

## Between Science and Revelation: A Critical Assessment of Zaghlūl al-Najjār's Scientific Hermeneutics in Hadith Interpretation

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### Abstract

This article investigates the methodological consistency of Zaghlūl al-Najjār's scientific hermeneutics as articulated in *al-I'jāz al-'Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*. Al-Najjār proposes a five-step interpretive framework for uncovering scientific content within prophetic traditions, comprising linguistic analysis, contextual examination (*asbāb al-wurūd*), cross-hadith comparison, Qur'anic correlation, and scientific validation. While widely cited, the internal coherence of this model has not been subjected to close critical analysis. Adopting a qualitative, text-based approach rooted in hermeneutical theory, this study analyzes seventy hadiths discussed in al-Najjār's work to assess the extent to which his stated framework is consistently applied. The findings reveal that only three hadiths (4.3%) demonstrate full methodological implementation, while the remainder exhibit partial and uneven usage of the proposed steps. This inconsistency suggests a tendency to prioritize scientific concordance over traditional exegetical rigor. The article argues that such inconsistency reflects an underlying epistemological tension between the authority of empirical science and the interpretive legacy of *'ulūm al-ḥadīth*. Rather than rejecting the scientific hermeneutical project, this study calls for a more critically grounded approach—one that integrates scientific inquiry without compromising methodological transparency or fidelity to the hadith tradition. This research contributes to broader discussions on *i'jāz 'ilmī* by proposing evaluative criteria for future scholarship aiming to reconcile revelation with modern science within a coherent and academically sustainable framework.

[Artikel ini mengkaji konsistensi metodologis dari pendekatan hermeneutika ilmiah yang dirumuskan oleh Zaghlūl al-Najjār dalam karyanya *al-I'jāz al-'Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*. Al-Najjār mengusulkan kerangka interpretasi



lima langkah untuk mengungkap kandungan saintifik dalam hadis, yang mencakup analisis linguistik, kajian konteks (asbāb al-wurūd), perbandingan antarhadis, korelasi dengan ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an, serta validasi ilmiah. Meskipun pendekatan ini cukup berpengaruh, koherensi internal model tersebut belum banyak dianalisis secara kritis. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis teks yang berakar pada teori hermeneutika, studi ini menganalisis tujuh puluh hadis yang dibahas oleh al-Najjār untuk menilai sejauh mana kelima langkah metodologis tersebut diterapkan secara konsisten. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa hanya tiga hadis (4,3%) yang dianalisis secara utuh menggunakan seluruh komponen metodologi, sementara sisanya menunjukkan pola penerapan yang parsial dan tidak merata. Ketidakkonsistenan ini mengindikasikan kecenderungan untuk memprioritaskan kesesuaian ilmiah dibandingkan ketelitian tafsir tradisional. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa ketidakkonsistenan tersebut mencerminkan ketegangan epistemologis antara otoritas ilmu empiris dan warisan interpretatif 'ulūm al-ḥadīth. Alih-alih menolak pendekatan i'jāz 'ilmī, studi ini mengusulkan perlunya pendekatan yang lebih kritis dan metodologis, yang mampu mengintegrasikan sains tanpa mengorbankan transparansi dan integritas tafsir hadis. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada diskursus i'jāz 'ilmī dengan menawarkan kriteria evaluatif bagi studi-studi masa depan yang berupaya merekonsiliasi wahyu dengan ilmu pengetahuan dalam kerangka akademik yang koheren dan berkelanjutan.]

**Keywords:** Scientific Hermeneutics, I'jāz 'ilmī, Zaghlūl al-Najjār, Hadith Interpretation, Epistemology of Revelation

## Introduction

The swift progress of contemporary science, particularly in disciplines such as biology, physics, and chemistry, has profoundly transformed the epistemological framework of modern intellectual discourse.<sup>1</sup> This transformation not only expands the boundaries of empirical inquiry but also influences the interpretive frameworks applied to religious texts, particularly within the Islamic tradition.<sup>2</sup> Scientific discoveries are increasingly viewed not merely as tools for exploration but as analytical instruments capable of revealing dimensions of Qur'anic and hadith discourse that have long remained hidden or underexamined. This epistemic shift has sparked renewed interest among Muslim scholars in exploring the intersection

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<sup>1</sup> Hammis Syafaq et al., "Reconstructing Islamic Epistemology: Bridging Metaphysics, Reason, and Revelation," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 2 (December 7, 2023): 240–69, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2024.14.2.240-269>.

<sup>2</sup> Ali Akbar, "Islam–Science Relation from the Perspective of Post–Revolutionary Iranian Religious Intellectuals," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 1 (January 2019): 104–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2017.1383882>.

between revelation and scientific rationality, especially regarding topics such as the human body, embryology, health, and cosmic order.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most prominent responses to this intellectual trend has been the emergence of new methodological frameworks aimed at interpreting hadith through the lens of modern scientific epistemology. A central figure in this endeavor is Zaghlūl al-Najjār, an Egyptian scientist and Islamic thinker whose work, *al-I'jāz al- 'Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah* (The Scientific Inimitability of the Prophetic Tradition), proposes a systematic paradigm of *i'jāz 'ilmī* (scientific inimitability) within the Sunnah. This work compiles over seventy hadiths that, according to al-Najjār, contain implicit or explicit references to scientific truths later affirmed by contemporary research. In his introduction, al-Najjār outlines a hermeneutical methodology that incorporates linguistic, contextual, and thematic analysis, culminating in the integration of scientifically validated data. His primary aim is not merely to defend the authenticity of hadith but to reconceptualize them as epistemologically relevant sources that are compatible with—if not predictive of—modern science.<sup>4</sup>

Zunaidi Nur has systematized al-Najjār's approach into a series of critical steps: identifying hadiths with scientific indications, verifying the reliability of their chains of transmission (*isnād*) and textual content (*matn*), conducting comparative analyses with other narrations, engaging in a thorough linguistic and contextual examination (including *asbāb al-wurūd*), correlating the findings with Qur'anic verses, and finally, interfacing with scientific knowledge to extract or affirm latent meanings. This multi-tiered method aims to provide a theologically grounded yet empirically informed response to Orientalist critiques while simultaneously asserting the continued interpretive relevance of Islamic revelation in an age increasingly shaped by scientific paradigms.<sup>5</sup>

However, this integrative project has not been without controversy. As Sevdenur and Jamil observe, scientific interpretations of hadith inevitably involve a negotiation between two distinct epistemological foundations: divine revelation and empirical science. While efforts in this field have evolved from superficial analogies to more sophisticated syntheses of religious and scientific discourse, the integration of modern science into hadith interpretation remains dynamic and contested—both

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<sup>3</sup> S. Nurjanah, "Kosmologi dan Sains dalam Islam," *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, no. 1 (2013): 109.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Al-Najjar, *Al-I'jāz Al-'Ilmi Fi As-Sunnah An-Nabawiyyah*, 5th ed. (Nahdhah Mishr: Ath-Thiba'ah wan An-Naysr wa At-Tauzi', 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Z. Nur, "Hermeneutika Hadis Zaghlul An-Najjar," *Tamaddun Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2022): 170–90, <https://doi.org/10.55657/tajis.v1i2.53>.

within scholarly and theological arenas.<sup>6</sup> Critiques of *i'jāz* approaches have emphasized their epistemological tensions and methodological limitations. For instance, Permono argues that interpretations influenced by Maurice Bucaille, while rhetorically appealing, often lack the epistemological rigor necessary to preserve the integrity of revelation.<sup>7</sup> Within institutional contexts, Indarto and Kurniawan have demonstrated how Muhammadiyah's triadic interpretive framework—*bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani*—provides a more structured alternative to earlier, often eclectic *i'jāz* methods.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, a focused and critical examination of the internal methodological coherence in al-Najjār's hadith analysis—particularly the alignment between his stated theoretical framework and its practical application—remains largely absent from current scholarship.

This study aims to address a significant gap by posing a central question: To what extent does al-Najjār consistently apply the interpretive framework outlined in the introduction of his work to his actual analysis of individual hadiths? Adopting a hermeneutical approach, this article critically evaluates the coherence between al-Najjār's theoretical premises and their implementation, while also considering the broader epistemological implications of integrating scientific reasoning into hadith interpretation. The central argument presented here is that, despite the intellectual ambition and theological creativity of al-Najjār's framework, there are notable divergences between his methodological claims and his interpretive practices that warrant deeper scrutiny.

This study employs a qualitative, text-based research design grounded in hermeneutical analysis. It focuses on a close reading of *al-I'jāz al-ʿIlmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyyah*, comparing the principles articulated in its introduction with their operationalization in selected case studies. The analysis identifies structural patterns, rhetorical strategies, the use of scientific and scriptural sources, and instances of methodological deviation or inconsistency. An evaluative framework is developed based on the principles of internal coherence and epistemological consistency, which serve as benchmarks for assessing the integrity of *i'jāz ʿilmī* methodologies.

The primary contribution of this article is its proposal of evaluative criteria for assessing works that seek to bridge Islamic revelation and modern science. By providing a critical examination of one of the most influential texts in the field, this

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<sup>6</sup> Alhattab Sevdenur and Khairil Husaini Jamil, "Exploring the Impact of Scientific Advancements on Hadith Commentaries," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 26 (December 3, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.26.2024.308>.

<sup>7</sup> Ajar Permono, "Kritik Metodologi Penafsiran Bucaillisme Atas Ayat-Ayat Sains," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 19, no. 1 (October 12, 2019): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2018.1901-01>.

<sup>8</sup> Kurniawan Azis Indarto, "Metodologi Pemahaman Muhammadiyah dalam Kontekstualisasi Hadis Sains" (other, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2024), <https://digilib.uinsgd.ac.id/101152>.

study enhances ongoing debates regarding the legitimacy, limitations, and future directions of scientific hermeneutics within hadith scholarship. The article begins by outlining al-Najjār's methodological framework, followed by an analysis of selected prophetic traditions that he interprets. It concludes with a theoretical reflection on internal coherence and its implications for the epistemology of *i'jāz 'ilmī*.

### **Scientific Hermeneutics and the Prophetic Tradition: Analyzing Zaghlūl al-Najjār's Methodology of *al-I'jāz al-'ilmī* in Hadith Interpretation**

In the landscape of contemporary Islamic scholarship, efforts to integrate the intellectual legacy of Islam with the discoveries of modern science have consistently generated a rich and dynamic field of dialectical inquiry. Among the prominent figures dedicated to this intellectual synthesis, Zaghlūl al-Najjār stands out as a key scholar. Through his academic contributions and prolific writings, he has sought to demonstrate the miraculous dimensions of the Qur'an and the Sunnah when examined through the lens of empirical science.

This section elaborates on al-Najjār's intellectual framework by tracing his unique academic journey, examining the core contributions of his seminal work, *al-I'jāz al-'ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*, and offering a detailed exploration of the methodological apparatus he developed for interpreting prophetic traditions with scientific relevance. A comprehensive understanding of this methodological framework is not merely background knowledge; rather, it serves as a critical analytical prerequisite for evaluating potential inconsistencies in its application—an essential issue that becomes the focal point of the subsequent sections of this study.

Zaghlūl Rāghib Muḥammad al-Najjār, born on November 17, 1933 (28 Rajab 1352 AH) in Ṭanṭā, Egypt, exemplifies a unique synthesis of religious and scientific intellect. Raised in a devout family—his father was a memorizer of the Qur'an, and his grandfather was a renowned imam and scholar—al-Najjār completed the memorization of the Qur'an before the age of nine, an early indication of the scholarly path that would shape his life.<sup>9</sup>

His relocation to Cairo marked a significant new phase in his formal education, during which he obtained qualifications in Arabic language studies.<sup>10</sup> Notably, after mastering foundational Islamic sciences, al-Najjār chose an unconventional academic path for his time by studying geology at the Faculty of Science, Cairo University. He graduated as the top student in 1955 and received the prestigious

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<sup>9</sup> S. H. Lestari and A. Asparina, "Scientific Approach toward Hadith: A Study of Zaghlūl al-Najjār's Work," *Diroyah: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Hadis*, no. 1 (2020): 20–30, <https://doi.org/10.15575/diroyah.v5i1>.

<sup>10</sup> Z. Al-Najjar, *Tafsīr Āyāt Kauniyah Fī Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm*, 1st ed. (Maktabah Syuruq Ad-Daulah, 2017).

Barakat Award.<sup>11</sup> His academic journey continued at the University of Wales in the United Kingdom, where he earned a Ph.D. in geology in 1963 and was subsequently appointed as a professor.

Al-Najjār's dedication extended beyond academia. He served as the rector of the Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE) in the UK and, since 2001, has led the Scientific Miracles Committee of the Qur'an and Sunnah under Egypt's Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs.<sup>12</sup> His dual background in science and religion has inherently positioned him as a key figure in articulating and developing the concept of *i'jāz 'ilmī*—scientific inimitability in Islamic texts.

The most tangible manifestation of al-Najjār's views on *i'jāz 'ilmī* within hadith literature is found in his work *al-I'jāz al-'Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*. First published by Nahḍah Miṣr: *al-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Naṣhṣ wa al-Tawzī'* in Egypt, this book compiles seventy hadiths with scientific themes, each extensively commented upon by the author. Organized thematically (*mawḍū'ī*), the book categorizes these traditions into nine primary sections that address theological, cosmological, anthropological, dietary, medical, ethical, and eschatological subjects. Some editions include illustrations to enhance readers' understanding of the scientific aspects. Al-Najjār adopts an analytical (*taḥlīlī*) approach in his commentaries, integrating established scientific discoveries to uncover latent or previously overlooked meanings in the hadith texts.<sup>13</sup>

This work addresses orientalist skepticism regarding the authenticity of prophetic traditions. Al-Najjār argues that scientific verification can substantiate hadiths alongside historical validation. A particularly contentious aspect of his methodology is his tendency to prioritize scientific content over the reliability of a hadith's chain of transmission (*sanad*). He often includes weak (*ḍa'īf*) hadiths, justifying this by asserting that a hadith may be elevated in status based on the empirical truth of its content (*matn*).<sup>14</sup> This epistemological stance represents one of the critical focal points of this study's analysis of methodological inconsistency.

Beyond applying *i'jāz 'ilmī*, al-Najjār also developed a comprehensive hermeneutical framework for understanding scientifically oriented prophetic traditions. In the preface to *al-I'jāz al-'Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*, he outlines an interpretive structure based on several principles.

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<sup>11</sup> B. Lilmu'minin, "Mu'jizat Ilmiah dalam Pandangan Zaghlul Raghīb Najjār," February (2020): 85.

<sup>12</sup> Intan Pratiwi Mustikasari, "Urgensi Penafsiran Saintifik Al-Qur'an: Tinjauan atas Pemikiran Zaghlul Raghīb Muhammad al-Najjār," *Studia Quranika* 6, no. 1 (July 17, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.21111/studiquran.v6i1.5674>.

<sup>13</sup> Mustikasari, 39.

<sup>14</sup> M. A. D. Insan Labib et al., "An Analysis of Zaghloul El-Naggar Thought (Critical Study of Hadith Used in al-I'jāz al-'Ilmi fī Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah Books)," *Journal of Integrated Sciences*, 2024, 90–113.

“To comprehend the cosmological verses in the Book of Allah, as well as the cosmological references in the sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him), one must first interpret them accurately within the framework of the Arabic language, including its lexical indicators, stylistic features, the context of hadith revelation (*asbāb al-wurūd*), and their intertextual relationships with other Qur’anic verses and hadiths. These interpretations should also be contextualized within the overarching principles and universal objectives of Islam, while considering the established axioms of modern science that are pertinent to the subject matter.”<sup>15</sup>

Zunaidi Nur identified seven key methodological steps within this framework.<sup>16</sup> However, al-Najjār does not explicitly include two preliminary steps—selecting hadiths with scientific indications and evaluating their authenticity—as part of his formal methodology. Consequently, this study focuses on the five steps that he explicitly articulates.

The first step is linguistic analysis, which serves as a foundational component in hadith studies. Al-Najjār emphasizes the importance of examining rare vocabulary (*gharīb*), metaphorical expressions, and syntactical constructions. He correlates lexical meanings with parallel usages in the Qur’an and the hadith corpus, explores etymological roots, and contrasts semantic applications. According to Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, this form of analysis not only uncovers temporal and contextual nuances but also aids in the verification of a hadith’s content (*matn*).<sup>17</sup> In practice, al-Najjār employs this linguistic framework to connect scriptural language with scientific terminology.

The second step involves analyzing the context of hadith revelation (*asbāb al-wurūd*), which examines the historical and sociocultural circumstances surrounding specific hadiths. This method aids in discerning whether a hadith is general or specific, absolute or restricted, and helps identify any abrogating (*nāsikh*) or abrogated (*mansūkh*) elements. Al-Najjār often enhances his interpretation by incorporating more comprehensive narrative versions or parallel traditions to enrich the historical context. Contextual sources include the Qur’an, other hadiths, and statements from the Companions.<sup>18</sup> This approach protects against decontextualized or ahistorical interpretations of hadiths related to scientific phenomena.

The third step is inter-hadith analysis, which involves interpreting a hadith considering other thematically related prophetic traditions. This hermeneutical

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<sup>15</sup> Al-Najjar, *Al-I’jaz Al-’Ilmi Fi As-Sunnah An-Nabawiyyah*.

<sup>16</sup> Nur, “Hermeneutika Hadis Zaghul An-Najjar.”

<sup>17</sup> M. A. Suryadilaga, *Metodologi Syarah Hadis Dari Klasik Hingga Kontemporer*, 1st ed. (Kalimedia, 2017), 111.

<sup>18</sup> I. Abror, *Ilmu Matan Hadis*, ed. Ed. 2nd (Kalimedia, 2022), 21–23.

method clarifies general, ambiguous, or unrestricted hadiths by referencing more specific or explanatory counterparts. Al-Najjār employs this technique to develop a comprehensive understanding of topics addressed across multiple narrations and to resolve any apparent contradictions. This strategy aligns with classical interpretive norms and enhances the internal coherence of his scholarly readings.

The fourth step involves cross-analysis with thematically similar Qur'anic verses. This method of textual interrelation aims to ensure that hadith interpretations align with Qur'anic principles, thereby avoiding semantic distortion or doctrinal contradiction. As Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī notes,<sup>19</sup> the Sunnah serves as an exegesis of the Qur'an and must, therefore, remain consistent with its message. Al-Najjār consistently employs this step to reinforce the harmony between revelation and scientific findings.

The fifth and most distinctive step is scientific analysis. This is where al-Najjār's methodology diverges most clearly from traditional hadith scholarship. He interprets prophetic traditions through the lens of scientifically validated theories and data derived from contemporary research in fields such as astronomy, biology, medicine, and his own specialization, geology. With strong academic credentials and published work in the natural sciences, al-Najjār possesses the authority to integrate scientific insights with Islamic epistemology. This approach not only lends contemporary relevance to religious texts but also uncovers dimensions of the Qur'an and hadith that resonate with the evolving frontiers of human knowledge.

### **Methodological Inconsistencies in *al-I jāz al- 'Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*: A Critical Reassessment of Zaghlūl al-Najjār's Scientific Hermeneutics**

While Zaghlūl al-Najjār's methodology for interpreting prophetic traditions through scientific reasoning has garnered considerable attention across the Muslim world, the integrity and consistency of its implementation remain subject to scrutiny. His proposed hermeneutical model—anchored in five analytical pillars: linguistic analysis, contextual background (*asbāb al-wurūd*), thematic cross-referencing with other hadiths, alignment with Qur'anic verses, and validation through established scientific findings—aims to elevate the epistemological status of the Sunnah within modern scientific discourse. However, when this framework is applied to the actual content of his major work, *al-I jāz al- 'Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*, a significant methodological gap becomes apparent.

This section aims to investigate the discrepancy between al-Najjār's theoretical framework and its practical implementation. By defining inconsistency as any instance in which fewer than all five methodological steps are applied—

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<sup>19</sup> Yusuf Al-Qardhawi, *Kayfa Nata'ammal Ma'a As-Sunnah An-Nabawiyyah*, 5th ed. (Madinah: Daar Al-Wafaa' li Ath-Thaba'ah wa An-Nasyr wa At-Tauzi', 1996), 93.

regardless of the depth of analysis—this study highlights the extent to which the approach he articulates remains under-implemented. Such inconsistency is not merely a procedural oversight; it represents a significant fault line in the development of a coherent and reliable methodology within the emerging field of scientific hermeneutics (*tafsīr ‘ilmī*).

A comprehensive textual analysis of all seventy hadiths examined in *al-I ‘jāz al- ‘Ilmī* reveals that only three hadiths (4.3%) were interpreted using the complete five-step framework. The remaining hadiths demonstrate partial application, with 33% utilizing only three components, 29% employing four, 23% relying on two, and 10% depending on a single method. These statistics, derived from meticulous coding of each interpretive entry, highlight the disparity between methodological aspirations and actual interpretive practices. This pattern raises critical questions regarding both the operational feasibility of the model and the epistemological hierarchy that al-Najjār implicitly adopts when navigating the intersection of textual tradition and modern science.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Methodological Application in *al-I ‘jāz al- ‘Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah***

Number of Applied Methods	Number of Hadiths	Percentage (%)
5 (Complete Application)	3	4.3%
4	21	29%
3	24	33%
2	16	23%
1	6	10%

Source: Compiled and calculated by the author based on content analysis of *al-I ‘jāz al- ‘Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*.

One of the most significant areas of inconsistency lies in the omission of *asbāb al-wurūd*, the contextual background of hadith transmission. For instance, in Hadith 37—concerning the medicinal value of truffles (*al-kam ‘ah*) as a treatment for ocular ailments—al-Najjār cites the narration from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī but neglects to provide any socio-historical context. Classical sources, such as Ibn Ḥamzah’s *al-Bayān wa al-Ta ‘rīf*, document that during the Prophet’s time, truffles were culturally regarded with suspicion and were even believed to be harmful. The Prophet’s statement thus served to correct a prevailing misperception—a rhetorical and pedagogical function that enhances the hadith’s relevance and illustrates its epistemic intervention.

Without acknowledging this context, the commentary remains disconnected from the hermeneutical richness that the tradition offers.<sup>20</sup>

A similar deficiency is evident in al-Najjār's treatment of Hadith 30, which pertains to human genealogy traced back to Adam through the settling of semen in the womb. Al-Najjār cites a truncated version of a longer hadith found in al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*.<sup>21</sup> The omitted segment includes an exchange between the Prophet and a Companion that contextualizes the statement and connects it to Qur'anic exegesis, particularly Q.S al-Takwīr [81]: 8. Ignoring this narrative framework strips the hadith of its embedded exegetical cues and undermines the textual coherence that a more complete rendering could provide.

In addition to contextual gaps, linguistic omissions also characterize al-Najjār's interpretive method. The hadith concerning resurrection from the coccyx (*'ajb al-dhanab*)—Hadith 63—contains a term that is widely classified as *gharīb* (obscure). Despite its extensive philological elaboration in works such as Ibn Ḥajar,<sup>22</sup> Ibn al-Athīr,<sup>23</sup> Ibnu Jauzi,<sup>24</sup> Imam Abi Abdullah al-Hamidi,<sup>25</sup> Ibnu Hubairah,<sup>26</sup> Ibnu As-Sayyid Al-Bathaliyusi,<sup>27</sup> al-Najjār provides no lexical clarification. This omission is particularly striking, given that such philological attention is central to his stated methodology. These gaps not only weaken the analytical strength of the commentary but also diminish its utility in fostering scientific analogues, especially in fields like embryology and anatomy, where terminological precision is essential.

The pattern of inconsistency extends further to the neglect of relevant Qur'anic intertexts. In Hadith 7, which emphasizes divine exclusivity in knowing the time and place of rainfall, al-Najjār focuses on meteorological processes but fails to reference key Qur'anic parallels such as Q.S Luqmān [31]: 34, Q.S al-Ra'd [13]: 8, Q.S.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibnu Hamzah Al-Husaini Al-Hanafi Ad-Dimasyqi, "Terjemah Kitab Al-Bayān Wa At-Ta'rīf Fī Asbāb Wurūd al-Hadīs Asy-Syarīf," Vol. 2, ed. Suwata Wijaya and Zafrullah Salim, 8th ed. (Jakarta: Kalam Mulia, 2005), 179–80.

<sup>21</sup> Sulaiman bin Ahmad bin Ayub bin Muthir bin Al-Lakhami Asy-Syafi'i Ath-Thabarani, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabīr*, Vol. 5, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Taimiyyah, n.d.), 74.

<sup>22</sup> Abu Zakariyya Muhyiddin Yahya bin Syarf An-Nawawi, *Al-Minhāj Syarh Shahīh Muslim bin Al-Hajjāj*, Vol. 18, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Daar Ihya At-Turats Al-'Arabi, 1972), 92.

<sup>23</sup> Majduddin Abu As-Sa'adat Al-Mubarak bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad Ibnu Abd Al-Karim Asy-Syaibani Al-Jazari Ibnu Atsir, *An-Nihāyah fī Gharīb Al-Hadīs wa Al-Atsar*, Vol. 3 (Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-Ilmiyyah, 1979), 184.

<sup>24</sup> Abdurrahman bin Ali bin Muhammad Al-Jauzi, *Gharīb Al-Hadīs*, Vol. 2, 1st ed. (Beirut: Daar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, 1985), 71.

<sup>25</sup> Muhammad bin Futuh bin Abdullah bin Futuh bin Hamid Al-Hamidiy, *Tafsīr Gharīb Mā fī Shahīhain Al-Bukhārī wa Muslim*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabah As-Sunnah, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Yahya Ibnu Hubairah, *Al-Ifshāh 'an Ma'Ān Ash-Shihhāh*, Vol. 6, ed. Fu'ad Abdul Mun'im (Riyadh: Daar Al-Wathan, 1992), 349.

<sup>27</sup> Abu Muhammad Abdullah bin Muhammad bin As-Sayyid Al-Bathaliyusi, *Musykilāt Muwatha' Mālik bin Anas*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Daar Ibn Hazm, 2000).

al-An‘ām [6]: 59, and Q.S. Al-Jinn [72]: 26. Exegetes such as Ibn Kathīr<sup>28</sup>, Syaikh Utsaimin<sup>29</sup>, al-Baghawī<sup>30</sup>, and Imam Al-Isybīlī<sup>31</sup> have traditionally interpreted these verses in direct conjunction with the very hadith that al-Najjār cites. Including these references would have facilitated a richer intertextual reading and strengthened the hermeneutical connection between prophetic narration and Qur’anic cosmology. The absence of these associations reveals not only a lapse in methodological rigor but also a missed opportunity to situate the hadith within the broader epistemic framework of the Qur’an.

A final inconsistency pertains to the lack of engagement with thematically related hadiths, a principle recognized in classical scholarship as *al-ḥadīth yufassiru ba‘ḍuhu ba‘ḍan* (“hadiths elucidate one another”). In his analysis of Hadith 45—which prohibits the consumption of meat and milk from animals that consume filth (*al-jallālah*)—al-Najjār neglects to include complementary narrations from sources such as *Musnad Aḥmad*<sup>32</sup> and *al-Mustadrak* of al-Ḥākim<sup>33</sup>. These narrations provide essential qualifications, such as conditional permissibility following a period of purification, and are crucial for contextualizing the original prohibition. Their exclusion hinders a more balanced understanding and reflects a selective hermeneutical approach that undermines methodological coherence.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate that while al-Najjār’s approach seeks to synthesize prophetic traditions with scientific insights, his practical application frequently diverges from his theoretical commitments. The selective implementation of essential methodological steps indicates a hierarchy in which scientific verification often overshadows traditional hermeneutical tools. This tension underscores a more profound epistemological concern: Can a modern scientific perspective be utilized without undermining the textual integrity and methodological rigor of the Islamic tradition?

Ultimately, al-Najjār’s work represents a significant, albeit uneven, contribution to contemporary Islamic hermeneutics. His ambition to revitalize hadith studies through scientific integration is commendable, especially in an era characterized by epistemic fragmentation. However, for *al-i j̄āz al- ‘ilmī* to develop

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<sup>28</sup> Ismail Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Azhim*, Vol. 4, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Daar Thibah li An-Nasyr wa At-Tauzi’, 1999), 435.

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad bin Shalih Utsaimin, *Syarah Shahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 10, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Daar As-Sunnah, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Al-Hasan bin Mas’ud Al-Baghawi, “Ma’ālim At-Tanzīl fī Tafsīr Al-Qurān,” Vol. 4, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Daar Thibah li An-Nasyr wa At-Tauzi’, 1997), 150.

<sup>31</sup> Abd Al-Haq bin Abd Ar-Rahman Al-Isybīlī, “Al-Ahkam Asy-Syar’iyyah Al-Kubro,” Vol. 1, 1st ed. (Riyadh: Maktabah Ar-Rusyd, 2001), 255.

<sup>32</sup> Ahmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, Vol. 32, 1st ed. (Beirut: Muassasah Ar-Risalah, 2001), 325.

<sup>33</sup> Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Hakim, *Al-Mustadrak Ala Ash-Shahihain*, Vol. 2, 1st ed. (Beirut: Daar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, 1990), 46.

into a rigorously grounded interpretive discipline, future scholars must transcend rhetorical claims and ensure a consistent, critical, and comprehensive application of methodology.

### **Tracing the Roots of Methodological Inconsistency in *al-I'jāz al- 'Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah***

The credibility of a hermeneutical model depends not only on its conceptual sophistication but also on its consistent application across various textual cases. In *al-I'jāz al- 'Ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*, Zaghlūl al-Najjār presents an ambitious five-stage method for the scientific interpretation of hadith, which includes linguistic analysis, contextual exploration (*asbāb al-wurūd*), hadith comparison, Qur'anic correspondence, and empirical validation. However, as previous analyses have shown, the application of this method throughout his corpus is often inconsistent. These discrepancies should not be dismissed as mere technical oversights; rather, they must be examined within a broader diagnostic framework. A close analysis reveals three primary contributing factors: (1) the absence of relevant data, (2) the perceived irrelevance of available data to the scientific objective, and (3) the neglect of data that is both relevant and accessible.

The first factor arises from a structural limitation within the hadith corpus itself: the genuine absence of supporting data necessary for method implementation. Not every hadith is transmitted with an established historical background (*asbāb al-wurūd*), nor does every narration necessitate the semantic unpacking of rare or obscure terms. In such instances, al-Najjār's inability to apply all five methods is not indicative of a methodological flaw but rather a consequence dictated by the nature of the textual material. A pertinent example is his discussion of the hadith that reports 360 joints in the human body and the corresponding moral obligation of daily charitable acts. The emphasis here is appropriately placed on the anatomical accuracy of the narration in light of modern findings. However, no Qur'anic verse or significant linguistic issue appears relevant or accessible to this hadith. Searches in major classical commentaries, such as *Ikmāl al-Mu'lim* by al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ<sup>34</sup>, *Syarh Sunan Abī Dāwūd* by Ibn Ruslan<sup>35</sup>, and *Sharḥ al-Arba'in* by Ibn 'Uthaymīn<sup>36</sup>, confirm the absence of intertextual links or semantic complexities that could have warranted additional methodological layers. This condition, while

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<sup>34</sup> 'Iyyadh bin Musa bin 'Iyyadh bin 'Imran Abu Al-Fadhl, *Ikmāl al-Mu'lim Bi Fawa'id Muslim*, Vol. 3, 1st ed. (Mesir: Daar Al-Wafaa' li Ath-Thaba'ah wa An-Nasyr wa At-Tauzi', 1998), 528.

<sup>35</sup> Syihabuddin Abu Al-Abbad Ahmad bin Husain bin Ali Ibnu Ruslan Al-Maqdisi, *Syarh Sunan Abi Dawud li Ibn Ruslan*, Vol. 6, 1st ed. (Mesir: Daar Al-Fallah li Al-Buhuts Al-Ilmi wa Tahqiq At-Turats, 2016), 379.

<sup>36</sup> Muhammad bin Shalih bin Muhammad Al-Utsaimin, *Syarh Al-Arba'in An-Nawawiyyah* (Daar Ats-Tsuraya li An-Nasy, n.d.).

limiting, is natural within the field of hadith sciences and does not detract from the overall analytical integrity.

The second factor contributing to methodological inconsistency arises when available data is excluded because it appears irrelevant to the specific scientific argument being constructed. This issue pertains not to textual absence but to thematic disconnection. Al-Najjār seems to omit contextual or discursive data when it does not serve the epistemic goal of correlating hadith content with modern science. For instance, in his interpretation of the hadith concerning human lineage and its connection to Adam, which is more fully preserved in al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, a conversational prelude involving the Prophet and a Companion. Al-Najjār isolates only the portion that refers to the nutfah and its connection to ancestry, aligning it with theories of genetics and human origin. While this approach may enhance scientific clarity, it sacrifices the narrative richness and rhetorical context of the hadith. Although the contextual conversation may not directly contribute to genetic science, its exclusion narrows the interpretive field and overlooks the layered meanings embedded in the complete report. As scholars such as Khaled Abou El Fadl (2004) and Shahab Ahmed (2016) have emphasized, fidelity to the literary and historical texture of religious discourse is crucial for maintaining interpretive integrity, even in modern engagement projects.

The third and most significant factor is the omission of supporting data that is not only thematically relevant but also readily available within the scholarly tradition. This neglect represents a critical methodological rupture. A notable instance is al-Najjār's treatment of the hadith concerning resurrection through the 'ajb al-dhanab. This term is recognized as *gharīb* and has been extensively explored by classical scholars such as Ibn al-Athīr in *al-Nihāyah*, Ibn Ḥajar in *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, and al-Nawawī in *Sharḥ Muslim*. Each of these works provides a detailed anatomical identification of the coccyx and its role in eschatological thought. However, al-Najjār's commentary entirely bypasses this philological tradition, thereby undermining both the textual and scientific rigor of his argument. Similarly, in his discussion of the prohibition against consuming *al-jallālah* (animals that consume filth), al-Najjār fails to engage with complementary hadiths that qualify this prohibition, such as those found in *Musnad Aḥmad* and *al-Mustadrak*. These narrations provide important legal and empirical nuances, including the permissibility of consumption after a specified period of dietary purification. Their inclusion would have offered interpretive balance and reinforced the scientific dimension concerning contamination and detoxification; yet, they are conspicuously absent.

There are plausible explanations for these omissions. Al-Najjār's academic background in geology and the natural sciences, while well-suited for scientific inquiry, may have limited his access to the extensive hadith commentarial literature necessary for a comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, his project is primarily driven

by a desire to demonstrate the alignment between prophetic language and modern empirical knowledge. As a result, data that does not directly support the narrative of scientific inimitability may have been deprioritized or considered extraneous. While this focus enhances the thematic clarity of his scientific interpretations, it also introduces a reductionist tendency that potentially marginalizes the ethical, rhetorical, and juridical dimensions of hadith discourse.

Taken together, these three factors—absence, misperceived irrelevance, and neglect—offer a multi-dimensional understanding of the inconsistencies present in *al-I'jāz al-'ilmī*. Rather than condemning al-Najjār's project in its entirety, these factors highlight the necessity for greater methodological transparency and interdisciplinary collaboration among scholars. Future endeavors in scientific hermeneutics must consider these variables by adopting a more holistic approach—one that remains faithful to the richness of the hadith tradition while articulating its connections to the evolving frontiers of scientific thought. Only through such integrative scholarship can the aspiration of *i'jāz 'ilmī* evolve from a rhetorical assertion into a robust academic discipline.

## Conclusion

This study has uncovered a critical paradox at the core of Zaghlūl al-Najjār's *al-I'jāz al-'ilmī fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyyah*: while the work is lauded for pioneering a scientific hermeneutics of hadith, it is plagued by significant internal inconsistencies between its stated methodology and its actual application. The most crucial and previously undocumented finding is the quantitative and qualitative extent of these inconsistencies—out of seventy hadiths analyzed, only three were interpreted using the complete five-step framework proposed by the author himself. This discrepancy is not merely procedural; it signifies a fundamental epistemological tension between the ambition to align religious texts with scientific epistemologies and the methodological rigor required for such a synthesis.

In the broader context of Islamic scholarship, these findings provide a critical intervention in ongoing debates surrounding *tafsīr 'ilmī* and the reinterpretation of revelation in light of modern science. By rigorously analyzing al-Najjār's methodology, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that questions the stability and coherence of scientific hermeneutics when applied to prophetic traditions. It offers much-needed analytical clarity to a field that often oscillates between apologetic enthusiasm and uncritical acceptance of empirical validation. Furthermore, the study advances the discourse by proposing that *i'jāz 'ilm* must be grounded not only in scientific credibility but also in hermeneutical consistency, intertextual coherence, and fidelity to the interpretive legacy of *'ulūm al-ḥadīth*.

However, this study also acknowledges its limitations. It focuses exclusively on the textual analysis of a single major work by one author and does not include field interviews, historical reception studies, or engagement with competing models of

*i'jāz 'ilmī* proposed by other scholars. Furthermore, the interpretive coding used to evaluate methodological completeness inevitably involves subjective judgment, particularly in borderline cases where methods are either partially applied or ambiguously articulated. Future research should broaden this investigation by conducting comparative analyses of multiple *i'jāz* works and incorporating interdisciplinary tools from cognitive science, linguistic pragmatics, and the sociology of knowledge. Such an expansion would facilitate a more nuanced understanding of how scientific reasoning is operationalized—and contested—within contemporary Islamic hermeneutics.

In summary, this study contends that while al-Najjār's framework constitutes a significant and audacious contribution to the re-engagement of Islamic revelation with modern science, its practical implementation presents unresolved methodological and epistemological challenges. If *i'jāz 'ilmī* is to transition from an apologetic discourse into a sustainable academic paradigm, future scholars must transcend rhetorical affirmation and commit to methodological rigor, textual transparency, and critical self-reflection.

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