

Adapting Blasphemy: *The Satanic Verses* and Early Muslim Sirah-Maghazi Literature

Abstract

For much of the early history of Islam, the Muslim community affirmed that Muhammad was successfully tempted by Satan to add errant, blasphemous verses to the Qur'an. But, as the centuries passed and orthodoxy became more codified, this troubling tale fell to the wayside, being preserved in only a handful of manuscripts. Salman Rushdie, in his novel *The Satanic Verses*, resurrected this story and adapted it as a fever dream conceived in the mind of an ex-Muslim wrestling with doubt. This study compares the surviving *sirah-maghazi* accounts of the Satanic Verses story with Rushdie's fictionalized account, analyzing the hermeneutical questions present in each and observing how the authors answer said questions. Rushdie's answers, which innovate upon the source material, depict Muhammad as a man who remains doubt-ridden despite his own ability to manipulate the divine messenger of Allah. These answers, incendiary and blasphemous, subvert the traditional angelic/demonic binary opposition of Western culture while simultaneously satirizing the contemporary Muslim doctrine of *'ismah*.