

Islamic Science: Does Islamic literature contain scientific miracles?

Denis Giron

Over the last decade growing numbers of Muslims have declared the Qur'an to be a book filled with alleged scientific miracles. Numerous web sites, books and videos have been produced that proclaim Islam to be truly a religion of divine origin, citing "scientifically accurate" statements in the Qur'an and Hadiths. Many of these productions introduce their claims with a statement like this:

One of the most remarkable things in the Quran is how it deals with science. The Quran which was revealed in the 7th century to Muhammed (p.b.u.h.)? contains unbelievable scientific facts which are being discovered in this century. Scientists are shocked and many times speechless when they are shown how detailed and accurate some verses? in the Quran are to modern science. For those who doubt the truth of Islam, I ask you: Could Muhammad, a 7th century desert Arab , from a poor and barbaric society, with no tradition of knowledge, philosophy and learning as the Greeks, with no author as prolific as Homer or Plato, an uneducated orphan who could not read and write, produce a book like the Qur'an if it was not from God?

This article will confront this question, as well as confront the various verses from the Qur'an which Muslim's cite as scientific miracles. This article will also look into various scientific absurdities found in the Qur'an and Hadiths that many Muslims fail to mention.

Of the roughly 1.3 billion Muslims on the planet, 90% are Sunni. Therefore, this article will confront the teachings of Sunni Islam. Hadith literature is, for the most part, unique to Sunni Islam, as many other sects (Shia, Submitter, Sufi) do not regard such writings as highly as the Sunnis do. Because of this, citing various Hadiths is only relevant in a discussion about Sunni Islam.

Creation of Earth

Modern scholars have criticized the bible for it's claim that the Earth was created in six days. This has been waved off as just another myth concocted by an ancient people to explain how the world was created. The Qur'an has made the same mistake regarding the amount of time needed to create the earth, as is seen in the following verse:

And verily We created the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in six Days, and naught of weariness touched Us. (Qur'an 50:38)

It is a known fact that Muhammad had contact with Jews and Christians, and much of the Qur'an is modeled after the Bible. While the Qur'an does not have the bible's claim that "on the seventh day God rested" (Genesis 2:2) it still proclaims the earth to be created in six days.

Muslims who seek to cast the Qur'an as being compatible with modern science, point out that the Qur'an also says that a day for Allah and the angels is similar to 50,000 years (Qur'an 70:4). In citing this verse, Muslims try to say the Earth was completed in 300,000 (6 x 50,000) years. While it is a nice try, the reality is this still does not agree with modern science, which states that it took several billion years for the Earth to reach this stage. Billions of years passed before there were trees, or forests, or animals.

Furthermore, such claims open the Qur'an to more criticism. The verse that allegedly says a day equals 50,000 years (Qur'an 70:4) states:

"The angels ascend to Him in a day, the measure of which is fifty thousand years." This verse actually seems to be discussing the speed of travel for angels. Possibly it is saying that the angels can travel in a day, the amount of space it would take others 50,000 years to cover. My goal is not to offer alternative interpretations to this myth. However, I dispute the claim that the this verse is saying a day equals 50,000 years because such a thing contradicts other parts of the Qur'an!

A day cannot equal 50,000 years because according to the Qur'an, a day equals 1,000 human years (Qur'an 22:47 & 32:5). Furthermore, to claim that it took Allah 300,000 years to create the Earth is to insult the God of Islam, as when he creates, he says "Be!" and it is (Qur'an 2:117).

The Qur'an on Embryology

In 1982 Keith Moore, an anatomy professor at the University of Toronto, produced a textbook titled "The Developing Human, 3rd edition". In this book Moore states his astonishment at the way embryonic development is depicted in the Qur'an. Moore would go on to produce fourth and fifth editions of his textbook, as well as another book titled "Human Development as described in the Quran and Sunnah", all of which many Muslims cite with great pleasure. Moore and his Muslim supporters are referring to the following verse:

We placed him as sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed; Then We made the sperm into a clot of blood; then of that blood clot We made a lump; then we made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then we developed out of it another creature. So blessed be God, the best to create! (Quran 23:13-14)

Indeed, at first glance, this seems like a remarkable statement for a "7th century desert Arab" to make. However, upon closer study, one realizes that there is both explanation and error to this verse. First we must ask if this was an original theory, and second we must ask if it is correct.

Many people are amazed by the mention of sperm in this verse. This is nothing special. Since the beginning of time man has been aware of the "seed" that is released from the penis during sexual intercourse. The Bible, a text much older than the Qur'an, tells a story of a man who was struck down by God for "spilling his seed on the ground" (Genesis 38:9-10).

The entire study of human life as mentioned in the Qur'an is not original at all. While Muslims try to claim that Muhammad made these statements before scientists discovered them, they are wrong. Theories of the formation of a child inside the womb was put forth by Aristotle nearly 1,000 years before the Qur'an was written. In fact Aristotle correctly described the function of the umbilical cord, something not mentioned in the Qur'an, showing that earlier philosophers were aware of such things mentioned by Muhammad and more. Every mention of human development in the Qur'an is similar to Roman and Greek theories. Consider the following verse referring to sperm:

He is created from a drop (of sperm) emitted-- Proceeding from between the backbone and the ribs. (Qur'an 86:6-7)

Clearly this verse is incorrect, and clearly it has origins in earlier theories. First of all, for sperm to originate between the back and the ribs would mean that it comes from the kidneys! We now know that semen is produced in the testicles, but people in Muhammad's time did not know this. Eleven centuries before Muhammad, the Greek physician Hippocrates theorized that sperm passed through the kidneys into the penis. For centuries this was an accepted (and incorrect) belief of the origins of sperm.

There are those who claim Muhammad had no contact with Greeks or Romans. Pre-Islamic Arabia definitely had contact with Byzantium, Syria, Egypt, Persia, and Babylon. There were many Jews and Christians living in the area, and they were familiar with Greek or Roman philosophy. The Christians were connected to Rome. The Jews were connected to Babylon and Persia. It is easy to see how such theories regarding embryonic development may have reached Muhammad.

Finally, to touch back on the verses that spoke of the development of an unborn child, I will say they too are incorrect. The Qur'an stated that the blood clot was turned to bone and then God "clothed the bones with flesh" (Quran 23:13-14). It is scientific fact that living tissue forms first, and then bones grow at a later time, and continue to gain strength (by building calcium) for many years after birth. Therefore, this is one of many scientific inaccuracies in the Qur'an.

Scientific Absurdities in the Qur'an and Hadith

To believe in the Qur'an is to not think rationally. There are numerous myths and scientific errors within the text of the Qur'an, and the Hadiths. Muslims accept many scientific absurdities with blind devotion. The world has matured as a whole, and has shed many of the fears and superstitions held by primitive cultures of the past. Unfortunately, because the text of the Qur'an is revered, people do not question many superstitious concepts that Muslims should have outgrown long ago.

To begin, I would like to give an example of a myth from Hindu culture. According to Hindu tradition, the god Siva would leave his wife home alone for long periods of time. One day she took skin from her own body, and used it to create a child. The child was used to protect her, and the house. When Siva returned, the child refused to let him enter the house. Without hesitation Siva drew his sword and decapitated the child. Siva's wife was quite angry, and to make up for what he did, Siva went out and cut off the head of an elephant, and placed it on the child's body. This is why the Hindu deity Ganesh has the body of a human, but the head of an elephant.

Now that I have told this story, will any Muslim believe it? Of course not. It is an absurd myth. There is no need to debate this issue, it is obvious that this is not true. It is a myth created by a primitive culture. If it is easy to see that this is a myth, why is it so difficult for Muslims to see the myths within their own text? I will now give a run down of some of the scientific errors in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an has a story of a woman who has never had sexual intercourse (a virgin) that becomes pregnant and gives birth (Qur'an 19:16-21). This is a myth deeply rooted in many cultures. Muslims are used to debating with Christians, so they are never told that virgin birth is impossible, as this is a doctrine of Christianity as well. The reality is, this is a scientific absurdity.

The Qur'an tells us that this same child who was born of a virgin mother is able to speak in complete sentences at only a day old (Qur'an 19:29-33)! While Muslims and Christians are debating the scientific knowledge written in the pages of the Qur'an, a rational thinker can clearly see that this idea of the talking baby, born of a virgin mother, is absurd. It was a myth adopted by Muhammad, and inserted into the text of the Qur'an.

For further scientific absurdities consider the following Hadith:

Sahih Muslim, Book 40, Number 6985:

Narrated AbuHurayrah:

Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) said: The Last Hour would not come unless the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him; but the tree Gharqad would not say, for it is the tree of the Jews.

A rational person can quickly realize the ridiculous nature of this Hadith. There is scientific error at so many levels. First, the idea of stones and trees talking is from the realm of fairy tales. In order for the stone or tree to talk, it would need a brain, lungs, the proper vocal cords, and an understanding of the language it is speaking. Equally disturbing is the claim that one of these trees, the Gharqad, will take sides with the Jews.

If the thought of trees and stones talking was not enough, the Qur'an mentions clouds that can speak. Allah said to the clouds "come willingly or unwillingly" and they said "we come willingly" (Qur'an 41:11). Most readers pass right by this verse, but many questions come up when analyzing it. At what point does water vapor become conscious? Is a water molecule alive? With two atoms of hydrogen, and one of oxygen, where is the brain or the orifice required for speech?

Stories of non-living matter (rocks, etc) acting similar to living organisms is also found in the Qur'an. There are stories of mountains that have fear (Qur'an 33:72). Fear is an emotion which is caused by chemical impulses in the brain. Do the mountains, made a stone and dirt, have brains with these chemical impulses taking place?

One major scientific error in the Qur'an can be seen in the following verses:

And he followed a road; Till, when he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring, and found a people thereabout. We said: O Dhu'l-Qarneyn! Either punish or show them kindness. (Qur'an 18:85-86)

This is a major scientific blunder in the Qur'an. A man walked until he reached the setting place of the sun, and saw it setting in a muddy spring. Modern science has taught us that the earth revolves around the sun. The above excerpt from the Qur'an seems to state that it is the sun that moves, as well as sets on earth! If the sun were to touch the surface of the earth, everything would be incinerated, and all life would die.

Another curiosity is the mythical beings known in Islam as Jinn. There are Muslims who believe that Jinn stand on top of each other's shoulders all the way up to heaven, and listen to what is being discussed. There is a Hadith narrated by Aisha (Sahih Bukhari Volume 9, Book 93, Number 650) that says soothsayers and psychics receive some of their information from Jinn who stealthily acquire this info by listening to the discussions in heaven. The Qur'an says that the stars were created

to defend heaven from such eavesdroppers (Qur'an 37:6-8), as well as saying that the stars are used as missiles (projectiles) to drive them away (Qur'an 67:5).

First of all, if Jinn can reach heaven by standing on the shoulders of one another, that means heaven is a given distance from earth. If this is true, then eventually we will be able to fly to heaven by space shuttle, or see it with a telescope. What is far worse in this theory is the thought that stars are used to throw at the Jinn. Stars are essentially stationary, but one can imagine how 7th century Arabs might have been in awe of the sights in the sky. This myth seems to confuse shooting stars with stars. The authors of the Qur'an and Hadiths probably thought stars and "shooting stars" were the same thing, when in reality they are not.

According to the Qur'an there was a man who could understand the speech of animals (Qur'an 27:18-19). While zoologists have formed methods of communicating with apes and chimps, no human being has ever been able to understand the "language" of species different from our own. The ability to speak like a human is formed by advanced brains with complex thought patterns, something most animals do not have. Therefore, to think that a man could understand the spoken language of another animal is absurd.

What is even worse is the verses cited have this man hearing the speech of ants! It is a scientific fact that ants have no speech patterns. They communicate through chemical trails, and other forms of odor. In other words they communicate via smell, not sound! This blunder is understandable, as the average desert Arab in the seventh century would not know this. However this lack of knowledge of the animal kingdom proves human origin of the text, and disputes theories of a divine origin.

The Qur'an states that Allah created the sky in layers. He created seven heavens, and decked the lowest heaven with lamps (Qur'an 67:3-5) and adorned it with the beauty of the stars (Qur'an 37:6). The Qur'an also states that the moon is within these seven heavens (Qur'an 71:15-16). If the stars (lamps) are in the lowest heaven, they are either closer to the earth than the moon, or are at an equal distance from the earth as the moon. Either way this is scientifically inaccurate. It is a known fact that the stars are much farther away than the moon.

The following Hadith speaks of monkeys that are Muslims:

Sahih Bulhari Volume 5, Book 58, Number 188:

Narrated 'Amr bin Maimun:

During the pre-Islamic period of ignorance I saw a she-monkey surrounded by a number of monkeys. They were all stoning it, because it had committed illegal sexual intercourse. I too, stoned it along with them.

It is a rule in both Islam and Judaism that women who commit adultery are to be stoned. According to the above Hadith monkeys were subject to this law as well. What other laws do monkeys follow? Are they required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca? Are they required to read the Qur'an? What constitutes adultery in the monkey world? This is simply a myth. This is similar to a story found in the Ramayana, an ancient Hindu epic, that talks of the monkey Hanuman, and others of his kind, fighting for control of the monkey kingdom.

There is a Hadith (Sahih Bukhari Volume 1, Book 9, Number 490) which states that if a woman or a dog passes in front of you while you are praying, your prayer will not make it to heaven. While there are chauvinistic implications here, I'd like to focus on the scientific aspect. What is it about women and dogs that nullify prayers? Are the prayers carried by a type of sonic wave that women and dogs disrupt? It is obvious that there is no scientific explanation to this absurd myth. No one should be

surprised by this, as numerous Hadiths say dogs are evil, and should be killed. Sahih Bukhari Volume 4, Book 54, Number 540 says plainly: "Allah's Apostle ordered that the dogs should be killed."

Of course when it comes to killing animals, there are different laws for different species. Dogs are to be killed instantly, however snakes are to first get verbal warning if he comes to your house. If the snake comes a second time, kill him (Sunan Abu Dawud Book 41, Number 5240). The interesting thing about such a Hadith is the fact that snakes cannot hear. It is bad enough to assume that any animal would understand you giving a verbal warning, but to assume that an animal that is deaf will understand you is ridiculous. It is the equivalent of writing a note for a bat, and leaving it on your door so that he may read it later.

The following Hadith shows the poor sanitation habits of Muhammad and his followers:

Sunan Abu Dawud Book 1, Number 0067:

Narrated AbuSa'id al-Khudri:

I heard that the people asked the Prophet of Allah (peace_be_upon_him): Water is brought for you from the well of Buda'ah. It is a well in which dead dogs, menstrual clothes and excrement of people are thrown. The Messenger of Allah (peace_be_upon_him) replied: Verily water is pure and is not defiled by anything.

The issue here is not hygiene, but rather a lack of scientific understanding of bacteria, viruses, and germs that can be present in water. Excrement is a very common cause of water becoming contaminated with Escherichia coli (E. coli), a bacteria commonly found in the colon that is deadly to humans if ingested. Water contaminated with dead dogs or menstrual fluids can be equally dangerous.

Conclusion

Muslims cite alleged scientific miracles in the Qur'an and Hadiths to try and prove a divine origin of their faith. In this short study of Islamic science, these claims have been debunked. Clearly there was no supernatural force giving Muhammad scientific information. While the Muslims argued that advanced scientific knowledge in the Qur'an is a sign of divine origin, the rational thinker points out that the numerous and obvious scientific errors point to a wholly human origin.

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