

# THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HISTORY

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## POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE PROPHET'S MARRIAGE WITH MARIA AL-QIBTIA - MOTHER OF BELIEVERS

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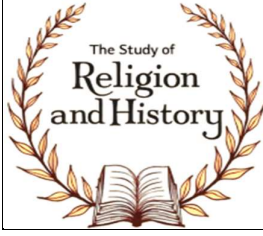
### ABSTRACT

*The study discusses that the Prophet's marriage with Maria al-Qibtia was not just a social or personal event but a well calculated diplomatic technique that contributed to long-lasting Muslim-Coptic relations and enabled peaceful political integration of Egypt. Maria al-Qibtia, titled by Quran as 'Mother of believers', arrived Madinah from Egypt in 7 AH, 628 CE. She was a noble lady, sent by the Byzantine governor of Egypt Muqawqis to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as a goodwill diplomatic gesture. The prophet married her and she gave birth to the only child of the Prophet born after his migration to Madinah. The objective of the study is to bring forward the political aspect of the marriage as it is of great significance with respect to Islamic tradition of tolerance and peaceful coexistence with other communities. Moreover, the marriage has a political and diplomatic angle both at the Muqawqis and the Prophet's side. Qualitative methodology has been followed while carrying out research for the study, focusing on authentic sources of the Prophet's biography and commentary of Quran. It is revealed that getting noble woman married to rulers as a diplomatic step, has remained a practice in the past. The Prophet's acceptance of Maria al-Qibtia as her wife had far reaching results with respect to political point of view. His directions to the Muslims to treat the Copts kindly upon conquering Egypt and its subsequent manifestation, after his death, was the ultimate political success of this whole event.*

**Keywords:** Maria Qibtia, Byzantine governor, Muqawqis, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Political aspect of marriage.

### INTRODUCTION

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), after the Treaty of Hudaibiah, wrote letters to various heads of state, inviting them to Islam. In this context a letter was sent to Muqawqis, governor of one of the provinces of Byzantine Empire. The Prophet asked the leader of the Copts to embrace Islam. The governor came up with a friendly reply, however, did not accept Islam. In a gesture of diplomatic goodwill, he sends two honorable young girls, who were sisters, towards the Prophet along with certain gifts. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) married one of the sisters namely Maria al-Qibtia upon arrival and made her respectfully entered his household. In this paper we will analyze the political aspect of marriage while highlighting importance of such steps by certain rulers in history. In this way, readers will come to know about the political perspective of the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) associated with the event.



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Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah, one of the greatest biographers of the Prophet of 20<sup>th</sup> century, in his book in French language 'Le Prophete de l' Islam' (translated in Urdu by Professor Khalid Pervez) has written as follows:

“During early years of Islam, in 616 C.E., Iranians conquered Egypt which was under the rule of Byzantine emperor Heraclius. Iranians rule lasted for about 10 years. It is considered natural that the new lords (Iranians) supported the Coptic leader (After 10 years of the rule) and the Iranians faced smashing defeat (by the Byzantine forces) and they retreated to a level where all previously captured lands including Egypt got out of their hands. The mental state of Coptic leaders at the time can be understood. In such circumstances the Prophet’s envoy reached (Muqawqis, the Coptic leader) with an invitation to embrace Islam. It was in vain to expect that in the situation a leader would accept a new religion (However, it was Prophet’s political acumen and foresightedness that he took the step) . . . . . Muqawqis reply has been saved in the history, in which he politely refused any possibility of a messenger in Arabia, while sending gifts to the Prophet.”<sup>1</sup>

Along with the gifts he sent two noble girls (who were sisters), to the Prophet, specifically amplifying their honorable status among the Copts in the letter (Shibli, 2016). Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah in his Book 'Muhammad Rasoolullah' has written:

“It is possible that the two sisters would have been of Iranian origin. Maria Qibtia (before accepting Islam) had accepted Christianity. It is a possibility that her father would have been Iranian and her mother Coptic (Egyptian). We don’t know further details apart from the fact that Maria Qibtia happily with her consent accepted Islam; on the basis the Prophet made her his wife.”<sup>2</sup>

He, in his book 'Le Prophete de l' Islam' has further written:

“Maria Qibtia bore a baby boy to the Prophet (peace be upon him), named Ibrahim, who died in infancy.”<sup>3</sup>

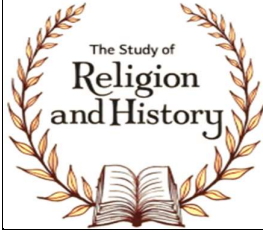
The whole incident has deep political effects. The paper will specifically highlight the same, covering the Prophet’s foresightedness in writing letters to the Coptic leader. Moreover, it will also discuss the selection of the Prophet’s envoy for the mission, marriage with the Coptic noble girl upon her arrival to Madinah, and the Prophet’s glad tiding to the Muslims of conquering Egypt with the instructions to deal with the Coptics kindly. The conquest took place

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah, *Paighamber-e-Islam* (Translation by Professor Khalid Pervez), (Beacon books 2020), 322.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah, *Muhammad Rasoolullah* (Translation by Professor Khalid Pervez), (Beacon Books, 2017), 186.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah, *Paighamber-e-Islam* (Translation by Professor Khalid Pervez), (Beacon books, 2020), 322-323.



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in 642 CE, after around ten years of the Prophet passing away. The actions thus reflected great statesmanship and superb political acumen of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Therefore, it can be safely deduced that marriage had political and diplomatic dimensions and the same needs to be studied as the research problem.

## LITERATURE REVIEW & ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Classical literature has been reviewed in context to Maria al-Qibtia. It has been learnt that famous Muslim historians like Ibne Sa'd (d. 230 AH)<sup>4</sup>, Ibne Hisham (d. 218 AH)<sup>5</sup> and Jareer Al Tabari (d, 310 AH)<sup>6</sup> have not included Maria Qibtia in the list of the wives of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), considering her as a concubine of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

20<sup>th</sup> century great researcher Allama Shibli Noamani has written specifically about Maria Qibtia status in his canonical work 'Seerat un-Nabi', comprehensive biography of the Prophet (peace be upon him). He has given a strong logic about the Prophet marrying Maria al-Qibtia upon her arrival to Madinah. According to him "Muqawqis in his letter had written about her that she and her sister Sireen were extremely honorable among the Copts and such words could not be used for slave girls. Both accepted Islam during the travel to Madinah on hands of the Prophet's envoy Hatib bin Abi Balta and therefore Maria must have been married by the Prophet upon arrival and could not be kept as a concubine."<sup>7</sup>

Dr Muhammad Hamidullah great Islamic scholar of 20<sup>th</sup> century has written specifically in his biography of the Prophet that the Prophet made her his wife upon arrival to Madinah.<sup>8</sup>

Another great researcher of 20<sup>th</sup> century Sayed Hasan Musanna Nadwi have done extensive research on the status of Maria al-Qibtia. He has highlighted the dubious words used for Maria al-Qibtia like 'Umme walad', 'Malakati', 'Ihda' etc. that had been the cause of confusion about her status and had given strong historical references that the words were used during the Prophet's time for a wife of a person. The use of these words for concubines was started in later Muslim rules of Umayyad and Abbasids. He has given authentic reference of a tradition narrated by Hakim, through chain of very reliable narrators, indicating Maria al-Qibtia as a wife of the Prophet. Thus, the research work is extremely convincing and may be considered as a masterpiece for considering the true status of hers. The conclusion of this great work was that Maria al-Qibtia was the wife of Prophet (peace be upon him), married to him upon her

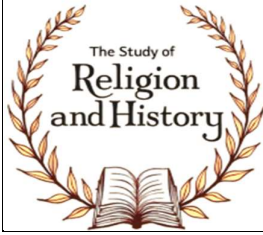
<sup>4</sup> Muhammad bin Sa'd, *Tabqaat Ibne Sa'd vol. 8* (Urdu Translation by Maulana Raghbi Rahmani), (Nafees Academy, 1982), 294-295.

<sup>5</sup> Maulana Sayed Hasan Musanna Nadwi, *Ummul momineen Sayeda Maria Qibtia*, (Maktaba Darul Ahsan 2010), 61.

<sup>6</sup> Allama Ibne Jaffer Muhammad bin Jareer Al Tabari, *Tareekhul umam wal malook vol. 2* (Urdu translation by Sayed M Ibrahim M A Nadwi), Darulishaat 2003, 318.

<sup>7</sup> Allama Shibli Noamani, *Seeratunnabi vol. 1*, (Maktaba-e-Islamia, 2016), 319.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah, *Muhammad Rasoolullah* (Translation by Professor Khalid Pervez), (Beacon Books, 2017), 186.



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arrival to Madina (Musanna, 2010).

Orientalist like Lesley Hazleton has considered Maria al-Qibtia as a concubine of the Prophet. In her work 'The First Muslim', Lesley has narrated unauthentic story of Prophet's wives' resentment over Maria al-Qibtia kept as a concubine. According to her the wives got united in protest the time the Prophet was spending with Maria al-Qibtia.<sup>9</sup>

Another famous orientalist Karen Armstrong has also considered Maria al-Qibtia as a concubine of the Prophet (peace be upon him), as she has relied upon early Muslim historians. She has considered the background of revelation of Chapter 'Tehreem' of Quran as the wives' resentment over inclusion of a concubine from Egypt in the household of the Prophet.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, diverse views are held by the researchers and scholars with respect to the status of Maria al-Qibtia (may Allah be pleased with her). The political aspect of marriage from the Muqawqis side has been discussed only by Sayed Hassan Musanna Nadwi. However, the discussion needs further details for highlighting the political aspect from the Prophet's side, especially its effects on the conquest of Egypt. This study will fill this gap.

## Research Methodology

Research Methodology adopted is qualitative with nature of research as historical-analytical. Primary sources include Ibn Sa'd canonical work 'Tabqat Ibne Sa'd' and Jareer Tabari's 'Tareekhul Umam wal Malook'. Secondary sources include books on biography of the Prophet by Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, Allama Shibli Noamani's 'Seerat un-Nabi' and Sayed Hasan Musanna Nadwi's book 'Ummul Momineen Sayeda Maria Qibtia'. Method used is textual analysis having comparative historiography and critical evaluation of narratives.

## Objective of the study

Research objectives include the study of the political perspective of the marriage of the Prophet (peace be upon him) with Maria al-Qibtia, specifically identifying the Prophet's political acumen and foresightedness with respect to the conquest of Egypt in future.

## Research Questions

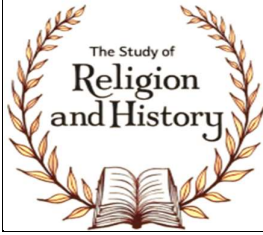
This study basically based on the following research questions:

1. What were the reasons for Muqawqis sending two honorable girls towards the Prophet?
2. What were the reasons behind the Prophet's marriage to one of the noble girls?
3. What were the political effects of the event?

## Significance of the research

<sup>9</sup> Lesley Hazleton, *The First Muslim-The story of Muhammad*, (Riverhead Books, 2013), 309.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad-A biography of the Prophet*, (Phoenix Press paperback, 1991), 236.



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The study is of much significance as the political aspects of the Prophet's marriage with Maria al-Qibtia, Mother of believers, (a title given to all the wives of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)) has not been studied much like the political aspect of his other marriages, for example with Juwairiah, Mother of believers. This is mainly because of the confusion that has prevailed in the history about Maria al-Qibtia's status in the Prophet's household; with number of historians thinking her as a concubine of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) rather than his wife.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### **Political condition of Egypt under the Byzantine Empire.**

Makkans were engaged with neighboring Egypt in trade prior to Islam. However, Makkans were not interested with the internal affairs of Egypt. Political condition of Egypt had been deteriorated day by day. Whole of Egypt had accepted Christianity. Byzantine rulers used to appoint administrators and religious scholars for the Copts. However, religious tussle between the Romans and the Copts got so severe that Copts refused to accept the appointed leader by the Roman Royal court. As a result, by the middle of fifth century CE, two leaderships got established in Egypt—One that appointed by the Romans and other that of the Copts (Hamidullah, 2020).

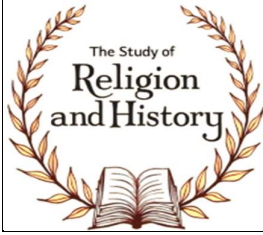
### **The role of Al-Muqawqis as the ruler of Egypt.**

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah has written, "At the time around the advent of Islam, Iranians conquered Egypt in 616 CE and remained for nearly ten years. It was natural that the new rulers backed the Coptic leader and Roman appointed leader had to leave. However, Iranians were defeated in 628 CE and had to leave all captured lands including Egypt. This was the time when the Prophet (peace be upon him) wrote to Muqawqis, the Coptic leader of Egypt. The word Muqawqis is neither of Arabic origin nor is it Coptic. According to Arabs its meaning was "Great builder". Muqawqis personal name was Jareej ibne Mana. Jareej is a derivative of George or Gregory."<sup>11</sup>

### **The geopolitical situation of the Arabian Peninsula during the rise of Islam.**

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah in another book has written, "At the time of advent of Islam, city states of Makkah, Taif and Madina has somewhat political system to a smaller level. Leadership roles of some leaders had not been able to create any sort of caste system, rather all citizens were considered equal. Criteria for selection of leader was experience and wisdom. The wise leaders have created a somewhat developed administration having arrangements for all important and basic requirements. As a political and diplomatic step Makkans have established relations with different tribes living in the region. These pacts were used to facilitate defense alliance in case of wars and facilitated the movement of trade caravans. Makkans were

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah, *Paighamber-e-Islam* (Translation by Professor Khalid Pervez), (Beacon books, 2020), 319-321.



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powerful enough to attract tribes from distant regions like Madinah, desirous of alliance with Makkans.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Early diplomatic contacts between Madinah and neighboring regions.**

The Prophet upon migration to Madinah immediately concluded a pact with the Jewish tribes

living there. Moreover, he also entered in pacts with the tribes of the region against Makkans. As the Pact of Hudaibiah with Makkans took place in 6 AH (627 CE), and a sigh of relief was sort for Madinian state, the Prophet (peace be upon him) wrote to neighboring head of states of Arabia, including the two Empires of Byzantine and Iran, inviting them to Islam. This was the time when the Prophet wrote to Muqawqis, the Byzantine governor of Egypt.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **The Prophet’s Letter to the Egyptian Governor**

Before going into the details of the Prophet’s invitation to the governor of Egypt, it seems prudent to go through the historical background of Egypt in connection to the Prophets. Qazi Suleiman Salman Mansoorpuri in biography of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) ‘Rahmatul lil Aalameen’ has written as follows:

“Prophet Ismael was the first offspring of Prophet Ibrahim, born from lady Hajira. His father named him Ismael (Book of Genesis; 15, 16), that is synonymous with Samee Ullah’. This meaning is also given in Torah (Book of Genesis). ‘God heard the voice of the kid from the place the kid was lying’ (Book of Genesis; 10, 17).<sup>13</sup> Lady Hajira was the daughter of the emperor of Egypt. The emperor was so much overwhelmed by the reverence of Lady Sara (Prophet’s Ibrahim first wife) that he felt elevated in sending her daughter Hajira in the service of Lady Sara.”<sup>14</sup>

It is important to note that Jews regard Lady Hajira as a concubine of Prophet Ibrahim. This is not correct. Qazi Suleiman Salman Mansoorpuri has refuted the claim by giving strong evidence against the same, confirming Lady Hajira status as wife of Prophet Ibrahim. He has written, “It is a farfetched think to consider Lady Hajira as a concubine.”<sup>15</sup>

Qazi Suleiman Salman Mansoorpuri has depicted the connection of Prophet Ismael with Egypt and Arabia in a wonderful manner that we quote here:

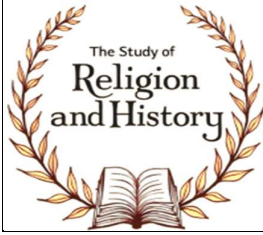
“Almighty Allah chose Ismael as a prophet for Arabia, Hejaz, Yemen and Hazarmaut and his personality was the source of alliance of various nations and states. Just think that he was the

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah, *Rasul e Akram ki Siyasi Zindagi*, (Darul Ishaat 2003), 33-34.

<sup>13</sup> Qazi Suleiman Salman Mansoorpuri, *RahmatullilAalameen*, (Darul Ishaat 2014), 256.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid Pg 254

<sup>15</sup> Ibid Pg 254



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first son of Prophet Ibrahim who was born in Iraq and settled in Syria. Prophet Ismael was the only son of Lady Hajira, who was born in Egypt.”<sup>16</sup>

After going through this historical background, we may understand well the historical and political importance of writing the letter to Egyptian governor Muqawqis by Prophet Muhammad, inviting him to embrace Islam.

## **Selection of Envoy for Egypt**

The Prophet selected Hatib bin Abi Balta Lakhmi for carrying the letter to Muqawqis, the governor of Egypt. Maulana Sayed Hasan Musanna in his book ‘Ummul Momineen Sayeda Maria Qibtia’ has written about him as follows:

“Hatib bin Abi Balta Lakhmi took the letter of the Prophet to Muqawqis, the leader of the Copts. The Prophet specially selected him for the purpose. He was a member of the royal family of the emperors of Heera. The emperors used to rule under Persia. It is pertinent to mention that Pharoses of Egypt were from Syria and especially the Pharos of the time of Prophet Musa was from the tribe of Lakham. In this way Hatib had a varied ancestral background. He was directly acquainted with Christianity. Moreover, his family had remained involved in Roman Persian conflict. He not only handed over the letter to Muqawqis but also held a conversation with him. The dialogue was very interesting. He took him in the past, reminding him of Pharos of the time of Prophet Musa and then said:

‘Prophet’s biggest opponents are the Quraish, archrivals are the Jews, whereas the Christians are most close to him. Musa had prophesied Esa, likewise Esa, the Son of Marium had prophesied about Muhammad (peace be upon him). So, we call you towards Quran in the same manner as you had called the Jews to Gospel. We have not stopped anyone from the religion of Esa, rather we ask for the same.’

Muqawqis replied:

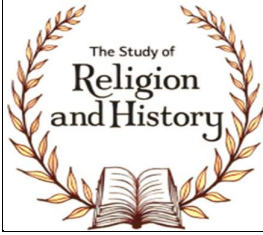
‘Yes, I have reflected about the Prophet (Muhammad). All indicators of Prophethood are clearly visible, like knowing minute details of a hidden thing, and giving prophecies about future, etc. Anyway, I will give it a thought..... Now you may go but be careful that Copts may not hear anything from you. They will not obey me for accepting the Prophet’s call. However, I think my state will go out of my hands and your leader will conquer these lands.’

The letter sent by Muqawqis was written by a scribe knowing Arabic. It read as follows:

‘To Muhammad bin Abdullah from Muqawqis, the leader of Copts, after presenting greetings. I read your letter and understood its theme and meaning. I knew that a messenger (of Almighty) had to come, however, I was of opinion that he would emerge in Syria. I have respected your

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid Pg 258-259



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envoy, and I am sending two girls to you, who are greatly honored among the Copts. And I am sending cloth and a mule for riding as a gift for you. Peace be upon you.”<sup>17</sup>

Selection of Hatib bin Abi Balta Lakhmi for taking the letter to Muqawqis is indicative of the Prophet’s political prowess.

## Extra Ordinary Gifts by Muqawqis

Maulana Sayed Hasan Musanna has written:

“Other kings (rulers) had also presented gifts to the Prophet at different occasions, however, the things Muqawqis sent were completely different. In letter, it was mentioned that he was sending two honorable girls and some gifts, i.e. cloth and a mule for riding. However, in history and in biography of the Prophet the long list of presents and their arrival to Madinah with glory could not be regarded as a normal friendly and amicable behavior.

Muqawqis bid farewell to Hatib’s convoy with such a protocol that his special escort platoon was sent along to maintain security. Even he gave Hatib 100 dinars and 5 dresses. With Lady Maria and Lady Seereen; Qaisra and Barira (two black girls) and Mabour (a black slave) also came along from Egypt. In animals a red mule named later as ‘Duldul’, horse namely ‘Maimoon’ and a red donkey ‘Yafoor’ was also sent. Above that a box was gifted having applicator for ‘surma’ (black powder for eyesight), mirror, comb, bottle of oil, scissors and ‘miswak’ (wooden toothbrush). Moreover, a container having famous honey from the land of ‘Nabha’, one thousand Misqal gold (equals 4.25 kg), 20 rolls of Coptic Egyptian cloth, ‘oud’ (fragrance), ‘mushk’ (fragrance), some other fragrances and a bowl of ‘Halloween’ were also among the presents.”<sup>18</sup>

This indicates a diplomatic signaling mechanism consistent with late antique political culture.

## Reception of Lady Maria Qibtia’s Convoy

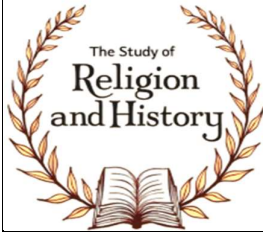
Lady Maria’s convoy was welcomed at Madinah. An important event must be seen considering a political background. As such it was a tribute from a ruler to the Prophet who was also a head of state. Sending of honorable girls was of important political significance, as illustrated below through different political events. Sayed Hasan Musanna has written in this regard as follows:

“The Prophet (peace be upon him) received the convoy and accommodated Maria al-Qibtia in the house of Umme Saleem binte Milhan, of Banu Najaar.”

According to a tradition related to Aisha (wife of the Prophet), the Prophet (peace be upon him) accommodated Maria al-Qibtia in house of Harsah bin Noaman Nazee bin Zaid Najaari. This

<sup>17</sup> Maulana Sayed Hasan Musanna Nadwi, *Ummul momineen Sayeda Maria Qibtia*, (Maktaba Darul Ahsan 2010), 18.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, Pg 22



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Harsa was the same who at the time of migration of the Prophet (peace be upon him) from Makkah to Madinah, had gifted his lands and many houses for the Prophet's wives and common immigrants. He used to present his houses whenever requirement arose. He would have offered his house at the time (of arrival of Maria al-Qibtia to Madinah). Aisha (May Allah be pleased with her) said:

'Lady Maria was our neighbor and wife of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the Prophet used to visit her daily.'

This has indicated that after some time she moved (from house of Umme saleem) to a house that was nearby to the compartments of the wives of the Prophet (the Prophet had separate compartment for each of his wife, adjacent to the mosque of the Prophet in Madinah). Aisha's tradition has also indicated the status of the Lady Maria Qibtia.<sup>19</sup>

## **'Mashrabah Umme Ibrahim'**

Later, lady Maria Qibtia was accommodated by the Prophet (peace be upon him) at a distance in Upper Madinah. Sayed Hasan Musanna has written:

"After some time, Maria Qibtia was resided in Upper Madinah namely Aaliya or Awali. This township was 3 to 4 miles from Madinah on the way to Najad. There was a small garden, namely 'Nakheel'. It had an upper story. Lady Maria resided in it throughout her life. The place exists today as well with name of 'Mashrabah Umme Ibrahim'. There is a mosque named 'Maria' as well where Maria Qibtia and the Prophet had offered prayers. All (historians and biographers) had agreed that Maria was very good and pious lady. She was fair in complexion. Aisha liked her beautiful hair and wrists. In 8th Hijra, when she gave birth to a baby boy, the Prophet (peace be upon him) named him Ibrahim. It was the same name with whom old ruler of Egypt had remained in contact. (Reference is made here of Prophet Ibrahim and the Pharos of Egypt who gave her daughter Hajira to him in marriage).

Maria Qibtia was from 'Hafan'. Hafan is in 'Anza' situated in the land of Suwaid in Egypt. 'Minaf', 'Anza' and 'Hafan' are the ancient cities of Suwaid, having ancient Egyptian traditions and civilization. On eastern bank of river Nile 'Anza' and 'Hafan' were located and on western bank lied 'Minaf'. City 'Hafan' was part of 'Anza'. 'Anza' had flourishing gardens. The reason why the Prophet (peace be upon him) arranged her residence in 'Nakheel' (in Awali Madinah)."<sup>20</sup>

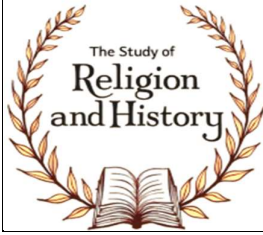
The special treatment of accommodating Maria Qibtia by the Prophet reflects his wisdom.

## **Marriage and diplomacy in political culture.**

Muqawqis was a governor under Roman Empire, led by Heraclius. Muqawqis friendly response to the Prophet could never go unnoticed (Musanna, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, Pg 25

<sup>20</sup> Ibid Pg 27



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Syed Hasan Musanna in his book has written about the same:

“The news of the convoy from Egypt and the magnificent presents did reaches the Roman King. His reaction was as expected. He got annoyed and blamed Muqawqis that he was inclined towards Islam. He thus removed him from the leadership of the Copts. Butler while discussing Amr bin Aas (the conqueror of Egypt) agreement post fall of Alexandria to Muslim’s had written that Muqawqis returned to power after Roman King’s (Heraclius’) death.

This clearly indicated that thinking of Muqawqis and Heraclius were completely different and they were planning a different political landscape in their mind.

Heraclius had gained Egypt after a great effort and sacrifice from the Persians. He felt that Egypt was again going out of his hands. Beyond the presents, sending two girls of very high prestige was important. He knew that this had always been a last step (for the political dominance of an adversary).

Establishing relationships (through marriages) between nations, states and tribes has always been a very effective way among all to avoid conflicts, differences and to gain mutual strengths.

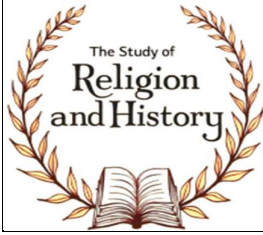
Khusro Pervez (the grandson of Noshervan) after getting defeated at the hands of Behram Chobin, when reached inside the boundaries of Roman Empire after crossing River Tigris, he was welcomed by King Maurice in the same manner. The king sent precious gifts to him and gave his daughter ‘Maria’ in marriage. He also helped him militarily against Behram Chobin and in this manner the Persian king regained throne.

When Alexander the Great was on his expedition, Dara wrote to him in similar manner and offered to be truce with him. He offered all western lands of Euphrates and his daughter in marriage. Although, Alexander, due his military might and war plans, did not accepted the offer despite his commander Parmenion strong recommendation. He replied to Dara that he had offered a portion of his land whereas he (Alexander) was the owner of all the land. As far as his daughter was concerned, he would marry her if he desired to do so, whether Dara would give consent or not. The war between the two took place and Alexander defeated Dara. His daughter also came to Alexander as a war captive. Upon his return from India when Alexander reached the palace city of Susa, he took the daughter of Dara in wedlock and made celebrations of the victory....

He also knew that the Prophet (peace be upon him) had himself established relationships and in that he had married daughters of the leaders of different clans; Juwairiah bint-e-Al-Harith, daughter of the leader of Bani Mustalaq; Safiyah bint-e Huyay, daughter of the leader of Jewish clan Bani Nuzair and Ramla bint-e Abi Sufiyan, daughter of the leader of Quraish, the main opponent tribe.

That’s why Heraclius annoyance on Muqawqis act was natural.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Maulana Sayed Hasan Musanna Nadwi, *Ummul momineen Sayeda Maria Qibtia*, (Maktaba Darul Ahsan 2010), 24.



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As evident from history marrying daughters of rulers was of extreme political significance. The Prophet's act of marrying Maria al-Qibtia had positive political outcomes with respect to Egypt, not only during his life but also after his demise, as we will see in this paper.

## **Strengthening peaceful relations with Egypt.**

The marriage of the Prophet with lady Maria al-Qibtia has a special significance to Egyptian royal history. Qazi Muhammad Suleiman Salman Mansoorpuri has written about this:

“Baby boy Ibrahim (Son of Prophet Muhammad) mother is Maria Qibtia who was Coptic. As Prophet Ibrahim contemporary Egyptian King offered her daughter's hand in marriage to him, likewise the Egyptian ruler (Muqawqis) sends lady Maria Qibtia to Prophet Muhammad.”<sup>22</sup>

The Prophet married Maria al-Qibtia and emphasized upon the Muslims to be compassionate with Egyptians once they would conquer Egypt after him:

‘I urge you for favor and kindness with the Egyptians, as with them we have relationship in law as well as through ancestors.’ (Tahawi, hadith no. 2364)

Sayed Hasan Musanna has written in explanation of the hadith as:

“According to Masoodi, by ancestor the Prophet meant lady Hajira, wife of Prophet Ibrahim and mother of Prophet Ismael, and by relation in laws he meant lady Maria Qibtia, mother of his son Ibrahim.”<sup>23</sup>

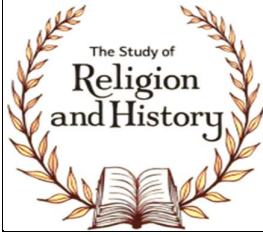
## **Demonstration of tolerance toward Christians and non-Arab communities.**

Egypt fell to Muslim forces in 642 C.E. (10 years after the Prophet had left), led by the companion of the Prophet, Amr bin al Aas. Amr in the light of Prophet's instructions treated the Egyptians with kindness as follows:

- a. He ordered freedom of religion to the majority Coptic population. He issued proclamation of safe conduct and invited Pope Benjamin I of Coptic church to return to Egypt from hiding, due fear of persecution by Byzantine authorities before the Muslim conquest. Upon his return, Benjamin was treated with respect by Amr bin al Aas, and he was able to resume his pastoral work.
- b. The Byzantine tax collection system was continued, however, with ease for the farmers.
- c. He guaranteed security to life and property of the populace.
- d. Existing Byzantine administrative structure, particularly at the local level continued.
- e. Elites and bureaucrats (often Coptic Christians) continued to handle taxation and daily administration under Muslim oversight.
- f. New garrison city, Fustat (near modern day Cairo) was established.

<sup>22</sup> Qazi Suleiman Salman Mansoorpuri, *RahmatullilAalameen*, (Darul Ishaat 2014), 294.

<sup>23</sup> Musanna Nadwi, Maulana Sayed Hasan, Ummul momineen Sayeda Maria Qibtia, maktaba Darul Ahsan 2010, 45.



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## **Strategic implications for early Muslim foreign relations.**

The conquest of Egypt and Muslim behavior after the conquest, under the Prophetic directions, had deep political effects for years to come. The initial period (around 642 C.E.) was characterized by a pragmatic, relatively low impact transition at the local level, but it set the foundation for the total Arabization and Islamization of the region over the following centuries.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The position of Maria al-Qibtiyya in Islamic tradition.**

Some traditions are indicative of Maria al-Qibtia status as a concubine of the Prophet. These traditions do not reach the level of 'Sahih' (authentic). On the other hand, there is an authentic tradition of Hakim (muhaddis, one who compiles traditions) which indicated that the Prophet married Maria al-Qibtia, who was sent towards the Prophet by Muqawqis.

Traditionally historians like Ibne sa'd, Ibne Hisham, Jareer al-Tabari had considered Maria al-Qibtia as a concubine of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

We have taken references from Quran to solve this dilemma.

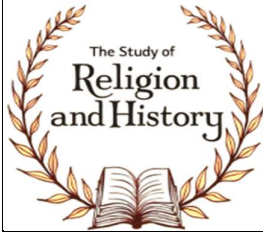
Quranic verse Al Ahzaab verse 50 specifically suggests that Prophet was allowed to have wives only and not concubines, unlike other Muslims who were allowed at that time to keep concubines. However, a woman prisoner of war, acquired by the Muslims as a war booty (Maal e Ghanimat) or as an enemy's asset given to Muslims without war (Maal e Fai) was allowed to the Prophet for marriage. Therefore, the Prophet married Maria Qibtia, just like he married lady Juwairiah and lady Safiah post wars of Bani Mustalaq and Khaibar respectively.

Abdullah Yousuf Ali in his commentary has amply highlighted the fact.

We have referred to that from Abdullah Yousuf Ali's commentary of Quran (verse 50 and 52 of Surah al Ahzaab).

Verse 50 translation with notes number in parenthesis:

“O Prophet! we have made lawful to thee thy wives to whom thou hast paid their dowers; And those whom thy Right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom Allah has assigned to thee; And daughters of thy paternal uncles and aunts and daughters of thy maternal uncles and aunts, who migrated (from Makkah) with thee; And any believing woman who dedicates her soul to the Prophet if the Prophet wishes to wed her; this only for thee, and not for the Believers (at large). We know what we have appointed for them as to their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess;— in order that there should be no difficulty for thee. And Allah is oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.”



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Verse 52 translation:

“It is not lawful thee (to marry more) women (3754) after this, nor to change them for (other) wives even though their beauty attracts thee, except any thy right hand should possess (as hand maidens): And Allah both watch Over all things.

3741 This presents no new exclusion or license. The verses 50-52 just affirms things about the specific conditions of the Prophet's marriages different from those of common Muslims. This is contemplated under four categories, which we shall evaluate as per following.

1. *Marriage with dower*: This is the common Muslim marriage. As for as the Prophet's case, there was no restriction to the number of four, and women of the people of the book (Ahl-e-Kitab) were not among His wives, but only believers. This is not explicitly mentioned here but has been assumed by His actual practice. Apparently, women who are expected to train other women in Islam must be Muslims.
2. *Women Prisoners of War*: The identical observation as in the last point. This point does not now arise, as the whole situations and events of war have been transformed and slavery has been eradicated by universal covenant.
3. *Those are first cousins, and not within the Forbade Grades of Marriage*. These are particularly mentioned here as forbidden. None of them could marry the Prophet unless she had performed the Hijrah (migration) with him, if she had not so performed it despite her close relationship, she could not be credited with any great fervor for Islam or be considered appropriate for training other women in Islam.
4. *A believing woman who offers her soul to the Prophet*: Apparently this case, like the last, is only valid for Prophet, and it is circumvented around with the curb that the Prophet deems it a suitable and proper case of true facility to the community and not just sentimental woman's chance. Some commentators think there was no such case. But others, with whom we agree, think that this relates to Zainab bint-e-Khuzaima, who had dedicated herself to the poor and was called the ‘Mother of the Poor’ (Ummul Masakin). Similarly, the last category (category 3) might possibly refer to Zainab bint-e-Jahsh, who was a daughter of the Prophet's paternal aunt, herself a daughter of Abd-ul-Muttalib.

3746. The common law of Muslim marriage will be formed primarily in Surah Baqarah 221-235, Surah Nisa 3-4, 19-25, 34-35, and Maida 6.

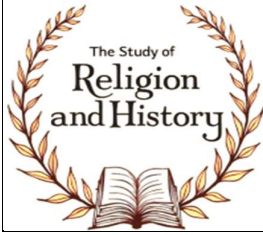
3754. This was uncovered in AH7. After that the Prophet did not marry again, except the handmaiden, Mary the Copt, who was sent as present by Christian Muqawqis of Egypt. She became the mother of Ibrahim, who died in infancy.<sup>24</sup>

This study interprets Qur’anic verses as supporting that Maria al-Qibtia was a wife of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

## **The concept of “Umme Walad” in Islamic law.**

<sup>24</sup> Abdullah Yousuf Ali, *Commentary of Holy Quran, Chapter ‘Ahzaab’, verse 50 and 52, p. 1258-1261.*

Accessed from: <https://archive.org/details/quran-english-translation-and-commentary-by-yusuf-ali/mode/2up>



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In Islamic jurisprudence a terminology is used for a concubine who give birth to his master's child and earns freedom upon the death of her master. This term had found its way in fiqh from local custom, when during Umayyad rule, after the Rashidun Khilafat, Muslim armies started making prisoners of wars as slaves and concubines. However, the term 'Umme walad' was historically and literally meant to describe a person's wife who was mother of his child. Sayed Hassan Mussan in his book 'Ummul Momineen Sayeda Maria Qibtia' has given very relevant examples to explain the actual meaning of the word 'Umme walad'. He has quoted two historical traditions, one in which the Prophet's wife Khadija-tul-Kubra was quoted as 'Umme Aulad un-Nabi' (mother of the Prophet's children) and another of Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib's wife (Umme Fazal) quoted as 'Umme walad' of Abbas (Musanna, 2010).

It is deduced that large scale concubinage started in Umayyad dynasty took refuge of this term for concubines who bore child of their masters.

## **Influence on Muslim-Christian relations in early Islamic history.**

The Prophet's marriage with Maria Qibtia, Mother of believers, as well as his marriage with Safiyah, Mother of believers, married after the fall of Khaibar gave impetus to Muslims to marry woman of Ahle Kitab (The People of the Book). Therefore, as Islam spread to European lands many Muslim soldiers as well as traders married Christian and Jew women. Therefore, an early form of globalization was demonstrated by the Muslims giving example of tolerance and peaceful co-existence with other communities.

## **Accounts of early Islamic historians.**

Early Islamic historians like Ibne Ishaq (d. 151 AH), Ibne Saad (d. 230 AH) and Jareer Al Tabari (d, 310 AH) have not included Maria Qibtia in the list of the wives of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him),<sup>25</sup> because of the confusion with respect to her status as a Prophet's wife.

## **Comparison with modern academic interpretations.**

Some revisionists are of view that the Prophet (peace be upon him) married Maria Qibtia upon her arrival to Madinah from Egypt. These include, Allama Shibli Noamani,<sup>26</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah,<sup>27</sup> Maulana Sayed Hassan Musanna,<sup>28</sup> and Muhammad Tanzeel Al Siddiqui Al Husaini.<sup>29</sup> However, almost all the orientalist following the early sources, no matter if the sources are weak, are of view that she was a concubine of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

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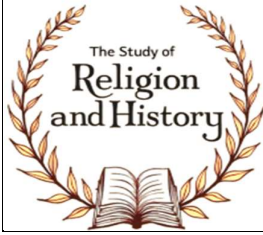
<sup>25</sup> Ibid, Pg 60-61

<sup>26</sup> Allama Shibli Noamani, *Seeratunnabi vol. 1*, (Maktaba-e-Islamia 2016), 319.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah, *Muhammad Rasoolullah (Translation Prof Khalid Pervez)*, (Beacon Books, 2017) 186.

<sup>28</sup> Maulana Sayed Hasan Musanna Nadwi, *Ummul momineen Sayeda Maria Qibtia*, (Maktaba Darul Ahsan, 2010), 76.

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad Tanzeel Al Siddiqui Al Husaini, *Preface to Ummul momineen Sayeda Maria Qibtia*, (Maktaba Darul Ahsan 2010), 6.



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These include Lesley Hazelton,<sup>30</sup> Karen Armstrong<sup>31</sup> and editors of Encyclopedia of Islam.<sup>32</sup>

## **Evaluation of authenticity and historical context.**

As we have learnt, there exists two views about Maria al-Qibtia, Mother of believers, status. This study interprets Qur'anic verses as supporting of the view that Maria al-Qibtia was a wife of the Prophet since her arrival to Madinah.

## **Examination of the claim that the relationship had purely political motives.**

All marriages of The Prophet (peace be upon him) were with specific aim and purpose. As we analyze the marriage with Maria al-Qibtia, we realize that in 7 AH when the Prophet was extremely busy with the spreading of divine messages, it did not seem prudent to marry a girl without some great purpose. Later events after the conquest of Egypt by the Muslims has proved that there was a pure political motive behind the marriage, a sign of the Prophet's foresightedness and political acumen.

## **Balancing spiritual, social, and political factors.**

All three factors, i.e. spiritual, social and political, are evident in the Prophet's action of marrying Maria Qibtia. A noble lady coming from far place to the Prophet, sent by a governor as a diplomatic gesture, cannot be given a better response than to marry her for better political outcomes. Socially, the marriage signaled the Muslims for peaceful co-existence with other nations coming to the fold of Islam in future. Politically there can't be a better choice to marry such a lady and instructing the followers for kindness with whole of her nation once it comes under direct rule of the Muslims.

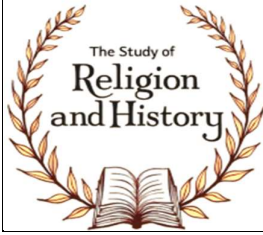
## **Misinterpretations in modern oriental and revisionist scholarship.**

There exists misinterpretation with respect to Maria Qibtia status in modern oriental and revisionist scholarship because revisionists take this event in the light of factual position of the status of Maria Qibtia. Muqawqis letter clearly indicated that the two girls, Maria and her sister Sireen, being sent were highly respected among the Copts. According to revisionists such words could not be used for concubines. Moreover, the revisionists have observed that they accepted Islam during the voyage to Madinah so they could only be accommodated after marriage in the new city. That happened when the Prophet took Maria Qibtia in his household certainly after marriage and Sireen was wedded to Hassan bin Sabit by the Prophet. She is either being a concubine or being inducted as a concubine is a far-flung idea for the revisionists. On the other hand, problem with modern orientalis is that they are more focused on historical narrative, not realizing the weakness of the same.

<sup>30</sup> Lesley Hazelton, *The First Muslim-The story of Muhammad*, (Riverhead Books 2013), 309.

<sup>31</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad-A biography of the Prophet*, (Phoenix Press paperback 1991), 236.

<sup>32</sup> *Encyclopedia of Islam Vol VI*, New Edition Edited by W.P Heinrichs, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel and C.H. Pellat, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1991, 575.



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## Findings

This study has been able to reach following key findings:

- The Prophet's call to Muqawqis to accept Islam was met with an amicable and a politically matured reply, sending honorable Maria Qibtia towards the Prophet as a goodwill gesture.
- The Prophet's wisdom and political acumen was reflective when he admitted Maria al-Qibtia in his household as his wife.
- The Prophet's instructions to Muslim conquerors of Egypt, for kind behavior with Coptic, showed great Islamic aspect of tolerance with other communities. It helped in understanding early Islamic diplomacy.
- Conquerors' kind behavior at the time of conquest under the Prophet's guidance, was helpful in the Arabization and Islamization of the region over the following centuries.
- Confusion with respect to Maria al-Qibtia with respect to her status as the Prophet's wife has been endeavored to be resolved with support of Quranic verses and their scholarly exegesis.

## Conclusion

The paper has been able to contribute towards gaining insight into the political aspect of 'Seerah' with respect to the marriage of the Prophet with one of His wives, Maria al-Qibtia. This aspect has not been discussed much in her case because of the confusion surrounding her status as a wife of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) marriage with Maria al-Qibtia was a well deliberated step having far reaching results on political landscape of Egypt. He was a messenger of Allah and a superb political leader. Famous historian Michael H Hart has termed him as the most influential person in the history of mankind. The reason he gave is as follows:

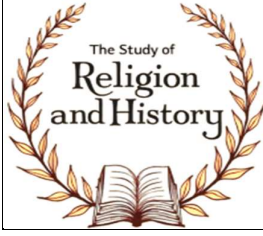
"He (Prophet Muhammad) was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and worldly levels.

Muhammad (PBUH) preached and promulgated the one and only world's great religion given by the Creator-Allah's and became an immensely effective political leader. Today, fourteen centuries after his death, his influence is still powerful and persuasive."

Future research may be directed towards study of detailed actions and their effects by the conqueror of Egypt, Amr bin al Aas, in the light of the Prophet's instructions, while dealing with the Coptic population.

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