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Constructing Historical Narrative between the Hadith Scholar's Criterion and the Historian's Perspective: A Critical Study of Mahdi Rizqullah's *The Prophetic Biography in Light of Its Original Sources*

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Abstract

This study sheds light on the distinctive renewal-oriented scholarly experience of Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad in his book *The Prophetic Biography in Light of Its Original Sources*, which represents a mature and comprehensive model of contemporary writing on the Prophetic biography. The central problem addressed by this approach concerns the author's success in disentangling the methodological relationship between two principal schools: the historical school (akhbār transmitters), which is concerned with maintaining the continuity of the narrative context and with the historian's commitment to presenting a complete picture of the story and encompassing its backgrounds, and the hadith school, which adheres to the rigorous rules of hadith scholars in scrutinizing chains of transmission and examining texts on the basis of caution and verification.

This integrative methodological approach is manifested in three principal features:

1. Chain-of-transmission verification within the narrative context: Integrating sound and acceptable reports into a coherent narrative fabric without causing an abrupt disruption in the flow of events, while marginalizing or excluding reports whose weakness or contradiction with established principles has been established.
2. Reconstructing the historical picture through structural criticism: Moving beyond the mere apparent acceptance or rejection of reports toward constructing an integrated historical picture based on the strongest reports, thereby achieving a delicate balance between the "precision of the hadith scholar" and the "comprehensiveness of the historian."



3. Adapting the scholarly method to the educational purpose: Presenting historically and scientifically refined material without depriving it of its affective appeal or its spiritual and educational value.

The study concludes that Mahdi Rizqullah's method constitutes an "epistemological bridge" through which he succeeded in preserving the authenticity of the Islamic historical heritage while subjecting it to the highest standards of modern scholarly criticism. This made his book a reliable reference that combines confidence in its sources with analytical depth.

Keywords: Prophetic biography; Mahdi Rizqullah; hadith criticism; historical narrative; hadith scholars and historians; structural criticism; historical methodology.

Introduction

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds, and may blessings and peace be upon the noblest of the prophets and messengers, our Prophet Muhammad, and upon his family and all his Companions. To proceed:

The purified Prophetic biography constitutes the practical and embodied application of the rulings and values of Islam, as well as the historical setting in which revelation was sent down and within which the features of the first Islamic state and society took shape. Hence, documenting the Prophetic biography acquired exceptional significance in Islamic thought. It was not merely a record of events that had passed or biographies of people of the past; rather, it has been and remains a source of guidance, an interpretive aid to the Qur'anic text, and a practical exposition of the Prophetic Sunnah.

Nevertheless, the documentation of the Prophetic biography has historically witnessed a methodological tension between two principal schools in the Islamic heritage: the school of hadith scholars, founded on rigor, caution, and criticism of chains of transmission, and the school of akhbār transmitters and historians, founded on narrative continuity and the completion of the overall picture of the historical event. This tension has generated a contemporary methodological problem: one group calls for purifying the Prophetic biography and restricting it to what has been authenticated through a connected chain of transmission meeting the standards of hadith scholars, whereas another group maintains that subjecting the entirety of the Prophetic biography to the complex conditions of hadith scholars would fragment its historical fabric and eliminate facts and contexts indispensable to a comprehensive understanding of the course of the prophetic mission.

Amid this contemporary tension, serious attempts have emerged to disentangle the methodological relationship and bridge the gap between the hadith scholar's objective and the historian's perspective. The renewal-oriented experience of Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad in his reference work *The Prophetic Biography in Light of Its Original Sources: An Analytical and Critical Study* is one of the most mature and comprehensive of these attempts in addressing the problem. The author sought to present a foundational formulation that combines the rigor of the hadith critic in scrutinizing source material with the historian's broader perspective, concerned with the coherence of the narrative and the completeness of its features, without neglecting the educational and faith-oriented purpose for which the Prophetic biography was produced.

Research Problem

The problem addressed by this study is defined by the following central question: How did Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad reconcile the rigor of hadith criticism with the historian's concern for the completeness of the narrative context in the corpus of the Prophetic biography? What methodological and foundational controls did he adopt to disentangle the two approaches without compromising the authenticity of transmission or undermining the historical structure?

This problem gives rise to the following questions:

- What is the nature of the methodological and purposive difference between the historian's concern for a complete picture and the hadith scholar's caution regarding the authenticity of transmission?
- How did Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah integrate chain-of-transmission verification and hadith criticism into the fabric of historical narrative without causing an abrupt interruption in the text?
- To what extent did his structural conception of criticism succeed in reconstructing the historical picture while preserving the educational and spiritual impact of the Prophetic biography?

Significance of the Study

This study derives its significance from the following considerations:

- It addresses a precise methodological issue in research methodologies concerning the Prophetic biography, one that occupies the attention of researchers and historians in contemporary Islamic studies.
- It highlights a mature applied model that succeeded in avoiding both excess—random acceptance of weak reports—and deficiency—the historical fragmentation resulting from rigid adherence to the apparent implications of chains of transmission.
- It offers a foundational approach that may contribute to formulating a contemporary methodology for writing the Prophetic biography and Islamic history more generally.

Research Method

The study adopts the inductive-analytical method to examine Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah's methodology through his book and to trace its practical applications, while employing the comparative method to evaluate and compare the approaches of hadith scholars and historians in dealing with historical events.

Proposed Research Structure

The article consists of an introduction, three principal sections, each divided into two subsections, a conclusion, and a bibliography, according to the following structure:

- **Introduction:** (general framework, research problem, significance of the topic, methodology adopted, and research structure).
- **Section One:** The Theoretical Foundation of the Duality of Criticism and Narrative in the Corpus of the Prophetic Biography.
 - **Subsection One:** The Functional Distinction between the Historian's Concern for a Complete Picture and the Hadith Scholar's Caution in Transmission.
 - **Subsection Two:** Criteria for Accepting Historical Reports and the Scope of Leniency among Early Scholars.

- **Section Two: The Methodological and Foundational Features of *The Prophetic Biography in Light of Its Original Sources*.**
 - **Subsection One:** Chain-of-Transmission Verification within the Narrative Context and Addressing the Disruption of Historical Flow.
 - **Subsection Two:** Structural Criticism and the Reconstruction of the Historical Picture in the Work of Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah.
- **Section Three: The Educational Dimensions and Methodological Evaluation of the Experience.**
 - **Subsection One:** Educational Adaptation of Scientifically Refined Material without Undermining Its Affective Value.
 - **Subsection Two:** Evaluation of the Experience: The Limits of Reconciliation between Hadith Rigor and Historical Comprehensiveness.
- **Conclusion:** Including the principal findings and recommendations.
- **Bibliography.**

Section One: The Theoretical Foundation of the Duality of Criticism and Narrative in the Corpus of the Prophetic Biography

The relationship between the methodology of hadith scholars and that of historians in the Islamic heritage is complementary in terms of their overarching purpose, yet it entails a marked divergence in their particular tools and objectives. To understand Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad's critical approach, it is necessary to deconstruct this relationship, clarify the fundamental point of divergence between the two groups, and determine the extent to which the early scholars of the Muslim community recognized this distinction.

Subsection One: The Functional Distinction between the Historian's Concern for a Complete Picture and the Hadith Scholar's Caution in Transmission

The starting point for understanding the contemporary methodological problem between the hadith school and the historical school lies in recognizing the **"functional and purposive divergence"** of each. This divergence does not stem so much from a contradiction between standards as from the difference in the objective pursued by each group.

First: The Objective of the Hadith Scholar (Safeguarding Revelation and the Principle of Caution)

The hadith critic approaches transmitted reports from the standpoint of his primary function: preserving the religion and protecting the Shari'ah from foreign elements and fabrication. Since the actions, statements, and tacit approvals of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) constitute a second source of legislation after the Noble Qur'an, the hadith scholar approaches the text with a high degree of caution and critical rigor (al-'Itr, 1997, pp. 29–33).

- **Priority of Establishing the Authenticity of Transmission:** The hadith scholar gives priority to establishing the soundness and continuity of the chain of transmission and the integrity and precision of its transmitters, while ensuring that the text and chain are free from irregularities and defects that would undermine their validity.
- **Acceptance of Historical Gaps:** The hadith scholar does not object to the Prophetic biography appearing as a series of discontinuous events or containing temporal and contextual gaps, so long as the material accepted by him has met the rigorous

standard of chain criticism (al-‘Umarī, 1989, pp. 12–15). His basic principle is to suspend judgment or exclude a questionable report rather than accept a report that has not been established through a connected chain of transmission, as a precaution against attributing to the Prophetic status anything that has not been authentically established.

Second: The Historian’s Perspective (Reconstructing the Scene and Completing the Context)

On the other hand, the historian and akhbār transmitter, such as Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidi, and Ibn Sa’d, proceeds from a somewhat different objective: **reconstructing the historical event and interpreting the movement of society and prophethood** (al-Dūrī, 2005, pp. 23–28).

- **Priority of the Complete Overall Picture:** A historical event consists of causes, preliminaries, geographical circumstances, human and political motivations, and consequences. If details and particulars—some of which may be transmitted through chains containing minor weaknesses or through mural reports and letters—are omitted, the historical scene loses its coherence, and the story appears fragmented and incomprehensible within its complete human and historical context (al-Asad, 1988, pp. 67–70).
- **Repairing Narrative Gaps:** The historian seeks to gather the various parts of the story and combine reports—that is, to bring them together so that they form a unified fabric—in order to repair narrative gaps, exercising leniency for the sake of presenting a comprehensive and comprehensible view of the values and events.

This distinction may be summarized as follows: the hadith scholar may sacrifice continuity of narrative and completeness of the historical scene for the sake of sound transmission and verification in matters of legislation, whereas the historian may exercise leniency regarding the degree of authenticity of chain transmission for the sake of preserving the sequence of the story and the completeness of the overall picture of the event (Ḥammādah, 1985, p. 45).

Subsection Two: Criteria for Accepting Historical Reports and the Scope of Leniency among Early Scholars

The early authorities of hadith criticism were not unaware of this methodological distinction between the two fields. Indeed, the critical literature of the early scholars established the principle of distinguishing between reports concerning lawful and unlawful rulings and reports concerning biographies, military campaigns, and virtues.

First: The Distinction between Legal Rulings and Military Campaigns in the Methodology of Early Scholars

It is established that more than one authority among the scholars of al-jarḥ wa al-ta’dīl practiced leniency in reports concerning military campaigns and biographies to an extent that they did not permit in matters of lawful and unlawful rulings:

- Imam **Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal**, may Allah have mercy upon him, is reported to have said: “When we narrate from the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) concerning lawful and unlawful matters, the Sunnah, and legal rulings, we are strict regarding chains of transmission; but when we narrate from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) concerning the virtues of deeds and matters that neither establish nor repeal a legal ruling, we are lenient regarding chains of transmission” (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 1432 AH, vol. 1, p. 383).

- He also stated in evaluating authorities of the military campaigns, such as **Muḥammad ibn Ishāq**: “Ibn Ishāq is a man whose reports—meaning those concerning military campaigns and similar matters—may be written down from him; but when it comes to lawful and unlawful matters, we require people of this [level of rigor],” while clenching his teeth (Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 1271 AH, vol. 7, p. 191).
- Imam **al-Dhahabī** explained this approach by stating: “Imam Aḥmad used Ibn Ishāq as evidence concerning the military campaigns, but did not use him as evidence concerning legal rulings” (al-Dhahabī, 1985, vol. 7, p. 46), demonstrating that the distinction between the field of legislation and the field of history was an established principle among the early scholars.

Second: The Parameters and Scholarly Scope of Leniency

The leniency exercised by early scholars in dealing with reports concerning military campaigns was neither absolute nor arbitrary. Rather, it was cautious and governed by precise scholarly parameters (al-Qāsimī, 1979, pp. 113–116):

1. **The historical report must not contradict an established hadith concerning legal rulings or matters of creed:** If a weak historical report conflicts with an authentic hadith, the authentic hadith takes precedence and the historical report is rejected.
2. **The report must not contain an attack on the Prophet’s infallibility or impugn the integrity of the Companions:** An example of this is the rejection by hadith scholars of the story of the *gharānīq* [cranes], which was attributed to the Prophet through disconnected and weak chains of transmission. The report was rejected both on the basis of its chain and its content because it contradicted the definitive principle of prophetic infallibility (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, vol. 5, pp. 441–443).
3. **The report must not be extremely weak or transmitted through liars and abandoned narrators:** The leniency was applied to *mursal* reports, *balāghāt* [reports transmitted in an abbreviated form], and reports transmitted by generally truthful narrators whose weakness was relatively minor; it did not extend to reports originating with fabricators or narrators whose deceptive practices involved seriously discrediting forms of *tadlīs*.

Third: The Contemporary Crisis of Application between Excess and Deficiency

The modern period has witnessed two opposing approaches to dealing with the Prophetic biography as a result of the absence of this original balance:

- **First approach (rigid verification):** This approach attempted to subject every detail and particularity of the Prophetic biography to the stringent criteria of hadith scholars applied to rulings concerning what is lawful and unlawful. This approach resulted in fragmenting the Prophetic biography into isolated fragments and events and excluding broad portions of its narrative landscape, causing the contemporary reader to lose the historical and contextual connections among events (Maʿrūf, 1986, pp. 34–37).
- **Second approach (narrative leniency):** This approach continued the practice of indiscriminately collecting reports without scrutiny and relied on later historical sources without drawing attention to the objectionable elements they contained. This opened the door to Orientalist and contemporary criticism of certain episodes in the

Prophetic biography on the basis of tenuous reports that cannot withstand critical scrutiny (Rizqullah Ahmad, 1992, pp. 15–18).

From this theoretical and foundational perspective, the originality of the attempt presented by Dr. **Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad** becomes evident. He sought to move beyond this tension by formulating a methodology that combines the **"caution of the hadith scholar"** with the **"comprehensiveness of the historian."**

Section Two: The Methodological and Foundational Features of *The Prophetic Biography in Light of Its Original Sources*

Dr. **Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad's** book *The Prophetic Biography in Light of Its Original Sources* represents a distinctive applied model of a contemporary researcher's attempt to move beyond the zero-sum choice between **"the authenticity of hadith transmission"** and **"the continuity of historical narrative."** The author recognized that the Prophetic biography is neither merely a collection of isolated legal rulings nor a freely transmitted historical narrative; rather, it is **a prophetic history whose foundations are protected by infallibility and which requires rigorous tools of verification without compromising its overall structure** (Rizqullah Ahmad, 1992, pp. 19–21).

Subsection One: Chain-of-Transmission Verification within the Narrative Context and Addressing the Disruption of Historical Flow

The stylistic architecture of contemporary writings on the Prophetic biography has presented a methodological dilemma. Such writings either adopt an unrestrained narrative style that neglects the reliability of reports and consequently falls into indiscriminate acceptance, or they become dominated by hadith-critical studies in which the language of narrator evaluation and chain verification overshadows the original text, fragmenting the story and transforming it into a catalogue of chains of transmission, well-known reports, and weak reports (al-'Umarī, 2002, pp. 87–91).

Dr. **Mahdi Rizqullah's** ingenuity in addressing this disruption became evident through several clearly defined methodological techniques:

First: Separating the Fabric of the Historical Text from the Domain of Chain Criticism

The author adopted a strategy of **"integrating narrative with critical footnotes."** He devoted the main body of the book to the accepted historical and narrative material, presented in a fluent style that respects the unity of the event and its chronological sequence, while relegating critical debates, narrator evaluation, chain verification, and comparison among chains of transmission to the **footnotes and marginal notes** (Rizqullah, 1992, p. 23).

- **Preserving the narrative:** The reader encounters the events of the Prophetic biography in a coherent and continuous form through which the causes, development, and consequences of each event can be understood, without interrupting the narrative flow with statements such as: "Among its transmitters is so-and-so, who is weak," "So-and-so transmitted it as a *mursal* report," or "Its hadith is strengthened by corroborating evidence."
- **Scholarly integrity:** The author did not disregard critical principles; rather, he incorporated them into the footnotes with precision, identifying the hadith authorities upon whom he relied, such as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Albānī, and Akram Ḍiyā' al-'Umarī. Thus, specialists can find the critical material they require without

depriving the general reader of the beauty of the narrative (Rizqullah, 1992, pp. 45–52).

Second: Dealing with Weak Reports and Carefully Integrating *Mursal* Reports

Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah did not simply and categorically exclude historical reports with weak chains of transmission or *mursal* reports. Rather, he classified them according to their function within the context (al-‘Alī, 1998, pp. 10–14):

1. **Complete exclusion:** This applies to extremely weak and objectionable reports, anomalous reports that contradict an authentic hadith, and reports that impinge upon the status of prophethood or the integrity of the Companions, such as the story of the *gharānīq* and the account of the Prophet’s marriage to the Mother of the Believers, Zaynab bint Jahsh, in its tenuous Israelite version.
2. **Acceptance for corroboration and contextual reconstruction:** Corroborating reports, *mursal* reports, and *balāghāt* that are supported by sound foundations or that fill a contextual gap unrelated to a legal ruling or matter of creed may be incorporated into the main narrative in sequence, while a footnote indicates that the report is *mursal* or that its individual chain is weak (Rizqullah Ahmad, 1992, pp. 112–115).

Subsection Two: Structural Criticism and the Reconstruction of the Historical Picture in the Work of Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah

Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah’s approach was not limited to the partial deconstructive criticism that considers each hadith or report separately and stops at its apparent acceptance or rejection. Rather, he went beyond this to practice **structural criticism** (*Constructive Criticism*) (al-Aḥḍab, 1985, pp. 132–136).

First: The Concept of Structural Criticism in the Prophetic Biography

In this context, structural criticism means not limiting the inquiry to the authenticity of an individual report considered in isolation, but rather gathering all reports transmitted concerning a single event and reconstructing them to form an integrated historical picture consistent with the objectives of the Sharī‘ah and with the historical and geographical realities (Ḥammādah, 1998, pp. 58–62).

- A hadith scholar who limits himself to partial criticism may authenticate a report concerning a particular event; however, when it is considered alongside the other authentic reports, an apparent contradiction may emerge regarding the sequence or chronology of events.
- Here, Rizqullah’s structural criticism comes into play, through which he assumes the role of the “critical historian.” He brings reports together and reconciles them, or applies methodological preference among them, thereby presenting the reader with a coherent picture free of contradiction.

Second: Practical Applications of Reconstructing the Historical Picture

The effectiveness of the author’s structural methodology becomes evident in several pivotal episodes of the Prophetic biography, including the following:

1. **Reconstructing the features of the Meccan period and clandestine organization:** The author employed structural criticism in tracing the stages of the Meccan call. He did not rely on the rigid and categorical division between the “secret” and “public” phases of the call as portrayed by some weak historical reports. Instead, he brought together

the authentic reports found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Musnad Aḥmad* to establish that the call had been known to the leading figures of Quraysh from its very beginning, and that secrecy was merely an organizational measure concerning the gathering of Muslims at the house of al-Arqam. In this way, he critically reconstructed the concept of “secrecy” in a manner consistent with the logic of events (Rizqullah, 1992, pp. 141–146).

2. **Clarifying the events of the military campaigns and expeditions (the Battle of Badr as a model):** In his study of the Battle of Badr, Rizqullah relied on reports found in the canonical hadith collections and documented exegetical works and compared them with the reports of Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī. He did not merely present the reasons for the expedition and the battle itself; rather, he reconstructed the military, geographical, and psychological dimensions of the Muslim army’s situation, demonstrating how political consultation—such as the counsel of al-Ḥubāb ibn al-Mundhir—coexisted with faith and divine support. He also purified the text of the narrative additions introduced by some historical transmitters concerning details about the angels or the number of those killed that lacked established chains of transmission (Rizqullah, 1992, pp. 375–389).
3. **Linking causes and consequences in the Treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyyah:** In the episode of al-Ḥudaybiyyah, the rigor of the hadith scholar and the comprehensiveness of the historian became evident in his approach. He relied on the foundational account in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, transmitted through al-Miswar ibn Makhramah and Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, and drew on reports from Ibn Ishāq to reconstruct certain geographical details and the route taken. He arrived at a structural analysis that presented the Treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyyah not merely as a political concession but as a strategy for a manifest opening that paved the way for the spread of Islam and altered the balance of power in the Arabian Peninsula (Rizqullah, 1992, pp. 488–502).

Accordingly, Rizqullah maintains that when hadith criticism is combined with historical awareness, it does not lead to reducing or fragmenting the Prophetic biography; rather, it leads to “purifying it of myths and legends and highlighting the true greatness of Prophetic leadership within its human context and its noble divine ordainment.”

Section Three: The Educational Dimensions and Methodological Evaluation of the Experience

The ultimate purpose of studying and documenting the Prophetic biography does not stop at the limits of acquiring knowledge and providing a dry historical framework. Rather, it extends to spiritual cultivation, education, and exemplary conduct. Hence, another problem arising from the duality of criticism and narrative emerges in Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad’s experience: How can rigorous scholarly scrutiny be reconciled with preserving the affective value and spiritual vitality of the Prophetic biography?

Subsection One: Educational Adaptation of Scientifically Refined Material without Undermining Its Affective Value

Academic hadith studies are often criticized for the dryness of their style and their immersion in the details of chains of transmission and critical terminology, which may deprive the historical text of its spiritual warmth and its ability to inspire determination and cultivate the

soul (al-Būṭī, 1991, pp. 17–20). The author overcame this methodological obstacle through an approach of educational adaptation based on the following principles:

First: Employing Critical Findings to Construct an Educational Perspective

Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah did not use hadith criticism as a tool of destruction or abstraction; rather, he employed it as a tool of purification and construction. Through his applications, he demonstrated that a refined account of the Prophetic biography, restricted to accepted reports, is more powerful in its impact, more reliable in its implications, and deeper in its educational value than tenuous stories containing exaggerations or fantasies inconsistent with the established patterns of Allah's action in human beings and societies (al-Ghaḍbān, 1990, vol. 1, pp. 12–15).

- **An example of educational adaptation:** In his treatment of the event of the Night Journey and Ascension, the author made authentic reports the foundation of the narrative structure. He highlighted its spiritual and educational dimensions, the obligation of prayer, and the connection between the Sacred Mosque and al-Aqṣā Mosque, while avoiding weak legendary reports containing objectionable supernatural details that cannot withstand critical scrutiny (Rizqullah Ahmad, 1992, pp. 215–228). The result was a pure faith-oriented account that strengthens certainty without conflicting with either sound reason or authentic transmission.

Second: Educational Inference and Civilizational Analysis

The author followed the refined historical narrative with focused analytical paragraphs under headings such as "Lessons and Insights" or "Political and Educational Analysis of the Event" (Rizqullah, 1992, pp. 301–305).

- **Balance between material and lesson:** The text neither became immersed in rhetorical exhortation that overshadowed the historical facts nor remained confined to cold historical documentation. Instead, educational inference became a natural outcome of the refined historical material.
- **Education through human realism:** By relying on authentic reports, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the noble Companions appeared in their realistic human form, embodying patience, taking appropriate means, experiencing trials, and engaging in careful military and political planning, far removed from mythical representations that deprive the Prophetic biography of its value as a human model that can be followed and emulated (al-Ṣallābī, 2004, pp. 8–11).

Subsection Two: Evaluation of the Experience: The Limits of Reconciliation between Hadith Rigor and Historical Comprehensiveness

Scholarly rigor requires subjecting Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad's experience to a critical evaluative reading that highlights the scholarly value it has added to contemporary works on the Prophetic biography, while identifying the limits and observations that researchers have noted concerning this approach.

First: Scholarly Value and Distinctive Features of the Experience

1. **Disentangling the methodological relationship:** The author succeeded in developing a practical intermediate formulation and bridging the gap between the rigor of the hadith scholar and the comprehensiveness of the historian. He neither fell into the rigid verification that fragments the Prophetic biography nor into the historical

leniency that indiscriminately combines sound and unsound reports (al-Sharīf, 1998, pp. 45–48).

2. **Establishing the authority of the Prophetic biography:** The book presents refined historical material that serves as a reliable reference for researchers, preachers, and educators, protecting them from citing fabricated or objectionable reports.
3. **Connecting chains of transmission and texts:** The study demonstrates that criticism of chains of transmission is not an end in itself but a means of protecting the historical text and understanding it within its proper context.

Second: The Limits of the Experience and Methodological Observations

Despite the evident success achieved by this approach, a number of methodological observations emerge upon close examination:

1. **Slight inconsistency in the degree of leniency:** Some researchers have noted that the author exercised leniency in certain historical passages and narrative details by accepting reports containing minor weaknesses transmitted through Ibn Ishāq or others in order to reconstruct temporal and spatial details, while adopting a stricter approach in other comparable passages. This reflects the difficulty of establishing a precise and consistently applicable standard for the scope of historical leniency throughout all sections of the Prophetic biography (al-‘Awnī, 2006, pp. 112–115).
2. **The dominance of source verification over strategic analysis at times:** Despite the author’s attempt to preserve narrative flow, the strong desire to document and incorporate the original sources caused some formulations to assume a rigorous academic character, which may reduce the literary fluency characteristic of classical works on the Prophetic biography (Hammādah, 1985, pp. 98–102).

Evaluative Conclusion: Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah’s methodology can rightly be regarded as an “epistemological bridge” and a turning point in modern writing on the Prophetic biography. He demonstrated that adherence to the rigor of the hadith scholar does not prevent the historian from presenting a comprehensive, compelling, and fully developed historical picture.

Conclusion

Praise be to Allah, by whose grace righteous deeds are completed. To proceed:

Following this research journey, which examined “The Duality of Criticism and Narrative in Mahdi Rizqullah’s Prophetic Biography: A Foundational Approach between the Rigor of the Hadith Scholar and the Historian’s Perspective,” the study arrived at a number of methodological findings and recommendations, which may be summarized as follows:

First: Principal Findings

1. **Functional distinction rather than contradiction:** The study demonstrated that the difference between the methodology of the hadith scholar and that of the historian in dealing with reports concerning the Prophetic biography is not a difference of contradiction but one of diversity and function. The hadith scholar exercises caution to safeguard legislation, whereas the historian seeks to complete the overall picture of the historical event.
2. **The early roots of the distinction:** The study revealed that distinguishing between reports concerning lawful and unlawful rulings and reports concerning military

campaigns and biographies was an established principle among the early authorities of criticism, such as Imam Aḥmad and al-Dhahabī, who practiced controlled leniency in matters of the Prophetic biography so long as no established religious principle was contradicted and prophetic infallibility was not compromised.

3. **The success of Rizqullah's model in disentangling the methodological relationship:** The study showed that Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad presented a mature applied model by incorporating chain-of-transmission criticism into the footnotes and marginal notes while reserving the main body of the book for a coherent narrative fabric serving the historical purpose.
4. **Adoption of structural criticism:** The author did not limit himself to partial deconstructive criticism. Rather, he practiced "structural criticism" by gathering all accepted reports and reconstructing them to produce a comprehensive and coherent historical picture of the Prophetic event.
5. **Combining authenticity and education:** The author successfully demonstrated that a scientifically refined Prophetic biography does not lose its spiritual vitality or educational impact. Rather, reliance on authentic reports strengthens realistic emulation of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his noble Companions.

Second: Recommendations

1. **Developing curricula:** Greater attention should be given to teaching "Methodologies of Writing the Prophetic Biography" at universities and academic institutions, with emphasis on innovative and informed models that combine hadith and historical criteria.
2. **Expanding structural criticism:** Researchers in the fields of the Prophetic biography and Islamic history should be encouraged not to limit themselves to the apparent hadith-based verification of reports, but to move toward structural criticism and the reconstruction of the historical scene in light of established principles.
3. **Reformulating the Prophetic biography for non-specialists:** The refined material found in Dr. Mahdi Rizqullah's book and other authoritative studies should be adapted into literary and educational formulations appropriate for young people and general readers without compromising its scholarly content.

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