

Prophet Muhammad: The Sultan of Hearts

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For those seeking solace from the trepidations of this world, *Prophet Muhammad: The Sultan of Hearts* is a thoughtful work of reflection and comfort. This two-volume comprehensive narrative of enchanted times recollecting the “Prophetic” summoning introduces the readers to Prophet Muhammad’s *sīrah* (biography) within a lucid and flowing stream of emotion. More than simply an effort to record events, stating who said what and did what based upon whose narration, as many of the traditional biographies tend to do, this work infuses events with meanings and feelings. As the authors indicate, the purpose is not to speak about the Prophet, but to “let him be observed in his own actions” (p. xvi), creating thereby an “awareness” of his life not as a sole figure, but “in connection with his companions” in order to “present a life model that has been miraculously constructed” (p. xvi).

This *sīrah* is not about reinterpreting events. In fact, a great deal of what it says falls back on the earlier and primary biographies of such figures as Ibn Hisham, Ibn Sa‘d, Ibn Kathir, Ibn Abd al-Barr, and al-Tabari, as well as the nine Sunni canonical Hadith collections (p. xvii). Its claim to novelty is not due to this “synthesis” alone, but more to its focus on the Prophet’s life in society as a member of that society, rather than on the wars in which he engaged, as if those events were the most significant aspects of his mission (p. xiii). The authors’ intention, as they put it, is not simply to speak about the Prophet in their own descriptions, but rather to observe him in his own actions. His multi-dimensional personality is brought forth not only as a Prophet, but also

as a human being, father, husband, friend, leader, and judge, among numerous other roles and dimensions, but above all as a mercy to humanity in a world in which “people were neither distanced nor ‘otherized’” (p. xv).

This biographical account is divided into two rather extensive volumes. The first one starts from the very beginning: Ibrahim’s prayer in the valley of Bakka (Makkah) that Allah to send a Messenger from his progeny to call its inhabitants to the way of faith. It also offers the harbingers and signs related and leading to the cosmic call of Muhammad, the “Seal of the Prophets.” The second chapter, in fact, is titled “The Shared Request of All Prophets,” as they all spoke and prophesied about him. The following chapters trace what ancient scholars said about his advent, the Prophet’s lineage, the incident of the elephant, his life as an orphan, his high status among the Makkans, the start of the revelation and the subsequent hardships, the Prophet’s migration to Madinah, and, finally, the Muslims’ victory over the unbelievers at the Battle of Badr.

Starting with the first volume, it is interesting to cite the hadith in which Allah tells Adam that “had it not been for Muhammad, I would not have created you” (p. 9), as this indicates a full historico-divine cycle in which Prophet Muhammad is both a beginning and an end. His calling and sending, that is, becomes the real “end of history” not in the sense that there is nothing after it, but in the sense that this was the moment of perfection in human history. Events before the calling were all leading to this climax, after which it they would start moving toward the end of time.

It is perhaps within this context that the tradition that the Prophet had been sent with the “Hour” well-nigh may be understood. Hence the obligation that all of the prophets and revelations before Muhammad had to foretell him, as well as the crucial significance, as another historico-divine cycle, of the Mahdi’s future coming and Jesus’ return as a “re-celebration” of him. The first cycle is the end of *history*, whereas the second cycle is the end of *time*. No wonder that Muhammad was the shared request of all prophets (p. 8), for it was a collective appeal for the perfect “moment.” As prophets of Allah, they were naturally yearning for that moment as an act of faith, reason, and lineage.

Their plea was heard when a new star was born (p. 50) to herald his advent and birth, and when a Jewish merchant in Makkah, recognizing the sign, cried out: “The tribe of Israel has now lost the lineage of Prophethood. This is how it’s written. Now the Prophethood rests with the Arabs...” (p. 51). Even before the Prophet’s time had come, the harbingers of his arrival were anchored in place when Muhammad earned the title of “the Trustworthy” (*al-Amīn*) not for his power or wealth, but because of his stature and respect (p. 75).

Such was his stature that perhaps, against much of the custom of those days, it was Khadijah, Muhammad's first and most beloved wife who was fifteen years his senior, who proposed marriage even though he was working for her (p. 85). In a straightforward manner that might have perplexed many modern-day women, she said:

O my uncle's son! Verily I am interested in marrying you because of our close family ties. Your remarkable status within your tribe, your beautiful morals and your steadfastness in protecting what is entrusted to you and in speaking the truth.... (pp. 87-88)

This was not simply an instance of personal judgment. When the Makkans decided to repair the damaged Ka'bah, a dispute erupted between the tribes as to which one would have the honor of placing the Black Stone back in its spot. The dispute threatened to turn into something more serious before Abu Umayyah, the oldest male Qurayshi, suggested that they appoint a judge. They agreed that the first man to enter the Ka'bah's doors would be the judge. Auspiciously, this person turned out to be Muhammad. Thus even before his prophethood they were willing to accept the decision of the "Trustworthy." He asked them to place the Black Stone on a piece of cloth, thereby allowing each tribe to hold a side and lift it up, after which he raised the stone with his own hands and placed it back where it belonged (pp. 94-96).

Ironically, when he declared his prophetic calling, the Quraysh's leadership turned against him despite being unable to question his integrity or trustworthiness (p. 163).¹ In fact, it was easier to claim that he was an oracle, a poet, or a magician, even when none of these would stick, than to accuse him of being untrustworthy. Even his unbelieving uncle Abu Lahab's denunciation of the Prophet as a liar (p. 167) found no resonance among the people. In fact, Abu Jahl, another of his sworn enemies, actually admitted that "Muhammad tells the truth; he never lies!" (p. 226).

Yet attempts were made to injure the Prophet's family by forcing his sons-in-law to divorce his daughters Ruqqayah, Umm Kulthum, and Zaynab. Abu al-'As, Zaynab's husband, refused to do so; the other two complied. This was a source of great grief to the Prophet and his family (pp. 190-91). His Companions, especially those who were poor, were also abused and tortured by the unbelievers, frequently beyond endurance (pp. 201-03). The town's entire atmosphere became highly charged when, as the authors put it, "everyone had practically become a spy... and people were like parasites, carrying information to and from one another" (p. 207). This reality, together with the death of his uncle Abu Talib and Khadijah, as well as the Qurayshi plan to kill him,

led the Prophet to migrate to Madinah. Despite all of the trials and tribulations that followed – fighting the Makkans and other pagans and facing the conspiracies of the Jews and the Hypocrites – this was the beginning of a new era and a new civilization (pp. 441 and 437), the details of which follow in the second volume.

Volume 2 opens with the aftermath of the Battle of Badr and the developments that led to the Battle of Uhud and the Muslims' defeat a year later. It then presents the Battle of the Trench, when the large number of tribes that had gathered to invade Madinah were forced to withdraw by a strong wind. This is then followed by chapters dealing with the Prophet's umrah; his sending of ambassadors to Abyssinia, Byzantine, the Copts of Egypt, and Kisra the Emperor of Persia; the Battle of Khybar with the Jews; the conquest of Makkah; and finally with the Prophet's death.

Haylamaz and Harpci's biography has contributed a highly commendable and laudable work that weaves Islam into the present as a living reality. The two volumes are an emotional journey into the Prophet's life, one takes readers beyond the traditional chronological accounts. It is more about the spiritual elements of beauty and justice in Islam over and above strict legalities. Their claim to originality carries the readers through time, back in history to Islam's source, and then reconnects them to the present. They purport to show how the "Abu Lahabs" and "Abu Jahls" of olden times still live among us, reflecting pride, arrogance, and the denial of truth, along with a call to the "Abu Bakrs, Umars, Uthmans and Alis of our age to duty" (p. xiii).

Essentially, this work summons Muslims to their "calling." What this *sīrah* contributes is not new information or interpretations, but the way it paints a spiritual portrait that takes the Prophet's life and Islam beyond the mere limitations of ritualism, to which both have unfortunately been reduced in contemporary times. As one astute observer has put it, ritualism is what is left of a religion after it has lost its spirit.²

Endnotes

1. Page 161 states, incorrectly, that Safiyya bint Abd al-Muttalib (the Prophet's aunt) was the "wife of Abu Lahab." Actually, she was his half-sister. Abu Lahab's wife was Umm Jamil bint Harb, as p. 165 states.
2. Source not available.

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