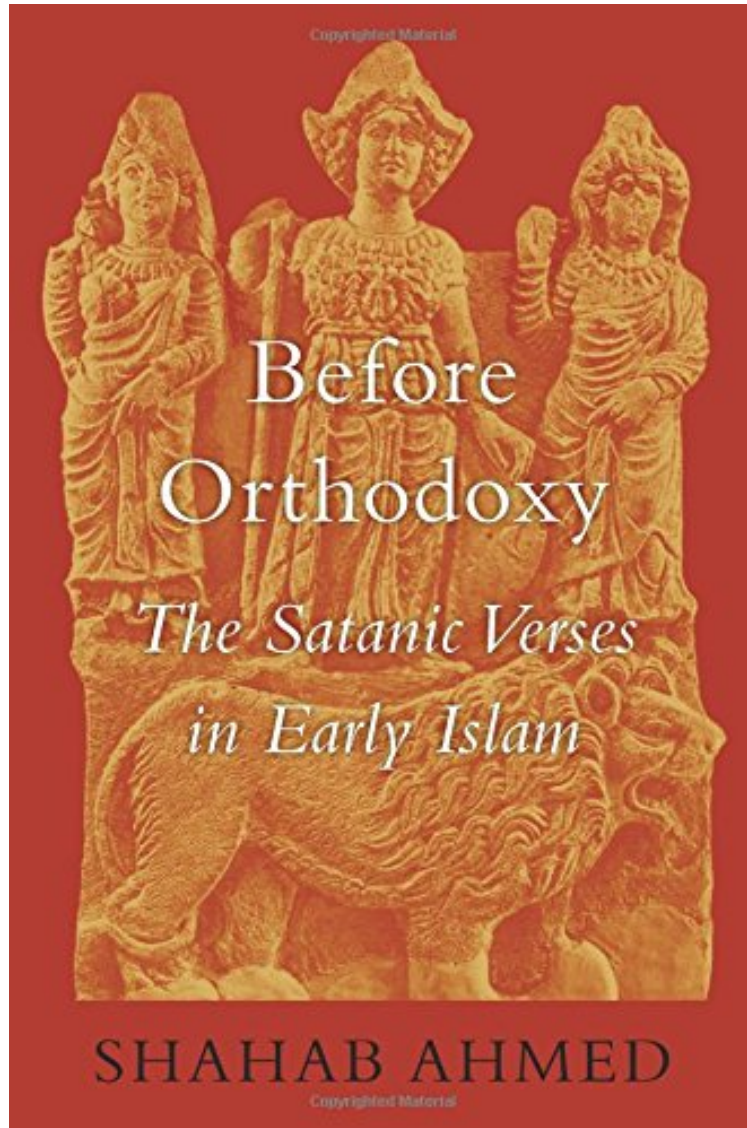


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Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam

Shahab Ahmed

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Shahab Ahmed : Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. heroicBy David Reid RossShahab Ahmed wrote his doctoral thesis on the Satanic Verses controversy, and devoted several articles to its development through the centuries. He planned a magnum opus in three volumes to organise his findings. This book is the first of those volumes; he passed away before he could do much with the latter two. Based on what I read here, this is an incalculable loss to the historical study of Islam. At least we have this one.Ahmed sets himself in the Motzki school of "The Hadith", but takes time to delimit

what "The Hadith" means. Among non-Muslims the Hadith's skeptics descend from Joseph Schacht, whose field was jurisprudence. In law, the correct practice of Islam was paramount; the people of the Sunna devolved into the ahl al-hadith, and were not above forging asanid. However other fields of "The Hadith" thrived in parallel. One was the tradition of Qur'anic commentary, tafsir, which might explicate verses with no legal implications. There was also the tradition of... pure tradition: of narratives about the Prophets (not just Muhammad!), and of the Muslim community's history. (Further fields, like apocalyptic, are not germane to the topic.) In these fields, which Muslims have termed riqaq, the narrators rarely bothered to trace pure chains to the Prophet, and the classical hadith-critics like Ibn Ma'in rarely bothered to review those chains. It was common for a muhaddith to say that we may use - say - Abu Ma'shar in riqaq but never in "hadith" that is, legal hadith. Ahmed argues the precise opposite: riqaqi asanid should be presumed authentic as far back as they claim to be, which is rarely earlier than the Marwani era. Which is not to say that the transmissions were always clear or consistent. This book's main project is to investigate these. Ahmed finds the transmissions consistent in meaning but often variant in literal text. The Ibn Ishaq tradition in this case comes out poorly. To the extent Ibn Ishaq taught a mabaath (which Ahmed terms, erroneously, his sira), its transmissions here differ wildly. The difference seems geographic, between Rayy (Tabari) and Kufa (Ibn Hisham and Utaridi): in Rayy Ibn Ishaq delivered a well-organised narrative from Muhammad bin Ka'b al-Qurazi, but in Kufa was perhaps either equivocal (to Utaridi) or even silent (to Ibn Hisham). Other transmitters like Abu Ma'shar step up with independent confirmation of Qurazi's narrative, which match best Ibn Ishaq in Rayy. (Personally, concerning a hadith in the apocalyptic genre, I have found similar time/space differences in a Qatada-based tradition cluster.) From this Ahmed reconstructs an outline (ma'ni) of Qurazi's narrative, with the warning that it can never be more than an outline (lafz). This is still pretty good for the early 100s / 720s! Ahmed goes on to trace asanid to many other muhaddithun and mufasssirun. He notes that *almost every* second-century writer of tafsir and Prophetic biography notes this story. Six of them trace their accounts as far back as Ibn al-'Abbas in the 60s / 680s, with similar content. This leads Ahmed to contrast the first Muslims' acceptance of the Satanic Verses hadith with modern Muslims' rejection of it. He argues that modern Muslims default to the ahl al-hadith, who want for their Prophet a perfect example of humankind and a vessel for God's Word. The Prophet's first biographers had a wholly opposed aim: they needed *drama*. An epic hero is not perfect; he is faced with challenges, that he might overcome them and win. The Qur'an being a Divine text can best enter into an epic if the hero-prophet is faced with temptation related to the text itself. For this, the Satanic Verses anecdote serves excellently. Ahmed concludes that, as a result, we are still left agreeing with modern Muslims, that the Satanic Verses tale be an invention by early pious story-tellers - Arabs call them qussas. It is, nonetheless, an extremely early instance of the genre and likely also a witness at least to sura 53 and maybe to Q. 22:53 too. As with Sulayman Bashear, one wonders if the author's premature death had intimidated his editors. This book uses footnotes and digressions to the extent they take over the text. For instance it provides, piecemeal, a new translation and transliteration of all Surat al Najm over pp. 69, 81-2 and in their footnotes, taking up much space. Distractions like this belong to an appendix. Despite that, this book is excellent and, at its low price, difficult to justify NOT buying. Anybody interested in the Satanic Verses controversy, and in Islamic historical memory generally, needs this book.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Great book! Tons of references
By Tony RI meant to write this review months ago. Please excuse my unorganized review but i have so much to say about such a great book. I was blown away by Ahmed's work on Ibn Taymiyah and the Sayanic verse, so I knew that Ahmed would deliver another awesome work. Ahmed references many books that are not available in English and could make it difficult to prove that certain giants in Muslim scholarship actually said that this event is considered authentic (recently one volume of Ibn Hajar's 'fath al bari' was released with more volumes to come). Before Orthodoxy talks about the differences between the ahl al sunnah and the ahl al sirah when approaching oral tradition. Eventually the hadith scholars gained popularity and got to define what constituted as authentic and inauthentic. I really liked that Ahmed provides the chain of transmission with hadith critical explanations from known authorities and their methodology. Get this book!

One of the most controversial episodes in the life of the Prophet Muhammad concerns an incident in which he allegedly mistook words suggested by Satan as divine revelation. Known as the Satanic verses, these praises to the pagan deities contradict the Islamic belief that Allah is one and absolute. Muslims today of all sects deny that the incident of the Satanic verses took place. But as Shahab Ahmed explains, Muslims did not always hold this view. Before Orthodoxy wrestles with the question of how religions establish truth especially religions such as Islam that lack a centralized authority to codify beliefs. Taking the now universally rejected incident of the Satanic verses as a case study in the formation of Islamic orthodoxy, Ahmed shows that early Muslims, circa 632 to 800 CE, held the exact opposite belief. For them, the Satanic verses were an established fact in the history of the Prophet. Ahmed offers a detailed account of the attitudes of Muslims to the Satanic verses in the first two centuries of Islam and traces the chains of transmission in the historical reports known as riwyah. Touching directly on the nature of Muhammad's prophetic visions, the interpretation of the Satanic verses incident is a question of profound importance in Islam, one that plays a role in defining the limits of what Muslims may legitimately say and do issues crucial to understanding the contemporary Islamic world.

This has been a long anticipated book, and the wait has been worth it. It is an excellent study of a complicated theological problem in Islamic religious history that has persisted due to the nature of the sources and the role it plays in defining and redefining the character of Muhammad and the nature of revelation. Both a study on what is arguably one of the most fascinating stories about Muhammad and a primer to the field of Islamic studies and the debate on early sources, this will be an instant classic. (Walid Saleh, University of Toronto) Well organized and clearly written, this work is based upon an exhaustive examination of the sources. The analysis is meticulous, the book sober in its conclusions. Ahmed's goal is to explain one aspect of the formation of Islamic orthodoxy by investigating how truth happens. He makes an important distinction between the three types of source material that make up historical memory discourse: sirah or biography; tafsir or Quranic exegesis; and hadith or prophetic exemplum. Ahmed asks good questions and he answers them in a convincing manner. (David Powers, Cornell University) The battle over Islamic orthodoxy continues to rage on today, making this work of contemporary relevance. A valuable piece of in-depth scholarship on the formation of the early Islamic community and its discourses about Muslim beliefs and practices. (Publishers Weekly 2017-04-13) About the Author Shahab Ahmed taught at Harvard University and was a fellow in the Harvard Society of Fellows and the Islamic Studies Program at Harvard Law School.