narratives seem anachronistic. According to one of these narratives, a group from Banū Thaḳīf comes to Muḥammad and says: “Let us worship al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzá for one more year; then the Quraysh will understand our importance in your eyes.” According to Darwazah, this incident does not comply with the time of the revelation of the sūrah.³⁶

The expressions in the first three verses hint that Muḥammad was exhausted by disbelievers and hypocrites, which caused his resistance to weaken. The phrase “do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites” in verses 1 and 48 support this argument. The issues, which exhausted Muḥammad, relate to his marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, as shown in verses 4-7 and 36-38. According to many exegeses, Muḥammad’s marriage with his adopted child Zayd’s former wife Zaynab bint Jaḥsh after their divorce became a point of gossip among hypocrites who tried to discredit him. The commandment for Muḥammad not to obey hypocrites in the first verse may also refer to the activities by the polytheist enemy forces to intimidate and break the resistance of the Prophet in an environment when the Battle of the Trench was inevitable. Verses 11-20, especially 13-18, depict a situation about hypocrites. The order of disobedience may be related to the threats from polytheists.

Question of Adoption and Muḥammad’s Marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh

Considering verses 4-5, the order of disobedience may be connected with the rumors about Muḥammad’s marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. These verses are about the problem of child adoption. According to common opinion of Islamic scholars, the expression in verse 4, “Allah has not made your adopted sons your true sons,” abolishes the tradition of child adoption; the following verse orders to call the adopted children by the names of their true father instead of the names of their adopters.

Mawdūdī establishes a connection between the first two verses and these verses, which forbid adoption; accordingly, he makes the following assessments:

³⁶ See Darwazah, *al-Tafsīr al-ḥadīth*, VII, 348.

First, two verses were revealed after Zayd divorced Zaynab. Muḥammad felt that it was time to completely abolish child adoption, which was a custom of Jāhiliyyah. He had to act in person for the process and decided to marry the widow of his adopted child to entirely annihilate the tradition; Allah inspired him in the same manner. Muḥammad was loath because the tradition could provide the disbelievers and hypocrites, who were already mad about his achievements, with a means of propaganda. He did not fear for his personal fame but was worried about possible harm to Islam. This incident could cause mistrust among the followers of Islam and push Muslims with weaker faith into suspicion. Therefore, Muḥammad preferred not to step into action to abolish this Jāhiliyyah custom because this move could further harm the purpose of religion.³⁷

Verses 4-5 on adoption distinctly address the marriage between the Prophet and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. Before Muḥammad, Zaynab was married to Zayd, who was his well-known adopted child. Verses 36-37 discuss the incident involving Muḥammad, Zayd, and Zaynab. Verse no. 36 refers to the marriage of Zaynab bint Jaḥsh to Zayd and the role of Muḥammad in this union. According to the following verse, the conjugal life of Zayd and Zaynab did not go well; however, Muḥammad recommended Zayd “not to divorce.” He hid something as he feared the people who surrounded him. According to early exegetes, a hidden feeling of Muḥammad was his desire for Zayd and Zaynab to divorce so that he could marry Zaynab. Exegetes such as Muqātil ibn Sulaymān and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) have cited very interesting narratives about this topic.³⁸ Due to common recognition of the chastity of the Prophet, subsequent exegetes preferred to interpret this expression in the verse in different senses.³⁹

Regardless of the consistency and persuasiveness of the mentioned interpretations, the exegetes claim that verses 4-5, which forbid adoption, were revealed prior to verses 36-37. Therefore, Allah imposed the verdict on the prohibition of adoption, and Muḥammad demonstrated the actual practice of this judgment by marrying

³⁷ Mawdūdī, *Tefbimu'l-Kur'an*, IV, 386.

³⁸ See Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsir al-Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, III, 494-495; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, XII, 16-17.

³⁹ For further information and assessments on the problem, see Mustafa Öztürk, “Kur'an Kıssaları Bağlamında İsrâiliyyât Meselesine Farklı Bir Yaklaşım -Tefsirde İsrâiliyyât Karşıtı Söylemin Tahlil ve Tenkidi-,” *İslâmî İlimler Dergisi* 9, no. 1 (2014): 11-68.

Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, who was the former wife of his former adopted child Zayd. This argument, however, does not seem accurate. In the days of Companions, verses 4-5 were not construed as the total abolition of child adoption for everyone, and this rule was not applied. The following information provided by al-Qurṭubī is striking:

The prohibition in the relevant verse is not valid for persons who are commonly called/known with the name of their adopters, such as Miqdād ibn ‘Amr. Miqdād was mostly known through the name of his adopter. Indeed, everyone knew him as Miqdād ibn Aswad. Once Aswad ibn ‘Abd Yāghūth had adopted him in Days of Ignorance and he became famous with this identity. Upon revelation of this verse, “I am son of ‘Amr,” said Miqdād, but people continued to call him “son of Aswad.” Those who called him Miqdād ibn Aswad were on purpose; nevertheless, nobody from earlier generations dubbed them sinners. The same goes for Sālim, the foster child (*maulā*) of Abū Ḥudhayfah. Sālim was also called in reference to Abū Ḥudhayfah [and not to his natural father, even after the revelation of the verse]. Moreover, the same applies for persons who are adopted and known with the name of their adopters, after becoming known through their adopting family. Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, however, is in a different situation. It is not permissible to call him “Zayd ibn Muḥammad.” Whoever does so commits a sin pursuant to verse “*wa-lākin mā ta‘ammatat qulūbukum*” by Allah. Wa-Allāh^u a‘lam.⁴⁰

Considering these facts, the argument “It was time to terminate the custom of adoption; therefore, Allah, first of all, revealed the verses to forbid it; then, He demonstrated its application in the example of Muḥammad,” seems insignificant. Although the Qur’ān punished the immoral custom of *zibār* with atonement and did not completely abolish it, the total abolition of child adoption cannot be justified as a human and appropriate practice. Thus, the descendants of the Companions construed these verses as the abolition of adoption for the case of Muḥammad and Zayd. This specific abolition of adoption is probably available in the interpretations by early exegetes about the expression *wa-tukfī fī naḥsika* in verse 37.

We think that the verses 4-5 about adoption were revealed after the verses about the Prophet, Zayd, and Zaynab. However, the place in which these verses are displayed in muṣḥaf is not consistent with this conclusion. First, the order of muṣḥaf is not chronological.

⁴⁰ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, VII, 433.

Therefore, the composition of the book cannot be the basis for chronicling the progress of events. The order of the book manifests certain statements that are noncompliant with chronology, with regard to establishment of the dates of some of the judgments in the Qurʾān. For example, verse 119 of al-Anʿām reads as follows:

And why should you not eat of that upon which the name of Allah has been mentioned while He has explained in detail to you what He has forbidden you, excepting that to which you are compelled. And indeed do many lead [others] astray through their [own] inclinations without knowledge. Indeed, your Lord – He is most knowing of the transgressors.

Explanations of what is forbidden to eat are given in verse 145 of al-Anʿām and verse 3 of al-Māʾidah. However, this fact complicates the revelation order of the Qurʾān and the composition of muṣḥaf because this explanation is provided beforehand. Al-Anʿām was revealed in Meccah, whereas al-Māʾidah was revealed in the late Medinah period. The other verse about *ḥarām* food (Q 6:145) is introduced after 26 more verses. Addressing this problem, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) indicates that the chronological difference between the two verses is negligible.⁴¹ This problem is proof that the order of the verses, especially in the longer chapters, is established during the practical process (*ijtibādī*).

The problem with verse 119 in al-Anʿām is also applicable to verses 234 to 240 of al-Baqarah. Many chapters, which consist of verses about a main theme, do not comply with the chronological order of events. For instance, the initial verses of al-Anfāl include a debate about booty in the wake of the Battle of Badr prior to treating the pre-war conditions and how the battle occurred. Verse 17, however, returns to the post-war period. Verse 42 and the subsequent verses relate the incidents prior to Battle, whereas verses 67-70 mention the Battle and the problem of prisoners.

No chronological order can be derived from this composition. Considering the debates about booty in the initial verses of al-Anfāl, the reader realizes the function of the narrations in the verses regarding before and after Badr to conclude these discussions. This realization is similar to reminding a wealthy person of his past after he endure many years of poverty. Many verses about the period

⁴¹ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr*, XIII, 136.

before the Battle of Badr begin with the postposition “*idb*,” which means “back then, once.”

In this respect, no chronological significance exists in the precedence of verses on child adoption (verses 4-5) to verses about the marriage of Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (verses 37-38) in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb. The custom of child adoption was likely forbidden based on the content of verses 36-37, namely, the marriage, and upon objections and gossip about this event. Our emphasis on Muḥammad may seem strange. The historical data provided by al-Qurṭubī and expressions such as “Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men,”⁴² and “his wives are in the position of the mothers of believers.”⁴³ demonstrate that the problem of adoption was personal instead of general; it concerned the case of Muḥammad, Zayd, and Zaynab. Although the verse, “Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men.”⁴⁴ means that Muḥammad is not the father of Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, which suggests that he can marry his former wife Zaynab bint Jaḥsh without any objection, the expression “his wives are in the position of the mother of believers.”⁴⁵ actually means “Muḥammad is your father.”

These controversial verses are apparently related with the marriage that caused rumors in the community and repercussions in the family and private life of the Prophet. As previously mentioned, Zayd, who was the adopted child of Muḥammad, married and subsequently divorced Zaynab bint Jaḥsh before the Prophet united with the same woman. Many other verses in the chapter are directly or indirectly related to this incident. Prior to the analysis of the extent of this relationship, we provide and assess relevant information about the date of the marriage of Muḥammad and Zaynab. The marriage is closely connected with the verses about the Battle of the Trench, which constitutes the core of the chapter.

In *siyar* and *ṭabaqāt* literature, three viewpoints are expressed about the date of the marriage of Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, namely, 3, 4, and 5 AH.⁴⁶ For al-Balādhurī (d. 279/893), the claim that

⁴² Q 33:40.

⁴³ Q 33:6.

⁴⁴ Q 33:40.

⁴⁵ Q 33:6.

⁴⁶ Abū l-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī, *al-Bidāyah wa-l-nibāyah*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Giza: Hajr li-l-Ṭibāʿah wa-l-Nashr,

the marriage may have occurred in 3 AH is unfounded.⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabarī dates the marriage to 5 AH.⁴⁸ Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) quotes a narrative in which the marriage date of Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh is the first day of Dhū l-qaʿdah in 5 AH; he adds that the date seems reasonable considering the following words by ʿĀʾishah: “Rasūl Allāh married Zaynab bint Jaḥsh upon our return from Battle of al-Muraysīʿ or shortly after.”⁴⁹ According to this date, the verses about marriage of Muḥammad and Zaynab were revealed immediately after the Battle of the Trench because the Battle ended only a few days prior to marriage. The information provided by Ibn Saʿd requires no other words about the time interval of the revelation of the chapter. However, it offers a vague basis for the revelation of verses about this marriage. As many exegetes infer, these verses were revealed during a smear campaign by hypocrites against Muḥammad as a result of the marriage. In psychosocial terms, the smear campaign probably occurred during the battles; therefore, Muḥammad must have married Zaynab prior to the Battle of the Trench.

Regarding the Battle of al- Muraysīʿ (Invasion of Banū l-Muṣṭaliq), which is mentioned in the narratives about the date of the marriage, it began in Shaʿbān 5 (2 Shaʿbān 5 AH/27 December 626) and ended after one month (1 Ramaḍān 5 AH/24 January 627) upon Muḥammad’s return to Medinah.⁵⁰ The Battle of the Trench began one month after the Battle of al-Muraysīʿ, on 7 Shawwāl 5 AH. Therefore, Muḥammad married Zaynab bint Jaḥsh during this month between the two Battles. According to a narrative by al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823), at the end of entrenching, Muḥammad accommodated behind the Mountain of Salʿ, where his wives ʿĀʾishah, Umm Salamah, and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh stayed with him for a few days.⁵¹

1997), VI, 150; Kasım Şulul, *İlk Kaynaklara Göre Hz. Peygamber Devri Kronolojisi*, 3rd ed. (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2011), 661-662.

⁴⁷ Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyá al-Balādhurī, *Jumal min Ansāb al-asbrāf*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyāḍ al-Ziriklī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), II, 67.

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1968), II, 562.

⁴⁹ See Abū ʿAbd Allah Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿUmar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), X, 110-111.

⁵⁰ Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidi, *al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub & London: Oxford University Press, 1966), I, 404.

⁵¹ Al-Wāqidi, *al-Maghāzī*, II, 454.

Then, the Battle of al-Muraysī^c, which is the event of the necklace, the marriage of Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh and the Battle of the Trench occurred within a period of approximately three months. Sūrat al-Aḥzāb includes explicit or implicit expressions about these incidents. Verses and verse groups on the Battle of the Trench, the punishment of Banū Qurayzah Jews and Muḥammad's marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh are comprehensible. Although other verse groups seem out of context, verses in the chapter are essentially related to these events.

We discuss the verses that have an indirect reference to the marriage between Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. Verse 6 expresses that the Prophet is more worthy of the believers than themselves and his wives are in the same position as their mothers. According to verse 40, "Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets." Verse 56 states "Indeed, Allah confers blessing upon the Prophet, and His angels ask him to do so. O you who have believed, ask Allah to confer blessing upon him and ask Allah to grant him peace." Verse 69 indicates "O you who have believed, be not like those who abused Moses; then Allah cleared him of what they said. And he, in the sight of Allah, was distinguished." In addition, the verses on obedience and the metaphor of trust at the end of the chapter warn believers against rumors and smear campaigns by hypocrites about Muḥammad's marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh and advise the faithful not to join this dirty movement, as in the preceding event of necklace (*ifk*). The verses 45-46 indicate that Muḥammad is sent as a witness, forerunner, alerter, inviter, and a candle who glitters with heavenly light; thus, the text intends to reinforce the commitment to the Prophet among believers by reference to his position in the eyes of Allah.

Verses no. 50 and 51 also seem relevant to the marriage between Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. The former includes specific provisions for Muḥammad about polygamy with women who are given due compensation and women who are wives of the captives. The latter tells the Prophet to relax regarding which of his wives he is to divorce or keep. Apparently, the marriage of Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh and his privileged status about marriage caused discomfort within the Muslim community and his family. According to a narrative, Umm Sharīk wanted to marry Muḥammad after presenting herself to him and without asking for any dowry; Rasūl Allāh accepted. 'Ā'ishah asked "How can a woman grant herself?;"

when verses 50-51 were revealed, she made an interesting comment: "I see your Rabb almost runs after your wish and desire."⁵²

To end the rumors about the marriage of Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh and the disturbance caused by the gossip, verse 37 of the chapter reads "So when Zayd had no longer any need for her, We married her to you" and directly associates the marriage with divine will. Verse 38 states "There is not to be upon the Prophet any discomfort concerning that which Allah has imposed upon him. This is the established way of Allah with those prophets who have passed on before." Previous exegetes support this last phrase and reveal a connection between the marriage of Muḥammad and Zaynab, and the marriage of David with the wife of Ūriyā.⁵³

Verses 40-41 reiterate the position and mission of Muḥammad and seek an end to any controversy about his marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh: "Past prophets [just like hereby last one] were persons who communicated the verses of Allah to mankind and who feared no one but Him. Evidently, Allah is the only power to call them to account. O believers! Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men. [Therefore he is not the father of Zayd either.] He is the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets. And ever is Allah, of all things, Knowing."

Battles of the Trench and Banū Qurayzah

Verses 9-25 in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb treat the Battle of the Trench and discuss the differing behaviors and attitudes of believers and hypocrites in face of the danger of war and enemy. Verses 26-27, relate the battle against Banū Qurayzah.⁵⁴ According to scholars such as Qatādah, 'Urwah ibn Zubayr (d. 94/713), Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/768) and al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), the Battle of the Trench occurred in

⁵² Al-Bukhārī, "Tafsīr," 33/7; "al-Nikāḥ," 29; Muslim, "al-Raḍā'," 49, 50; al-Nasā'ī, "al-Nikāḥ," 1; Ibn Mājah, "al-Nikāḥ," 57; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, VI, 134, 158, 261.

⁵³ See Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr al-Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, III, 496; Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīl fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-majīd*, ed. 'Adil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1994), III, 474. Also see al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, VII, 495.

⁵⁴ See al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, II, 494-495; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sirab al-Nabawīyyah*, III, 193-194; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-l-nibāyah*, VI, 8-9.

Shawwāl 5 AH.⁵⁵ According to Muḥammad Ḥamīd Allāh, the war on 7 Shawwāl 5 AH (March 1, 627), lasted approximately one month and ended on the first day of Dhū l-qa‘dah (24 March 627).⁵⁶

The relevant verses in the chapter generally focus on the distress that was suffered by Muslims during the Battle of the Trench and the attitude of hypocrites. The verses 9 to 12 summarize and depict the situation of believers and hypocrites during the war:

O you who have believed, remember the favor of Allah upon you when armies came to attack you and We sent upon them a wind and armies of angels you did not see. And ever is Allah, of what you do, Seeing. Remember when they came at you from above and from below you, and when eyes shifted in fear, and hearts reached the throats and you assumed about Allah various assumptions. There the believers were tested and shaken with a severe shaking. And remember when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is disease said, “Allah and His Messenger did not promise us except delusion.”

Verse 25 highlights the outcome of the battle: “And Allah repelled those who disbelieved, in their rage, not having obtained any good. And sufficient was Allah for the believers in battle, and ever is Allah Powerful and Exalted in Might.”

In the same group of verses about the Battle of the Trench, verses 13-14 read as follows: “And when a faction of them said, ‘O people of Yathrib (Medinah), there is no stability for you here, so return home.’ And a party of them asked permission of the Prophet, saying,

⁵⁵ See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sirah al-Nabawīyyah*, III, 169; Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, II, 70; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-l-nibāyah*, VI, 9. There are also some sources that claim Battle of the Trench occurred in Dhū l-qa‘dah 5 AH, or even in 4 AH. The latter argument is put forth by scholars such as Mūsā ibn ‘Uqbah and Ibn Ḥazm; see Abū Muḥammad ‘Alī Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Jawāmi‘ al-sirah al-Nabawīyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, [1983]), 147; nevertheless, authors like al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), Ibn Qayyim (d. 751/1350), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), and Ibn Ḥajar criticize this claim. See Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwah wa-ma‘rifat aḥwāl šāḥib al-sharī‘ah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Muṭī Qal‘ahjī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1988), III, 396; Abū ‘Abd Allāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zād al-ma‘ād ‘alā bady kbayr al-‘ibād*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt and ‘Abd al-Qāḍir al-Arna‘ūt, 27th ed. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risālah & Kuwait: Maktabat Manār al-Islāmiyyah, 1994), III, 269-270.

⁵⁶ See Ḥamīdullah, “Hendek Gazvesi,” XVII, 194.

‘Indeed, our houses are unprotected,’ while they were not exposed. They did not intend except to flee. And if they had been entered upon from all its surrounding regions and fitnah had been demanded of them, they would have done it and not hesitated over it except briefly,” whereas verses 18-19 indicate the following: “Already Allah knows the hinderers among you and those hypocrites who say to their brothers, ‘Come to us’ and do not go to battle, except a few, indisposed toward you. And when fear comes, you see them looking at you, their eyes revolving like one being overcome by death.” Therefore, the verses that recommend obedience and loyalty to Muḥammad are not restricted to the verses about his marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh; however, they are also related to the defense of Medinah against polytheist and allied enemy forces. These verses refer to two incidents (the marriage and the Battle of the Trench) that occurred within one month.

On the day of his return from the Battle of the Trench, Muḥammad called Bilāl al-Ḥabashī at noontime and ordered that afternoon *ṣalāh* is to be performed in the lands of Banū Qurayzah; then, he girded and mounted his horse (23 Dhū l-qa‘dah 5 AH/15 April 627). As Muḥammad came in front of the castle where Banū Qurayzah took refuge, he separately addressed the Jewish chiefs and invited them to Islam. As they refused, he asked them to leave the fort and surrender. When they refused to yield, the battle begun. Banū Qurayzah remained under siege for approximately fifteen to twenty-five days. Helpless due to siege and lacking the promised assistance by the hypocrites, the Jews asked for the conditions that were granted for Banū Naḥīr, namely, to leave Medinah with only goods on a camel. However, Muḥammad refused this offer and told them that they could only surrender without reserve. The siege lasted a while before Banū Qurayzah consented to yield. At the behest of Muḥammad, the warriors of Banū Qurayzah were condemned to death, whereas approximately 100 women and children were released. The possessions of Banū Qurayzah were distributed to Companions as booty, and the remaining lands were sold to provide horses and guns for jihād. Meanwhile, Muḥammad obtained Rayḥānah bint Zayd, who was a woman among the captives, as net share.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Al-Bukhārī, “al-Maghāzī,” 14; al-Wāqidi, *al-Maghāzī*, II, 445, 496-525; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sirah al-Nabawīyyah*, III, 184-199; Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-*

Verses 26-27 in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb address this Battle:

And He brought down those who supported them among the People of the Scripture from their fortresses and cast terror into their hearts so that a party you killed, and you took captive a party. And He caused you to inherit their land and their homes and their properties and a land which you have not trodden. And ever is Allah, over all things, competent.

The following two verses, which are traditionally known as “verses on choice,” discuss the family life of Muḥammad in the wake of the Banū Qurayzah Battle. According to certain narratives, verses 28-29 – “O Prophet, say to your wives, ‘If you should desire the worldly life and its adornment, then come, I will provide for you and give you a gracious release. However, if you should desire Allah and His Messenger and the home of the Hereafter – then indeed, Allah has prepared for the doers of good among you a great reward’” – were revealed upon the following event: As the wives of Muḥammad saw the booty from the Jews after the sieges of Banū Qurayzah and Banū Naḍīr, they said “O Rasūl Allāh! The wives of Kisrā and Kaiser lead a life of luxury in adornments, jewels, courtesans, and servants, while we live in poverty and discomfort.” They made certain relevant requests and annoyed Muḥammad. Thus, the “verses on choice” were revealed.⁵⁸

According to a parallel comment by Ibn ‘Ashūr, Muslims obtained notable booty from Banū Qurayzah and led a comfortable and wealthier life. The life standards of Muḥammad remained unchanged. This fact caused complaints among his wives. The verse on choice was revealed to put an end to these complaints and to warn Muḥammad’s wives.⁵⁹

Framework of the Address to Muḥammad’s Wives and Incident of *Ifk*

Some verses in al-Aḥzāb, especially verses 30-34, directly address the wives of Muḥammad. Verse 30 reads: “O wives of the Prophet,

kabīr, II, 70-74; Casim Avcı, “Kurayza (Benî Kurayza),” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XXVI, 431-432.

⁵⁸ See Abū l-Thana’ Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘azīm wa-l-sab‘ al-mathānī*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2005), XI, 178.

⁵⁹ For associated comments, see Ibn ‘Ashūr, *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, XXI, 314.

whoever of you should commit a clear immorality – for her the punishment would be doubled two fold, and ever is that, Allah, easy.” Verses no. 32 and 33 include the following phrases:

O wives of the Prophet, you are not like anyone among women. If you fear Allah, then do not be soft in speech [to men], lest he in whose heart is disease should covet, but speak with appropriate speech. And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance. And establish prayer and give zakāh and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah intends only to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the [Prophet’s] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification.

These verses probably refer to the incident of *ifk*. The incident of *ifk*, which are also treated in verses 11-22 of *Sūrat al-Nūr* (24), occurred during the campaign against Banū l-Muṣṭaliq, which occurred between 2 Sha‘bān 5 AH/27 December 626 and 1 Ramaḍān 5 AH/24 January 627, almost a month prior to the Battle of the Trench. According to numerous sources, on the return home from the Invasion of Banū l-Muṣṭaliq, Muḥammad orders to depart before dawn. However, ‘Ā’ishah has walked away from the camp to relieve herself. Returning to the site, she notices that her necklace has fallen and begins to search, thinking that the procession will wait for her. However, she loses a considerable amount of time by searching for the drops in the dark. By the time she arrives at the encampment, the caravan has departed; she begins to wait and believes that they will look for her upon noticing her absence. Meanwhile, she falls asleep. Ṣafwān ibn al-Mu‘aṭṭal al-Sulamī, who is a rearguard in the army, finds ‘Ā’ishah during his routine check of the encampment, mounts her on his camel and leads the beast to catch the caravan. Although he walks fast, they can only join the caravan when the latter has a break in the heat of late morning.

The delay was not badly perceived; ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl, who was the chief of Banū Khazraj prior to Hijrah but was not granted the leadership of Medīnah upon the arrival of Muḥammad, triggered rumors and the incident caused discomfort in the community. Words uttered by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy and his men to insult, humiliate, and drive a wedge between Muḥammad and his father-in-law Abū Bakr rapidly became a smear campaign because Muslims such as Ḥassān ibn Thābit, Miṣṭaḥ ibn Uthāthah and Ḥammah bint Jaḥsh contributed to the rumors. Worried about the events, Muḥammad hesitated in reaching a conclusion; he decided to ask

some of his acquaintances for advice and took the subject to public at maşjid to be spared of these rumors. Verses 11 and 12 of Sūrat al-Nūr were revealed, and ʿĀʾishah was absolved from slanders.⁶⁰

Considering that the Invasion of Banū l-Muşṭaliq occurred one month prior to the Battle of the Trench and the information about the marriage between Muḥammad and Zaynab during the one month between the two Battles, the Prophet must have suffered serious distress and oppression due to rumors about his marriage with Zaynab and slanders against ʿĀʾishah. Verses 1 and 48 tell him not to surrender to hypocrites and disbelievers. These verses are reminiscent of various chapters: “Do not obey the disbelievers” or “turn aside from them,”⁶¹ which were revealed to enhance his endurance under intense oppression from polytheists during his time in Meccah.

The verses in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb about the wives of Muḥammad are a type of precaution against bad experiences, such as the incident of *ifk*. They indicate that if a wife of Muḥammad is involved in an immoral deed, her punishment will be doubled because she is no ordinary woman but a woman who has to refrain from talking to another man and cannot leave her home if possible. Likewise, the verses that are named with proper nouns, such as *ḥijāb*⁶² and *jilbāb*, can be considered within the scope of the mentioned precaution. The verses in the chapter about the wives of Muḥammad probably address the incident of *ifk*.

Assessment and Conclusion

The main theme of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb is the Battle of the Trench, which began on 7 Shawwāl 5 AH (1 March 627) and ended on 1 Dhū l-qaʿdah 5 AH (24 March 627), in addition to the subsequent Banū Qurayzah Battle. Verses about the Prophet’s marriage to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh were probably revealed during the Battle of the Trench. In *siyar* literature, various viewpoints about the date of marriage are

⁶⁰ See al-Bukhārī, “al-Shahādah,” 15; “al-Maghāzī,” 34; “Tafsīr,” 24/5-10; Muslim, “al-Tawbah,” 56, 57, 58; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, III, 232-240; Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, II, 59-61; Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī sharḥ al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah li-Ibn Hishām*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Wakīl (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1967), VI, 436-451.

⁶¹ See Q 25:52; Q 43:89.

⁶² According to Ibn Saʿd, the *ḥijāb* verse was revealed in Dhū l-qaʿdah 5 AH. See Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, X, 168.

expressed; the date is generally considered to have occurred in 5 AH. According to some narratives by authors such as Ibn Sa‘d and al-Wāqidi, Muḥammad married Zaynab bint Jaḥsh shortly after the Invasion of Banū l-Muṣṭaliq. During the Battle of the Trench, Zaynab was with the Prophet and some of his other wives. The Battle of al-Muṣṭaliq began on Sha‘bān 5 AH (2 Sha‘bān 5 AH/27 December 626) and ended on Muḥammad’s return to Medinah after approximately one month (1 Ramaḍān 5 AH/24 January 627).

Considering all historical data, the chapter al-Aḥzāb was probably revealed in 5 AH within a few months. All verses pertain to the incidents of this period. However, all verses in the chapter were presumably not revealed at once but in different groups within the mentioned period. All verse groups are related. The main motive behind the revelation of al-Aḥzāb involved plans by external polytheist groups and inside collaborators, such as Banū Qurayzah Jews and hypocrites against Muḥammad and Muslims who want to destroy them. This plan was actually put into practice in the Battle of the Trench.⁶³

The axis of the chapter focuses on the Battle of the Trench and the battle against Banū Qurayzah. Many other verses treat the marriage of Muḥammad to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, his privileged status with regard to polygamy, and warnings to his wives. The verses about these problems may seem unrelated with the verses about the Battle of the Trench. Seventy-three verses within al-Aḥzāb may initially discuss incidents and problems for a one-month period during the Battle of the Trench.

All verses in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb are a type of shield for Muḥammad. This shield protects against threats by polytheists outside Medinah and gossip and discrediting campaigns by Jews and hypocrites in Medinah, especially gossip about the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. In this context, the verses are similar to the scenario of a feature film, which is based on a one-week or one-month life experience of various dramatic events.

In this peculiar context, the Qur’ān relates the occurrences to the perspective of Muḥammad or the Companions; therefore, the book is written from the perspective of the incidents. In verses 9 to 22, some striking psychoanalyses about the mood of Muslims and hypocrites

⁶³ Cf. Öztürk, “Nuzūl of the Qur’ān and the Question of Nuzūl Order,” 198.

during the siege are observed. The lack of a third-person narrator can also pave the way for gaps and brevity in terms of historical information.

Verses 4-5 in al-Aḥzāb refer to the marriage between Muḥammad and Zaynab bint Jaḥsh; these verses are the first step in obviating rumors about the marriage. Verses 36-40 relate the consequence of marriage; the phrases “There is not to be upon the Prophet any discomfort concerning that which Allah has imposed upon him” and “Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men” provide the Prophet with a type of moral protection. The intention is to neutralize gossip by hypocrites and eliminate complaints by the affected believers and his wives, such as the interesting reproach “I see your Rabb almost runs after your wish and desire,” by ‘Ā’ishah.

With respect to the divorce of Zayd and Zaynab and Muḥammad’s marriage with the latter, certain exegetes and jurists state: “Allah wanted to abolish the custom of child adoption; so, He revealed verses 4 and 5 as a preparation; then, He realized the actual abolition of child adoption through marriage of Muḥammad with Zaynab.” These comments can scarcely be harmonized with divine justice-fairness or associated controversial issues about predestination or divine will. The best known exegetes in the classical era were members of the Ash‘arite school, and Ash‘arite Kalām defines Allah using absolute will. Good and evil were not considered to be independent from the revelation; instead, they were only defined via the revelation. Therefore, Allah attributes very dramatic roles to Zayd and Zaynab in his eternal scenario instead of the direct abolition of adoption, which is unimportant and does not bear any moral problem according to Ash‘arite viewpoint. In Ash‘arite Kalām, a man/object is obliged to live a predestined life by absolute and endless divine will, even though he seems free.

Sūrat al-Aḥzāb reflects a defensive counter-attacking style and strategy to place Muḥammad under protection. Many verses and expressions, including “Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men.” (Q 33:40), “The Prophet is more worthy of the believers than themselves.” (Q 33:6), as well as phrases about the privilege of Muḥammad in marrying the women indicated in verse 50, and “O Muḥammad! And any that you desire of those wives from whom you had temporarily separated – there is no blame upon you in returning her!” are tangible examples of the mentioned strategy.

Many verses in the chapter order show obedience to Muḥammad and refrain from tormenting him. Verse 56, which is traditionally known as *ṣalawāt verse*, underlines the unconditional support and devotion that should be displayed towards the Prophet. These verses warn believers about joining the smear campaign against Muḥammad, especially over his marriage with Zaynab, and invite them to look after their Prophet.

Based on these assessments, especially the *ḥijāb verse* and verses that are aimed at his wives, which tell them not to go out and make an appearance as in the Days of Ignorance and to wear garments that will make them recognizable when going out, seek to prevent and obviate the smear campaign against Muḥammad, particularly with regard to his marriage with Zaynab and generally about his family and wives. The expression “O wives of the Prophet, you are not like anyone among women.” (Q 33:32) is proof of this approach. Sūrat al-Aḥzāb intends to protect Muḥammad against hypocrites, Muslims and his own household due to the traumatic consequences of the *ifk* incident during the Battle of al-Muṣṭaliq.

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