

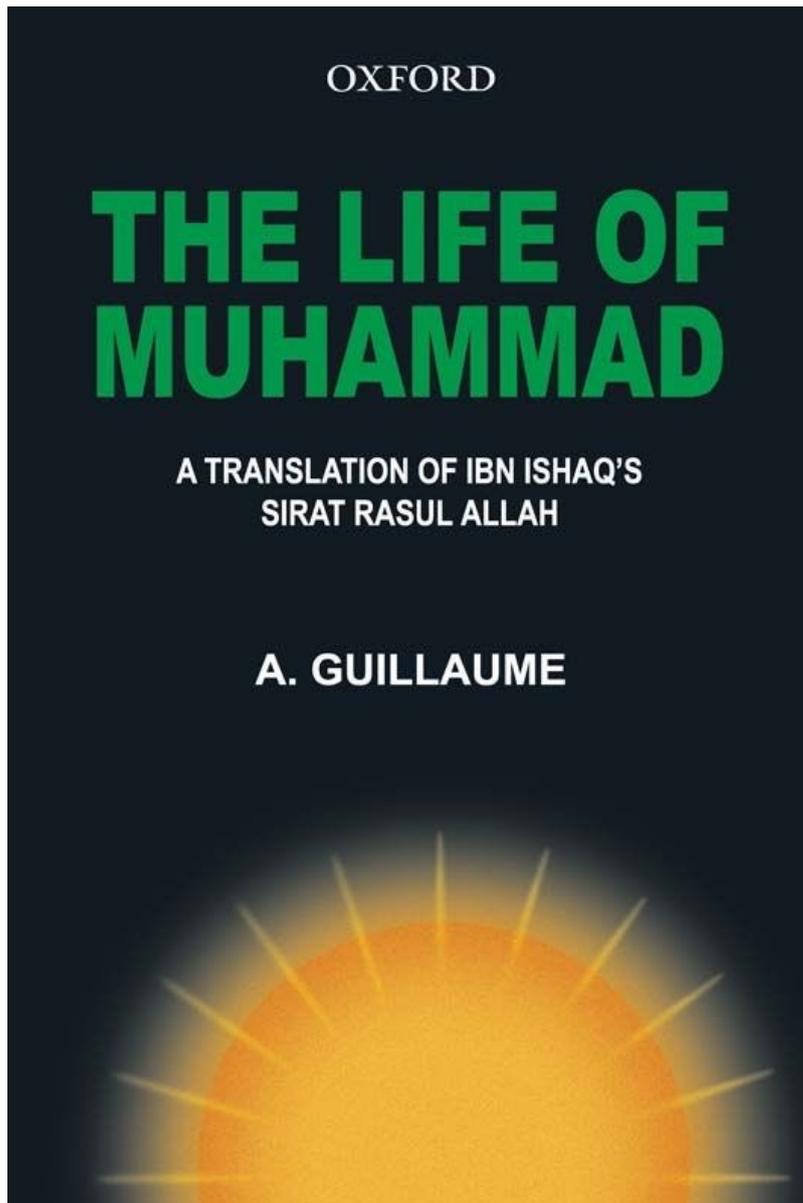
Similarly, a number of academic specialists of Islam think the incident is the result of the literary invention of very early Muslim biographers and historians (for reasons I'll explain below). 5/

What does it mean to say the Satanic Verses incident appears in the Islamic tradition? It means the Muslim historical sources that collect, carry, and preserve the cultural memories of the first Muslim community have recorded and reported the Satan Verses incident. 6/

We have at least 50 historical reports from the first 200 years of Islam (roughly 610-810 CE) that describe in detail the occasion when the Prophet Muhammad supposedly mistook the deception of Satan for the command of God, thereby altering the message of the Quran. 7/

These 50 or so reports are known as narrations (or **■ ■ ■ ■ ■** in Arabic). They should be understood as historical memories that follow specific style and hermeneutic in literary narrative. Let's take a look at one example from the 50 narrations. 8/

The narration here is recorded in one of the earliest and most authoritative biographies of Muhammad, by a certain Ibn Ishaq who died in 767 CE. The full text is available in English translation. 9/ <https://t.co/0mVxMCmPtd>



The narration is quite long but a close reading shows the following discernible narrative units and motifs. The first motif: Muhammad was distressed and under pressure from his local tribe. Satan exploited the situation by feeding him false revelation. 10/ <https://t.co/kTfRnLTiGu>

When the Messenger of God saw his tribe turning away from him, and was greatly disturbed by their estrangement from that which he had brought them from God, he desired within himself that there come to him from God something that would bring him and his tribe together. Because of his love for his tribe and his concern for them, it would have pleased him if their harsh treatment of him should, in some measure, have been softened, to the point that he thought to himself about it and desired it and wished for it.

So God sent down: "By the star when it sets: 'Your Companion has not gone astray, nor is he misguided: Nor does he speak from his own desire . . .!"; and when he (the Prophet) reached the verse, "Have you seen al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat, the third, the other?", Satan cast upon his tongue because of that which he had been thinking to himself about and had been desiring to bring to his people: "Those high cranes: Indeed, their intercession is approved.

The second motif: Muhammad joined the pagan Arabs in venerating of their idols, named Lat, Uzza, and Manat. The pagans rejoiced and took great delight that Muhammad and his Muslim followers afforded their pagan religion some respect. 11/ <https://t.co/cecfHYefSy>

When Quraysh heard this they were delighted. The way in which he had mentioned their gods pleased them greatly and they hearkened to him, while the Believers trusted their Prophet in regard to that which he brought them from their Lord, and did not suspect him of an error or delusion or lapse.

And when he reached the prostration part in the relevant verse of the Qur'an and completed the verse, he made the prostration and the Muslims made the prostration with the prostration of their Prophet, believing what he brought them to be true, and in obedience to his command. And the Qurayshi and non-Qurayshi pagans present in the mosque made the prostration themselves because of what they had heard in mention of their gods, so that there remained in the mosque neither Believer nor Pagan who had not made the prostration, save al-Walid b. al-Mughirah, who was a very old man and was unable to do so, so he took a handful of soil from the valley floor and made the prostration on it.

The third motif: Muhammad is reproached by the Archangel Gabriel who is the one that usually brings him revelation from God. Gabriel rebukes Muhammad, telling him 'what have you done! This isn't God's revelation'. 12/ <https://t.co/KL20wFyeXo>

Then the people dispersed from the mosque. Quraysh left having been greatly pleased by what they had heard in mention of their gods, saying, "Muhammad has mentioned our gods in the most favourable manner and has asserted in his recitation that they are the high cranes and that their intercession is approved".

News of the prostration reached those of the Companions of the Messenger of God who were in Abyssinia, and it was said: "Quraysh have accepted Islam"; so some men undertook to return while others remained behind. And Gabriel came to the Messenger and said: "Muhammad, what have you done? You have recited to the people that which I did not bring to you from God, and you have said that which He did not say to you!" The Messenger of God was grieved at this, and was greatly fearful of God.

The fourth motif: God forgives the grieving Muhammad and reminds him that previous prophets have fallen into similar traps set up for them by Satan.13/ <https://t.co/DFseuRNvBr>

So God sent down a Revelation and was Merciful to Him comforting him and lightening the burden of the matter, informing him that no Prophet or Messenger before him had desired as he had desired nor wished as he had wished but that Satan cast (something) into his desire, just as Satan had cast (something) onto his (the Prophet's) tongue, and that God then removed that which Satan had cast and established His Signs clearly meaning: you (Muhammad) are like the rest of the Prophets and Messengers. So God sent down: "We have not sent before you a Messenger or a Prophet but that when he desired, Satan cast something into his desire; then God removes that which Satan casts and establishes His Signs clearly—and God is All-Knowing, All-Wise."

So God dispelled His Prophet's grief, made him secure from that which he feared, and removed that which Satan had cast upon his tongue in mention of their gods—they are the high cranes and their intercession is approved!—with the words of God, the Glorious, following the mention of "al-Lat, al-'Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other": "Should you have males, and He females? That, indeed, would be an unfair division! . . ."—meaning: crooked —. . . Indeed, they are no more than names which you have named, you and your ancestors . . .," to His words: "to whom He wills and approves; meaning: how can the intercession of your gods be of benefit with God?"

And when there came from God that which removed what Satan had cast onto the tongue of His Prophet, Quraysh said, "Muhammad has regretted what he said about the status of your gods with God, and has changed it and brought something else." And those two phrases which Satan had cast onto the tongue of the Messenger of God had become lodged in the mouth of every pagan, and they became even more iniquitous than they had been before, and even more hostile to those of Quraysh who had accepted Islam and who had followed the Messenger of God.

The rest of the narrations bear the same general contours as the one above, with notable changes in the wording and some divergent narratives. These are not our concern here. 14/

Reports of the Satanic Verses incident were recorded by virtually every biographer of Muhammad in the first two centuries of Islam: 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr, Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, Musa b. 'Uqbah, Ibn Ishaq, Abu Mash'ar, Yunus b. Bukayr , and al-Waqidi. 15/

Similarly, in the first 200 years of Islam, exegetes of the Qur'an recorded the incident: Abu al-'Aliyah , Sa'id b. Jubayr, Mujahid b. Jabr, Dahhak, 'Ikrimah, Muhammad b. Ka'b, al-Hasan al-Basri, Qatadah, Abu Salih, 'Atiyah al-'Awfi al-Suddi, Kalbi, Muqatil, 16/

Ibn Jurayj, Ma'mar b. Rashid, and Yahya al-Basri. Six of these transmitted the incident on the authority of 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbas, with remarkably consistency. Ibn 'Abbas was a close and learned companion of Muhammad. 17/

A study of the transmission history of the incident shows it was widely circulated and reported in first two hundred years of Islam in almost every important intellectual centre in the Islamic world from the Hijaz to Syria to Iraq to Transoxania to North Africa. 18/

All the major cities of the Islamic world knew of the incident—and accepted it a true—in places like Medina, Mecca, Basra, Kufa, Baghdad, Rayy, Balkh, Samarqand, Marw, Sanaa, Fustat, and Qayrawan. 19/

This leads us to the next important question: why was embarrassing incident accepted as true? To understand the reasons behind their early Muslim acceptance of the Satanic Verses we need to understand why later Muslims rejected it. 20/

Later Muslims dismissed the incident as spurious and theological abominable based on two considerations: one, Muhammad was a protected by God. He was, in their view, infallible and not prone to make mistakes in his delivery of the revelation. 21/

Two, the historical reliability of the early transmitters of the Satanic Verses incident is dubious and rely on spurious historical information. The first rejection relies on theological doctrine called Infallibility of Prophet while the second is based on Hadith Criticism. 22/

This begs the question, though. Why did the early Muslim transmit such a story if it was indeed a literary invention of fecund imagination? Here we need to understand that early Islamic memory (including the life of Muhammad) was preserved by 3 distinct discourses. 23/

That is, the earliest historical accounts of Islam and the life of Muhammad break into 3 different and often disagreeing methods of preserving history. The 3 discourses are called Hadith, Sirah, and Tafsir. 24/

The Satanic Verses incident is reported in the genre of writing history that falls under Sirah and Tafsir. The former genre describes the biography and life of Muhammad, while the latter is exegesis or commentary of the Qur'an. 25/

The Hadith, on the other hand, was a different cultural and intellectual project to the first two. The identity of Muhammad as constituted by each of these historical memory discourses often reflects cultural project of these distinct genres of writing. 26/

The aim of the scholars of the Hadith movement was to establish legal, praxial, and creedal norms through the authoritative documentation of the words and deeds of Muhammad as produced from the historical memory of the early Muslim community. 27/

The Hadith scholars were concerned with prescribing the specific content of Islam as it relates to the elaboration of Islamic law. Hadith collections formed the bedrock of Islamic law. 28/

Law, in turn, was imitated the example of Muhammad. Hadith carried the statements and acts of the prophetic, forming the basis of detail legal, praxial, and creedal rules that regulated the lives of Muslims. 29/

The Hadith cultural project invested greatly in scrutinising the validity, credibility, and authenticity the historical memory of Muhammad. It fell back on a thorough process of investigation, historical criticism, and evaluation. 30/

The Satanic Verses incident was not included in any of the canonical Hadith collections. They deemed it inauthentic and incongruent with their theological project (which required the Prophet to be infallible). 31/

Scholars of Sirah and Tafsir were not primarily concerned with establishing norms of religious law and praxis for Muslims, rather they sought to construct a narrative of the moral-historical epic of the life of Muhammad in his heroic struggle to establish divine religion 32/

The Sirah, which carries many of the Satanic Verses reports, “is nothing if not an epic. Its central figure is a man of noble lineage but disadvantaged birth—a vulnerable orphan dependent on the protection of an aged uncle. 33/

He possesses extraordinary virtue that is recognized by all in his tribe, but is without fortune or power. This man is singled out by God to be His Messenger and charged with the mission of leading his people out of the darkness of idolatry to the salvation of monotheism; 34/

but his Message of monotheism and morality is rejected by his tribe, and draws only a few close friends and relatives, slaves and low-born freemen. His followers are persecuted; some are tortured and martyred, while others flee across the sea into exile. 35/

He is abused, spat upon, doused in offal. His uncle and wife die, and his clan is then boycotted by the tribe and almost starves to death.” 36/

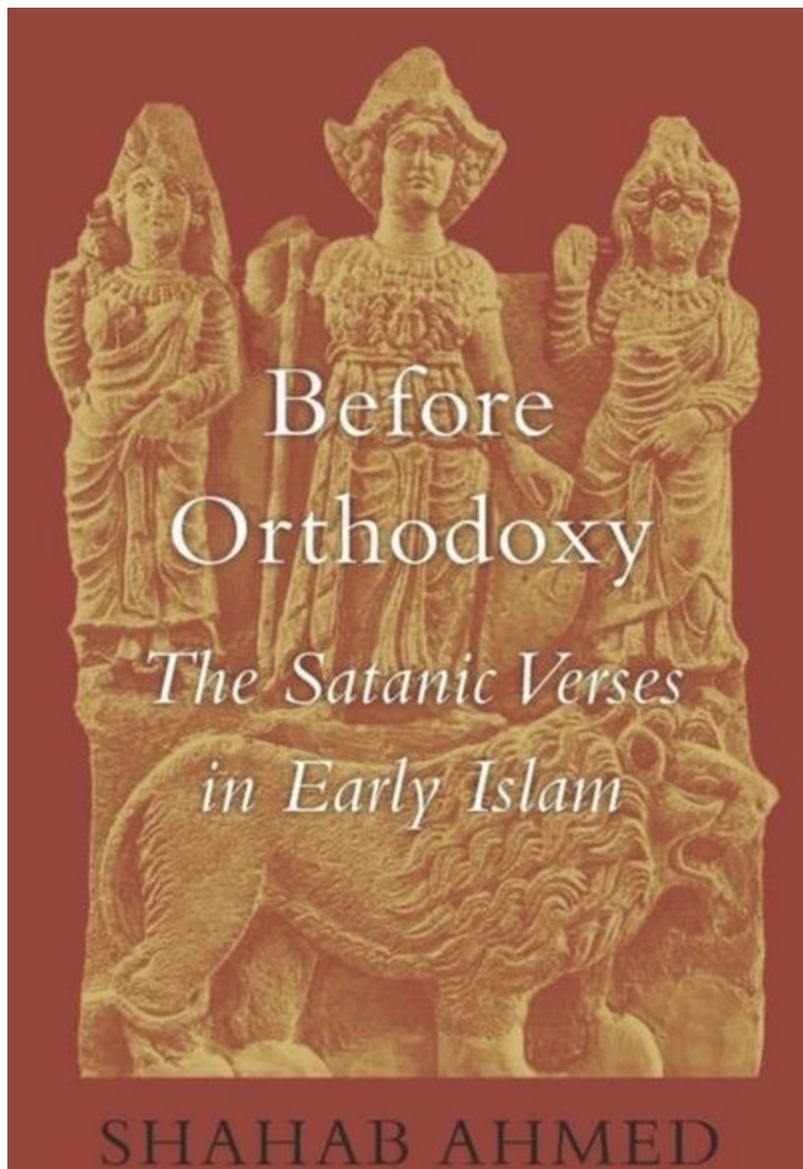
The Sirah is thus a deliberate attempt to portray a struggling and humanised Muhammad that goes on to rise against life’s vicissitudes to make monotheism triumph supreme. 37/

The Satanic Verses incident was invented, the claim goes, by the Sirah scholars in order to tell a heroic story of peril, suffering, fortitude, persistence, faith, courage, and triumph. 38/

In summary: the Satanic Verses story appears in the earliest historical sources of Islam. It is rejected by others. Critics deem it a literary invention to imbue Muhammad with virtue, which received little if any support by later orthodoxies. 39/

For a full treatment with excruciating details, consult the brilliant work (which I summarised above) of the late Shahab Ahmed. FIN.

■ <https://t.co/gnV4kjn4mh>



Addendum: please excuse all the typos and infelicities. I did the thread on my phone and in a hurry.