



Published biannually by:
HADITH AND AQIDAH RESEARCH INSTITUTE (INHAD),
Selangor International Islamic University College (KUIS)
Email: jurnalhadis@kuis.edu.my
Web: www.jurnal.kuis.edu.my/hadis/
Bandar Seri Putra, 43600, Bangi, Selangor (Darul Ehsan) Malaysia.
Tel: 03-8911 7000 Ext: 6129/6130, Fax: 03-8926 6279
Vol. 13, No. 26 (December 2023)

The Role of Historical Reconstruction of Context and Historical Transformation of the Lexicon in the Understanding of Islamic Holy Traditions: A Case Study ‘Burying Girls Alive is the Sign of Honour’ (*Dafn al-Banāt min al-Makrumāt*)

Pouran Mirzaei
Sofia A. Koutlaki
Sedigheh Maleklou

1. Quran and Hadith, Quran and Hadith University, Iran, Tehran. mirzaee785@gmail.com. 09125547748.
2. PH. D of “The Persian system of politeness and the concept of face in Iranian culture” with some reference to EFL teaching to Iranian native speakers,” Cardiff University, UK, Language and Communication Research Centre. sakoutlaki@gmail.com.
3. PH. D of Quranic science and Hadith. somaleklou@gmail.com.

* Corresponding Author: mirzaee785@gmail.com

Keywords:

Burying girls alive,
Fabricated tradition,
Semantic transformation of
the word, Historical
reconstruction of context.

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of Hadith fabrication in Islam is an issue that has led to questioning the authenticity of every individual Hadith. It becomes more critical when a hadith appears ambiguous or contradicts rational judgment. However, to achieve the narrator's true meaning, we should pay attention to evidence, such as the semantic evolution of a word over time and the historical reconstruction of the context. The present study, with an analytical-descriptive method, aimed to show the impact of the evidence mentioned above on understanding the permissible burying girls alive that, regarding the inconsistency of its content with religious and rational findings, is fabricated. Based on the results, a different reading of the narrative text and a new understanding of words contradict the possibility of its fabrication. Regarding the reported historical events and the difference between the literal meaning of the term burying (*dafn*) and burying alive (*wa'd*) among the early Arabs, it does not imply a permissible burying of girls alive, instead emphasises father's presence in the girl's burial, struggling along with the false culture of ignorant Arabs.

Received: September 1, 2023

Accepted: October 1, 2023

Online Published: December 31, 2023

1. Introduction

The falsifiers' fabrication of Hadith is a factual matter in the history of Shiite and Sunni traditions, so no religious scholars deny such an ominous phenomenon. Throughout history, tradition-scholars have caused tradition-scholars to devote part of their scientific effort to isolating and presenting "Fabrication" narratives. But the researcher should not forget that the traditional emission is the principle unless a compelling reason contradicts it. Hence, it should evaluate all aspects of rejecting a tradition (Hadith), accept its fabrication, and cover all available scientific paths. It is what has been less noticed by some hadith scholars and has caused them to be more inclined to criticise and reject it by finding some complications in the traditional appearance.

A hadith that implies girls' burial (*dafn al-banāt min al-makrumāt*) is one of the traditions most scholars consider fabricated because of its content and inconsistency with religious and intellectual findings.

Previously, there has not been an independent article explaining the meaning of this tradition and the Shiite and Sunni scholar's approach;

In Islam, holy traditions (Hadith) contain reports of sayings, actions or tacit agreements of the Prophet and the Shi'a Imams; as such, they constitute the essential source of reference after the Quran in shaping an understanding of Islamic knowledge and experience of God, humanity and the created world. For Muslims, the hadith offers interpretations and clarifications of the Quran on ambiguous matters or issues that have not been expounded. The Islamic community's general view is that our knowledge of Islamic teachings is based on the Quran and the Hadith.

Islamic teachings are divided into beliefs, ethics, and applicable laws. In all three types, the Hadith fulfils the essential functions of reinforcing Quranic teachings, clarifying and expanding on Quranic teachings, and explaining issues that have not been dealt with in the Quran.

The Hadith is as important as the Quran guiding the Islamic community's beliefs and behaviour. It constitutes the field from which all other Islamic sciences grew. Because of their importance in shaping Muslims' beliefs and practices, the Hadith has been exploited by opportunists who sought to give legitimacy to their views by couching them in Hadith's style throughout history.

Therefore, hadith fabrication is such a well-known fact in Shi'a and Sunni hadith history that no Islamic scholars of any sect deny its occurrence. Throughout history, this issue has led to a large part of hadith scholars' time and effort on the identification and explication of fabricated (*mawḍū'*) Hadith. However, this fact should not lead hadith researchers to look at Hadith with scepticism. In principle, a text characterised as Hadith is a kind of solitary report (*Khabar wāḥid*) that should be assumed to be traceable to an infallible personage unless it can prove the opposite.

Thus, assessing all aspects of a Hadith and exploring all accessible academic avenues before rejecting a hadith because of presumed fabrication is necessary. As observed in many of their writings, our predecessors' method has committed the defence of hadiths as far as this was possible.

Let us consider two Shi'a scholars of Hadith. Sayyid Murtaḍā (d.436/1044), a rationalist among the earliest Shi'a scholars, or 'Allāmah Majlisī (d.1110/1698), who left behind considerable work on hadith commentary in the later era. In many cases, even after rejecting a hadith on rational and textual grounds, they still admit the possibility of its authenticity, even when dealing with Sunni hadiths, which shows the strength of their commitment.

For example, Sayyid Murtaḍā analyses a hadith found in Sunni sources, which appears thus: 'The deceased suffers punishment [in the other world] due to the living's crying'. After analysing it firstly with rational arguments and secondly based on the Quran and other traditions, he passes a judgment on the Hadith as being invalid and rejected, and, after a precise analysis of the difficulty in understanding it, he puts forward his own opinion on its denied status (*radd*). However, even though this Hadith does not appear in any Shi'a collections and the considerable faults he points out in it, the formulation of his opinion leaves the possibility of the Hadith's authenticity open in his readers' minds.

In particular, he says, 'We have no other choices except these two: either to disregard the apparent meaning of the Hadith as far as possible, since it is out of keeping with logical argumentation, and seek another interpretation (i.e., carry out *ta'wīl*) or to pronounce the Hadith invalid or rejected.' (*Tanzīh al-anbiyā'*:173). Following this, and contrary to his earlier criticism, he adds, 'if we accept the Hadith as valid; we can interpret it (i.e., carry out *ta'wīl*) in various ways.' He adopts a *ta'wīl* viewpoint to present a vigorous defence of the Hadith by putting forward four possible semantic aspects of the Hadith in such a way as to make the reader doubt his earlier rejection. (*Tanzīh al-anbiyā'*, p. 173. He also writes on the same Hadith in *Al-amālī* 2:43, where he only mentions one of the four semantic aspects).

In contrast with this stance, this attitude is not encountered often in today's academic research. Once a few issues in the understanding of ahadith are found, scholars tend to critique or even pronounce a hadith as fabricated.

1. Aims of this paper

This paper attempts to demonstrate how a prophetic tradition that appears to be out of keeping with Islam's teachings and has generally been regarded as fabricated can be re-read through alternative methods, such as consideration of context and lexicological data pragmatic theory. Such an analysis has far-reaching implications: when Islamic texts can be used and abused to justify bigotry and violence, this case study of a hadith exemplifies a different method of examination and analysis, which, in our view, applies to other Islamic texts.

To demonstrate our proposition, we have chosen the well-known prophetic tradition *dafn al-banāt min al-makrumāt*, which is usually translated as ‘the burial of girls [is considered] among bounties’ which has generally raised doubts in the minds of listeners as to what Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam may have meant by it. At face value, this utterance suggests that the Prophet praises the pre-Islamic Arab custom of burying girls alive. On the other hand, assigning this meaning to this pronouncement is at odds with the historical evidence of the Prophet’s positive and supportive attitudes towards females. Therefore, the alternatives open are an outright rejection of this tradition as fabricated or a search for another way of reading it.

This research will attempt to answer the questions mentioned above through three research strands:

- The semantics of the word *dafn* focus on the practice of live burial of girls among the Arabs;
- The application of classic pragmatics theory;
- The historical record of the context and the situational context in which the Prophet issued this Hadith.

It should also be mentioned that the analysis does not set out to prove whether the Prophet issued the utterance contained in this Hadith; it instead tends to examine the extent to which considerations of the semantics and the practical usage of the word at the time of the Hadith’s issuance, as well as the context of the utterance, are of paramount importance in its contemporary understanding and re-reading. We aim to demonstrate that a word that appears to contradict rational and textual evidence can be shown to be unproblematic and logical when examined under a different prism and, therefore, can cease to be considered objectionable.

2. History of and Views on this Hadith

2.1. The Origins of this Hadith in Shi’a and Sunni Sources

The early Shi’a sources contain no traces of this tradition. The oldest reference to this tradition is found in the *Bihār al-anwār*, which is considered among the late Shi’a sources. The writer of the *Bihār al-anwār* reports the existence of this Hadith and, quoting from Sunni sources, characterises it as fabricated. It should be mentioned that before ‘Allāmah Majlisī, a reference to this Hadith is contained in the Persian commentary of the book *Shahāb al-akhbār*, written by a Shi’a scholar in the seventh c AD/twelfth c AH. Because the beginning and the end of the book have not survived, the identity of the commentator remains unknown; however, from the editor’s preface to the Persian Commentary to the *Shahāb al-akhbār* (p. 1), it is known with some certainty that he was a Twelver Shi’a and that he wrote this work in 690 AH.

Since the commentary in this book is the oldest source among Shi’a writings on the *dafn ul-banāt* Hadith, the seventh century must be considered the earliest recorded time of the narration of this Hadith among the Shi’as.

However, this book is listed among Sunni and not Shi’a sources because it was written by Qāḍī Qoḍā’ī, a Shāfi’ī Sunni scholar. In contrast, a Shi’a scholar was only its commentator and not its author in the seventh/twelfth century. After the *Bihār al-anwār*, the books *Arba’ūna ḥadīthan* (47), *Nahāyat al-dirāya* (316, 317), *Rasā’il fī dirāyat al-ḥadīth* (2:62) and *Yād-dāsht hā-ī Ustād Muḥaḥhari* (5:253) also record this Hadith following the *Bihār al-anwār* narration. All the sources mentioned above record this Hadith as ‘*dafn al-banāt min al-makromāt*’, without including any other material before or after the actual text.

In addition, this Hadith appears in the following Sunni scholarly writings in this order: Commentary on Abu Ḥanīfah’s (d.150/767) *al-Musnad* (p 413); *Al-mu’jam al-kabīr* (11:290) and *Al-mu’jam al-owsat* (2:372); Ṭabarānī’s (d.360/970) *Musnad al-shāmiyyīn* (3:324-5); *Al-kāmil* (2:278) by Ibn’Adī (d. 365/975); *Shahāb al-akhbār* (hadith 196) by Qāḍī Qoḍā’ī (d.404/1013); *Tarīkh al-Baghdād* (5:271) by Khaṭīb Baghdādī (d.412/1021); *Al-istī’āb* (4:1839) by Ibn’Abd al-Bīr (d.463/1070); *Tarīkh-i madīnat al-Damishq* (27:7) by Ibn’Asākīr (d.571/1175); and *Al-muḍū’āt* (2:183-7) by Ibn Jowzī (d.597/1200). After these, later sources repeat previous references.

Contrary to Shi’a sources, Sunni sources differ somewhat from each other in recording this Hadith: although the standard part of this Hadith, i.e. the sentence ‘*dafn al-banāt min al-makromāt*’, is identical in all of them, most of the earlier sources include the hadith text preceded by a frequently short explanation: upon hearing the news of the passing of his daughter Ruqayya, wife of ‘Uthmān Ibn ‘Affān, the Prophet uttered the words, ‘Glory be to God; the burial of daughters [is considered] among bounties.’ In other sources, the explanation is more detailed, adding that the passing of Ruqayya happened at the same time as the Battle of Badr and that when Zayd ibn Ḥārith announced the victory at Badr and Ruqayya’s death to the Prophet, the latter uttered this sentence. However, in the later sources, the preceding sections on the situational context and other explanations have been omitted, and, similarly to the Shi’a sources, only the standard part of the Hadith, i.e. the utterance itself, is quoted, so obviously, this omission has influenced the way it has been understood. We will refer to the only source containing situational context below. In the following section, we look at the chain of transmission (*sanad*) and the context of this Hadith issuance (*sabab ṣudūr*) in more detail.

2.2. An Analysis of the Chain of Transmission



This Hadith is reported by two companions of the Prophet in the Sunni sources. One narrator is Ibn ‘Abbās, who has only been reported in respect of this tradition in the early Sunni sources through six transmission pathsⁱ. The other is Ibn ‘Umar, whose narration is only written by Ibn ‘Adī and Khaṭīb Baghdādī and has only one way of transmissionⁱⁱ. However, the different paths of both chains contain common narrators to whom all transmission paths converge. In the Ibn ‘Abbās chain of transmission, this common section appears as ‘Abu ‘Abdullah Ibn Aḥmad ibn Bashīr ibn Dhukhwān from Arāk ibn Khālīd from ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Aṭā al-Khurāsānī from his father from ‘Ikrama from Ibn ‘Abbās.’ The Ibn ‘Umar chain is recorded thus: ‘Muḥammad ibn Ma‘ammar from Ḥumaid ibn Ḥammād from Mas‘ar ibn Kadām from ‘Abdullāh ibn Dīnār from Ibn ‘Umar’. From these two chains, this Hadith has been reported since the period of the followers of the Prophet's companions, that is, from the time of Abu ‘Abdullah Ibn Aḥmad ibn Bashīr and Muḥammad ibn Ma‘ammar, before whom the transmission follows a single path of communication (*mufrad*).

According to Sunni scholars, apart from the isolated report (*tafarrud*) by ‘Arāk ibn Khālīd, the chain of transmission of the Ibn ‘Abbās narration is open to another two instances of weakness. Based on a narration by Abu Khātam Rāzī ‘Arāk’s message has been characterised as weak and unreliable. In addition, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Aṭā’s narration is considered invalid, and he is seen as a person on whose narration one cannot depend, based on Yahyā ibn Ma‘īn and Ibn Ḥabbān’s report on him. We should mention here that narrators at the later levels of Ibn ‘Abbās’ transmission have also been characterised as weak too; however, this issue lies outside the scope of this paper, which examines only the narrators of the early levels and the shared chain of transmission of Ibn ‘Abbās.

Ibn ‘Umar’s chain of transmission is weak on two counts. Firstly, on account of its being an isolated report (*tafarrud*) on the narration of Muḥammad ibn Ma‘ammar from Ḥumaid ibn Ḥammād, and secondly, because of the presence of Ḥumaid ibn Ḥammād who is accused of transmitting unreliable hadiths by reliable narrators.

Then this question arises: Is critique on the chain of transmission enough for the pronouncement of this Hadith as rejected or fabricated? We argue against this position, following Sunni and Shi‘a scholars who have not solely confined their analysis to the weakness of the transmission chain.

2.3. Viewpoints of Shi‘a and Sunni scholars on this Hadith

The Hadith under discussion has been characterised as fabricated and rejected by both Shi‘a and Sunni scholars. Most Shi‘a scholars have questioned it based on content, whereas Sunni scholars usually focus their criticism on the transmission chain. This section focuses on the complaints by these two groups in this order.

After pointing out that several Sunni scholars have written books on fabricated Hadith, ‘Allāmah Majlisī lists this Hadith among the fabricated ones referred to in these sources (*Majlisī*, 1403: 30/415). ‘Allāmah Majlisī characterises this Hadith as fabricated based on the opinion of Sunni scholars without adding any comment on its rejection or acceptability status, which suggests that he agrees with this position. Other scholars such as Sayyid Ḥassan Ṣadr and Ḥāfiḍiyyān Bābulī, following ‘Allāmah Majlisī, have repeated his report word for word (*al-Ṣadr*, 1351:316-7; Ḥāfiḍiyyān Bābulī, 1425: 2/62). On the other hand, Shaykh Bahāī rejects it because it contradicts Quran’s precise formulation with these words:

The attribution of such a superstitious, prejudiced view to infallible personages is incorrect. The Holy Quran condemns this barbaric practice with strong words, such as ‘when the girl buried-alive will be asked for what sin she was killed’ⁱⁱⁱ: ‘when one of them is brought the news of a female [newborn], his face becomes darkened, and he chokes with suppressed agony’ and warns of its inevitable outcome of torment in the afterlife. Therefore, this tradition is, without doubt, fabricated and has its roots in the custom of the Age of Ignorance (Bahāī Muḥammad ibn Husaīn, 1387:148).

Among contemporary Shi‘a scholars, Āyātullah Muṭaḥḥari writes thus:

This Hadith is fabricated. A prophet who described daughters as ‘mercy’ (*raḥma*) does not utter such a sentence. It is a poem taken from a proverb from the age of ignorance [*jāhiliyyah*, the period before the advent of Islam – authors’ explanation]. In addition, following Shaykh Bahāī, most contemporary researchers count the live burial of girls among the ugly customs of some Arabian tribes in the age of ignorance and condemn it in the light of Quranic evidence. Since this Hadith reflects this Arab custom of the age of ignorance, it is considered rejected (Muṭaḥhari, 1427: 5/253).

As it becomes clear from the opinions of eminent scholars, these two reasons, i.e., the apparent similarity of the content of this Hadith to the *jāhiliyyah* custom and its apparent contradiction with the Quran’s clear message from the body of criticism expressed in various ways and levelled at this Hadith by Shi‘a scholars, which fact has led to this Hadith’s losing all claims to authenticity (Mas‘ūdī, 1389: 1/261).

However, the commentator of the book *Shahāb al-akḥbār* is the only person among Shi‘a scholars who put forward an interpretation in defence of this Hadith. This writer is considered the first defender of this hadīth in writing, which should not be taken to mean that oral/verbal security of this hadīth is unlikely to have taken place. He says:



There is generosity/bounty in the burial of daughters because, as a result, sorrow and suffering increase; However, Imam Sadeq [the sixth Shi'a Imam] says that daughters are good deeds and boys are blessings: God awards divine rewards for good deeds while He holds accountable the recipients of benefits (PM – this Hadith is found in *A 'yān al-Shi'a*, n.d.: 1/673). This is why a believer who has a daughter and is fully committed to her undoubtedly receives divine rewards, while the parent of a boy runs the danger of ending up in hell.

In another tradition, the Prophet sat with his companions when a man entered their circle. After he whispered something to one of the companions, the companion was visibly upset. The Prophet said: 'What news?'. The man answered, 'Good information.' When the Prophet asked for a second time, the man continued: 'As I was leaving, my wife was in labour, and now this man has come with the news that she has given birth to a girl.' Then the Prophet said: 'May the earth embraces her and the sky cast its shadow over her, and God provide for her and be a fragrant flower for you to smell';ⁱⁱⁱ that is, may she be the comfort to your heart and the light of your eyes. Then he addressed the others, saying this: 'Whoever has one daughter has enough suffering; whoever has two, even more; whoever has three is exempted from jihad and war; whoever has four, may his tribe come to his aid and lend money to him'. When a daughter was born to the Prophet (PBUH), and his family was displeased, he said: 'What is the matter with you? The Highest provides her with sustenance, and she is my fragrant flower for me to smell' (*Shahāb al-akhbār*, hadīth no. 196). [PM – These Hadith are found in *Al Kāfi*, 1497: 6/5-6; *Man, lā yaḥḍuruh al-faqīh*, 1413: 3/482]

Moving on to Sunni tradition, older Sunni sources until the sixth c AH/eleventh century AD^{iv} mention this Hadith without critique. Not even one of these sources characterises it as doubtful or fabricated. However, the appearance of Ibn Jowzī's bookmarked the beginning of the criticism and characterisation of this Hadith as fabricated. From then on, scholars such as Ṣāghānī, Suyūṭī, Dhahabī, Fatanī, Showkānī, Albānī, 'Ijlūnī and others, following Ibn Jowzī, considered it rejected and fabricated.^v

Among the Sunni scholars, Manāwī puts forward an interpretation other than a fabrication; his explanation shows that he accepts the text of this Hadith. In his clarification on its content, he considers the burial of a daughter by a father a good attribute through which God honours fathers. He writes: "The burial of daughters is a good attribute through which God honours fathers. Indeed, the best groom is the grave because a daughter is a man's honour, she is weak because she is a woman and is dependent, her upkeep is expensive and attracts those with evil intentions towards one's home" (Manāwī, 1415: 3/712). His interpretation has its roots in the age of ignorance mindset and reinforces the same problems raised previously on this Hadith and its incompatibility with the Prophet's merciful view.

According to Ibn Āshūr, another Sunni commentator, the Prophet's statement should be seen as a criticism of the beliefs of the age of ignorance, not as a recommendation. In his explanation of the content of the Hadith, he adds: 'This is the most famous verse of the Age of Ignorance' (Ibn Āshūr, n.d.: 14/71). This implies that he understands *dafn al-banāt* as the live burial of girls since the Prophet may have used this expression in disapproval of the practice of age of ignorance, not as confirmation of his view. In light of this interpretation, no further objections remain to reporting this statement.

Many Shia and Sunni scholars rejected this tradition as fabricated may lie because they had no access to the generally omitted from the authoritative hadith collections. The section of the Hadith containing situational information appears only in Ibn 'Abd ul Birr's *Al Isti'āb*, which is classified among the Sunni biographical references of Muslim dignitaries and narrators of traditions (*rijāl* works) and not among hadith collections. We argue that because most scholars lacked access to all available sources, they did not consider the possibility that valuable information on the background information of this Hadith might be found in a book other than a hadith collection. However, with today's advanced options for extensive searches across many sources afforded by modern technology, such obstacles are removed. Hadith researchers can access vast collections of works at a click of a mouse. The wide availability of these technological possibilities has important implications for re-reading Hadith and other Islamic texts.

We have so far reviewed the views of both Shi'a and Sunni scholars on the rejection or the explanation of the content of this Hadith. In the next section, we present two reasons that form the basis of another meaning that can be extracted from this Hadith; these can do away with the reservations expressed and the criticisms raised so far in reading this Hadith.

3. Our Analysis

3.1. Vocabulary Analysis of the Hadith Text

To understand the content of the Hadith, our analysis will now focus on the individual elements and the equivalents employed in its translation and interpretation.

In this Hadith, the word *dafn* is usually translated and understood as ‘burial of live girls’, which conjures images of the *jāhiliyya* practice. However, research into the meaning of this lexical item in the *jāhiliyya* period and the time of the Prophet (PBUH) presents a different picture. Our research indicates that *dafn al-banāt* was not used to refer to the *jāhiliyya* custom of the live burial of girls at the time, for which *wa’d al-banāt* was used.

The verb *was’ada – ya’idu – was’dan* in Arabic means ‘burying girls alive from fear of their bringing shame onto the family’. Under this entry, Arabic lexicons mention ‘Whenever a girl was born to an Arab, he buried her until she died, out of fear of shame and neediness; this action is referred to with the words *wa’d al-banāt* – *ya’idu – was’dan – maw’ūda*’ (Farāhidī, 1410: 8/97). It has also been mentioned that *wa’d al-banāt* means ‘killing daughters’ because Arabs at the age of ignorance buried girls alive (Ṭurāihī, 1375: 3/153; *Lisān al-‘Arab* 3:442). From this, we can safely conclude that Arabs used words and expressions other than *dafn ul-banāt* to refer to the live burial of girls. In addition, close attention to the usage of the phrase *dafn* indicates that the word was used about a dead, not a living person (Farāhidī, *ibid*: 8/50; Ibn Manẓūr, 1414: 13/155; Ṭurāihī, *ibid*: 6/247).

Arabic distinguishes the burial of a dead person from a living one. Since such precision and care are always present in Arabic discourse, we have no other option than to assume this has been the case in the Hadith under examination. Therefore, the ‘live burial of girls for fear of bringing shame onto the family’ was named *wa’d*.

The Quran itself supplies more evidence. This shameful tradition is referred to using derivatives from the same root, for example, in Q. 81:8 *mawwūda*, which confirms Arabic lexical usage.^{vi} However, supporting evidence is not confined to the Holy Quran and dictionaries. Numerous traditions of the Prophet that refer to or forbid this practice use the word *wa’d*. In Shi’a sources: “The Prophet (PBUH) forbade several things, including the live burial of girls (*wa’d al-banāt*)” (Ṣadūq, 1361: 280; *Majlisī, ibid*: 73/344). The same reproachable act is referred to in numerous Sunni sources, which seem to have been the base of the Shi’a ones (see, for example, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, 1419: 4/246; *‘Abd al-Razzāq, n.d.*: 10/440; *al-Bukhārī*, 1419: 3/78 and 8/143; *Muslim*, 1419: 5/ 131; *Dāramī*, 1426: 2/311; *al-Nisā’ī, 1411*: 6/103).

From the above, it becomes clear that the word *dafn* is never used in the Quran and the Hadith to mean ‘live burial’, nor do Arabic dictionaries list such usage. Therefore, there are no grounds to assume that *dafn* meant ‘live burial’, and thus *dafn* cannot simply be employed in the place of *wa’d* since each signifies a different concept in Arabic.

Before examining this Hadith in terms of situational context, we take a brief look at a seminal pragmatics text that has a bearing on our analysis.

3.2. Paul Grice's Co-operative Principle (CP, 1967, 1975)

Grice, whose work proved influential in pragmatics (the study of language in context), was interested in how a hearer moves from understanding the literal to understanding implied meaning. The basis of Grice’s theory is that interactants in conversation strive to achieve common goals, which pre-supposes their cooperative behaviour, expressed in terms of the Cooperative Principle (CP): ‘Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged’ (1975:45).

The CP comprises four maxims:

- A. Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange); do not make your gift more informative than is needed;
- B. Quality: Try to make your actual contribution one; do not say what you believe to be false; do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence;
- C. Relation: Be relevant;
- D. Manner: Be perspicuous: avoid obscurity of expression; avoid ambiguity; be brief (avoid necessary prolixity); be orderly.

We will now proceed to a semantic analysis of the Hadith under discussion in light of this pragmatic theory and the available situational information.

3.3. Semantic analysis of the Hadith in the light of the situational context and the grounds for issuance

The basic assumption in hadith analysis is that the Prophet and other Infallibles intended to cooperate with their utterance and convey a clear, unambiguous message, which would keep with their pastoral role. Ten centuries before the development of pragmatics, Shi’a scholars such as Shaikh Ṭūsī, Shaikh Kulāinī and Shaikh Ṣadūq, even as early as the third c AH/tenth c AD, focused on the importance of the grounds of issuance (*sabab ṣudūr*) and the historical and cultural context of a hadith as one of the important ways of hadith analysis and understanding.



This focus is rooted in the awareness that text has reached us through the written medium with the passage of centuries. Because of the strong likelihood that lexical items have different meanings from the ones they have today at the time of the Hadith's issuance, consideration of other evidence is of paramount importance. Among the numerous factors influencing our understanding are the effects of grammatical and syntactical structures and the employment of literary and rhetorical devices such as metaphors, similes, proverbs, irony and innuendo. In short, understanding a hadith does not occur in a vacuum and without considering linguistic, literary, historical, and situational factors.

Among the weightiest pieces of evidence in understanding the intention of an Infallible personage's statement is the event after which or the context in which the Hadith was issued. In most cases, the re-narration of the utterance, omitting the situational information and the grounds of issuance (*taqtī'*), can cause a profound misunderstanding of the Hadith. As already mentioned, inquiry into the earlier sources reporting the *dafn al-banāt* Hadith indicates that its later transmissions suffered from separating contextual information and the Hadith itself. This fact gave rise to misgivings in the intention of the utterance.

The reports containing information on the situational context exclude the possibility of *dafn* being taken to mean 'live burial' because the reference is to a dead person. In other words, as soon as the Prophet hears the news of Ruqayya's passing, he utters this statement. It is impossible to interpret it as referring to a live burial since this would render it irrelevant to the context, thus violating Grice's principle of relevance.

The alternative interpretation leads the analysis down an illogical path. Upon hearing the news of his daughter's death, the Prophet expressed regret that he had not buried his daughter before she died. But she had not done anything to incur shame upon her family, which might be interpreted as justification for the Prophet's words being interpreted as 'live burial'. Such an interpretation implies that the prophetic utterance violates quantity and manner maxims.

Therefore, there is no alternative but to interpret this statement of the Prophet as an expression of his feelings upon hearing the sad news. The phrase 'Praise be to God' at the beginning of the utterance must be seen as an expression of the Prophet's gratitude towards God at a difficult time; otherwise, there would be no logical connection between the three parts of this report, i.e., the Prophet's hearing the sad news; his expression of praise towards God; the utterance *dafn al-banāt min al-makrumāt*.

Based on the above, an alternative equivalent for the expression needs to be found. In our view, taking into account the literal meaning of the word *dafn* in Arabic usage, the replacement of the original meaning 'burial' instead of the mistranslation 'live burial' assumes legitimacy since it does not carry the negative connotations and is in keeping with the situational and linguistic context, as well as Grice's Co-operative Principle and the Prophet's attitude towards female offspring as documented through other sources.

Reports from the Prophet's life tell the story of his struggle against the culture and customs of the Age of Ignorance. Many hadiths show that daughters enjoyed a special place in his heart and that he treated them with extraordinary kindness. Other narrations spoke of the father's unique position accorded to male and female offspring and stressed the importance of treating them equally. Therefore, this distinction between daughters and sons, emphasising the latter, must be considered meaningful. Indeed, it can be read in no other way than this: not only is the Prophet's utterance utterly unrelated to the *jāhiliyya* custom but it should also be seen as an expression of the struggle against it and as a contribution to the establishment of a culture of kindness and benevolence of a father towards his daughter. In this light, the characterisation of a daughter's burial as a bounty and a good deed for a father is meant to bring into relief the special status of daughters in Islam; in fact, this narration goes as far as attempting to eliminate the erroneous *jāhiliyya* belief of considering girls as a source of shame for the family by deliberately referring to the burial of daughters rather than that of the offspring of either gender.

Another critical point to consider is that this is a historical narration. The sources refer to the Prophet's absence from his daughter's burial, thus: "The Prophet was not present at Ruqayya's funeral." (*al-Ṣafadī, 1420: 14/95*).

This fact prevents us from attributing the meaning of the 'burial' of a daughter by her father to his words and characterising the burial as a bounty since the Prophet did not bury his daughter himself. Instead, the reference is to the funeral ceremony, including the burial, as opposed to the actual act of burial. The report mentions that the Prophet uttered this statement as soon as he heard the news of Ruqayya's passing. The Prophet could also express his sadness at not having been present at Ruqayya's burial, which would have been a bounty for him.

Therefore, it may be for this reason that the Sunni commentators did not take a critical view of this Hadith until the sixth c AH/eleventh c AD. We can safely conclude that until then, the Hadith had been quoted along with its introductory section, which prevented misunderstandings. After the inappropriate interruption (*taqtī'*) in the transmission of the essential part, the utterance *dafn al-banāt min al-makrumāt* on its own was reminiscent of the *jāhiliyya* custom of burying girls alive, which contradicted Quranic precepts and prophetic teachings and life example. To resolve this apparent contradiction, scholars saw no alternative but to either pronounce it rejected (*mardūd*) or undertake *ta'wīl*.



4. Conclusion and implications

In this paper, we have demonstrated that to arrive at an accurate understanding of a religious/historical text (as indeed of any text), one needs to exercise caution in opting for the most obvious meaning. At first glance, the Hadith we examined presents readers with a problem: the Prophet, who expended great effort in eradicating pre-Islamic notions of women and female offspring and establishing a culture of respect towards them, is reported to be praising their live burial. This apparent illogicality led scholars to pronounce this Hadith as fabricated. However, we took another path toward re-reading. We examined alternative meanings based on lexicographical data, situational information (*sabab ṣudūr*) and pragmatics theory, thus preventing the need to consider this Hadith fabricated and falsified.

This analysis should be seen as a sample of the kind of analysis that can (should?) be used to arrive at the correct understanding of a hadith and other religious texts. In today's world, where religious bigots can (ab)use religious texts to support erroneous beliefs or justify violent actions, the implications of applying such linguistic and contextual analysis in dissipating misconceptions and misunderstandings are all too clear.

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Published biannually by:
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Vol. 13, No. 26 (December 2023)

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ⁱ. *Al- mu'jam al-owsaṭ* 2:372; *Al-mu'jam al-kabīr Musnad al-shāmiyyīn* vol. 3:324-5; *Al-kāmil* vol. 2:278; *Tarīkh al-Baghdād* vol. 5:271; *Al-istī'āb* vol. 4:1739; *Tarīkh-i madīnat al-Damishq* vol. 27:7

ⁱⁱ. *Al-kāmil fi du'afā al-rijāl* 2:278; *Tarīkh al-Baghdād* 7:301

ⁱⁱⁱ. *Al Kāfi* 6:5-6; *Man lā yaḥḍuruh al-faqīh* 3:482

^{iv}. *Sharḥ-i musnad Abi Ḥanīfah* 413; *Al-mu'jam al-kabīr* 11:290; *Al- mu'jam al-owsaṭ* 2:372; *Musnad al-shāmiyyīn* 3:324-5; *Al-kāmil* 2:278; *Tarīkh al-Baghdād* 5:271; *Al-istī'āb* 4:1839; *Tarīkh-i madīnat al-Damishq* 27:7

^v. *Al-muḍū'āt* 2:173-8; *Al-dur al-multaqiṭ* 24, no 18; *Al-laāli al-maṣnū'a* 1:309; *Tarīkh al-Islam* 18:308-9; *Tadhkirat al-muḍū'āt* 217-8; *Al-favā'id al-majmū'a* 217; *Al-silsilat al-ahādīth al-ḍa'īfat wa al muḍū'a* 1:165; *Kashf al-khifā'* 2:439

^{vi}. 'When the female (infant) buried alive [*maw'ūda*] is questioned'