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Book Review

Review of Muntasir Zaman's The Height of Prophet Adam: At the Crossroads of Science and Scripture

Muhammed Shibili*

The question of Adam's height has been a subject of interest among both classical and modern scholars. The interpretation of the prophetic hadith associated with this issue has generated extensive discussion, particularly concerning the apparent meaning of the hadith text in light of rational considerations and contemporary scientific findings. Hence, the topic remains a notable area of debate within the broader discourse on the interaction between revelation, reason, and modern knowledge.

Muntasir Zaman's work *The Height of Prophet Adam: At the Crossroads of Science and Scripture* was published by Beacon Books and Media Ltd in Oldham, United Kingdom, in 2022. The work comprises 174 pages and investigates the eminent hadith concerning the height of Prophet Adam in light of classical hadith scholarship, archaeology, biology, and the philosophy of science.

The book examines the authenticated hadith reports concerning the height of Prophet Adam as recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, the two most authoritative collections in the Sunni Hadith tradition. These narrations describe Adam as having been sixty cubits in height- approximately twenty-eight meters (ninety feet) and further indicate that the stature of humankind has since been decreasing.

The prevalent intense academic studies concerned with archaeological and scientific empirical enquiries raise controversy with the literal meaning of particular Hadith texts. The book consists of an

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introduction which covers preliminary topics associated with the conflict resolution of problematic Hadith. Rather than adopting a conventional chapter-based organization, the book is structured predominantly into two parts, each comprising a number of interconnected subsections that progressively develop the author's argument. The author refuses to reject Hadith by positing reasonable flaws espoused by the revisionist school of thought, as well as overlooking anything associated with scientists without explicit evaluation of scriptural hermeneutics. In contrast, he accepts the way of three tired model of conflict resolution, the robust framework coined by traditional Islamic scholarship.

In the Introduction, the author examines critically some unwarranted scholastic discourse on reason vs revelation and proposes a balanced stand highlighting profound scholarly objections to dogmatic scientism and an unfeasible interpretive approach on scriptural texts. It also explores probabilistic and definitive knowledge to evaluate the epistemic weight of evidence before venturing into the process of conflict resolution.

It also delves into divisions of Hadith reports, and he states that, in spite of these measures to scale authenticity, Hadith scholars were acquainted with the conversation surrounding the epistemic spectrum of reports. He adduces Ibn Khuzaymah's rejection of the hadith stating that Adam was created in the image of the Most Merciful.

Additionally, the author attempts to correct the notion of the existence of a binary of science and scripture and proposes that it should be reframed as a conflict between the authority of specific evidence from each source. He highlights interpretive flexibility within the tradition while presenting multiple comments attributed to classical scholars on such problematic Hadith, like Imam Shafi, who said that we can determine whether a Hadith is true or false if the transmitter relates what cannot possibly be the case, or what is contradicted by information that is better authenticated and is more indicative of the truth. Furthermore, He examines the prevalent narration that ancient people owned longevity as a reinforcement of argumentation of immense height, as well as questioning that narration itself by proving scarcity of incredible evidence. Ultimately, He stops a little bit of description on Isrā'īliyyāt reports.

Later, he begins the first part by arguing that the process of resolving conflict should be undertaken only when the scriptural evidence is explicitly authoritative. Through a precise evaluation of scriptural hermeneutics, he contends that most of reports are either not reliably transmitted and or are based on *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Furthermore, he observes that the Quranic verses which denote unique length of some ancient societies were dramatically exaggerated.

The author demonstrates archaeological and scientific findings which seems to conflict with the textual meaning of Hadith. Archaeologically, he states the record high in the trajectory of average human height is nearly 1.7 meters. Although it agrees that human height varied over time, it is proven that the case was not in a linear fashion. Through exploring the scientific lens of this issue, he considers very basic reasons from biology and physics that preclude the possibility of humans reaching such height. He insists on this argument based on Galileo's cube-square law, which explains that the weight grows faster than strength when size increases. For instance, if a normal human were enlarged to 90 feet while keeping the same proportions, the body would become so heavy that the bones and muscles would likely be unable to support it. So, the author clears from a biological and engineering perspective that a 90-foot human would require a very different body structure than an ordinary human. Through demonstrating the hardship of the literal meaning of the Hadith by positing an epistemically equal state of both pieces of two evidences, he admitted applying three tired model of conflict resolution in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Ultimately, He provides an evident description of a nuanced harmonistic way of dealing with some similar Hadith which conflicts empirical knowledge.

The second part explores three tired model as he introduces harmonization as a primary method of conflict resolution of scriptural texts, when confronted with purportedly definitive scientific evidence. With regard to the narration that Prophet Adam was sixty cubits tall, a multitude of interpretive approaches have been advanced. Some scholars maintain that the reported height pertains to Adam's state in Paradise. However, this interpretation raises questions concerning the subsequent clause of the narration, which states that humankind has continued to decrease in stature from that time until the present day. To

address this apparent difficulty, the author draws upon the views of several contemporary scholars. Simultaneously, other scholars interpret the statement as a hyperbolic expression rather than a literal description of Adam's physical height, along with some other interpretations.

As part of his second method of conflict resolution, namely prioritization, he conducts a detailed analysis of various lines of transmission of this particular Hadith. Based on this examination, he concludes that the exclusion outweighs the inclusion of disputed clauses. At last, the author considers the suspension of judgment as the final method of conflict resolution, a methodological approach adopted by scholars when available hermeneutical techniques fail to provide a satisfactory reconciliation of the evidence.

The author's methodology for addressing problematic hadith reports is particularly noteworthy. Rather than proceeding directly to the question of reconciliation, he first undertakes a careful examination of dimensions of the alleged conflict, thereby determining whether a resolution is substantively required. Only after establishing the necessity of reconciliation, he engages in a detailed analysis of the available methods of conflict resolution. This systematic approach provides a balanced framework for addressing apparent tensions between scriptural texts and external evidence.

Furthermore, the book's extensive engagement with premodern scholarly discussions significantly strengthens its argument. By highlighting the continuity between classical and contemporary approaches, the author seeks to demonstrate that modern scholars have not introduced an entirely novel problem concerning this hadith. Rather, many of their interpretive strategies represent a continuation of discussions and solutions already articulated within the premodern scholarly tradition.

A major strength of the book is the comprehensiveness of its methodological framework. Instead of confining his analysis to scientific discussions, the author systematically examines a broad spectrum of relevant evidence from diverse sources to formulate a precise conclusion.

Moreover, the author elucidates numerous scientific pieces of evidence, demonstrating the depth of his scrutiny in assessing authentic

hadith, which strengthens his argument and limits potential grounds for criticism of his approach.