Twitter Thread by Ahab Bdaiwi ■■■■■■ ■■■■■■



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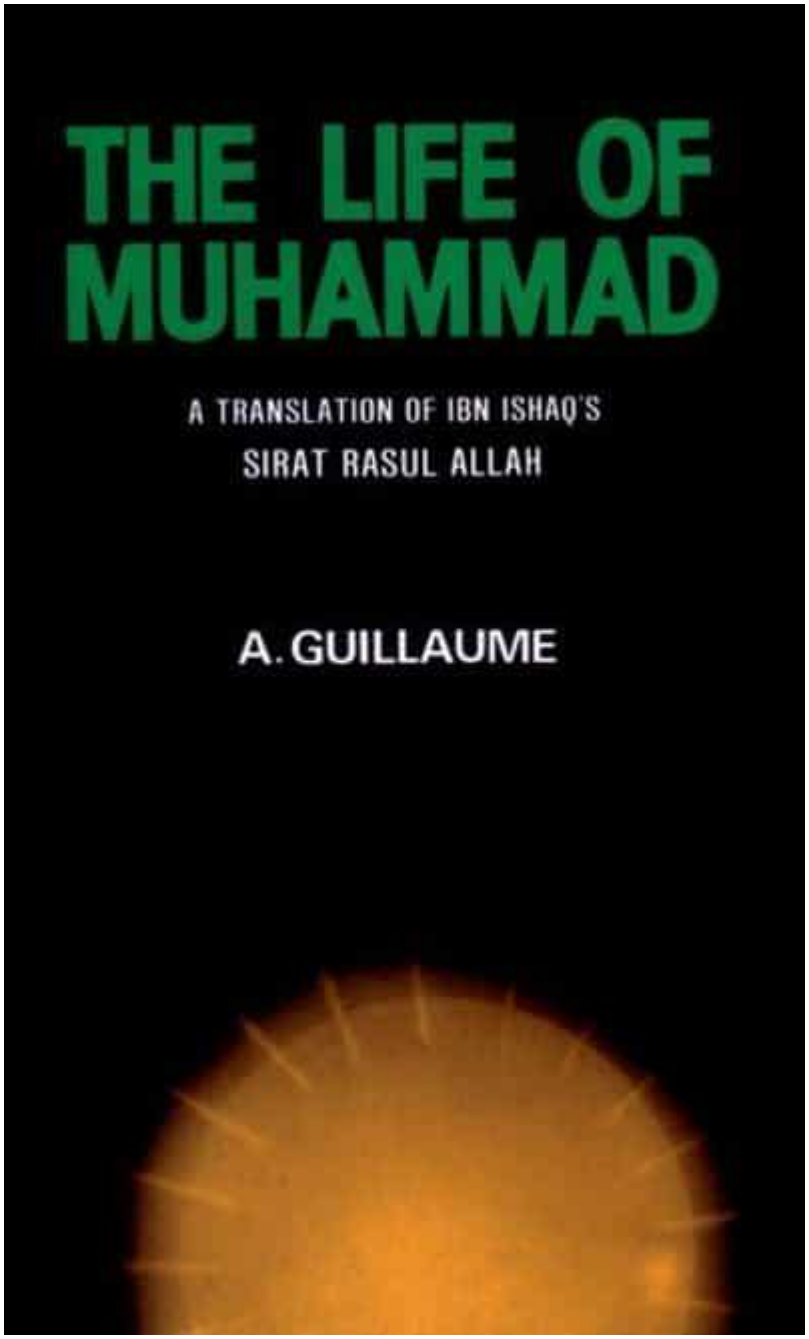
Did the Prophet Mu■ammad follow an Arabian religion or religiosity before Islam, that is, before what Muslim accounts label the "Call to Prophecy"? A short thread based on notes for an article preparation 1/

Biographical information about the life of Mu■ammad before the Call to Prophecy is seriously lacking - even in the literary imaginations of later Muslim sources. But there are useful and relevant starting points which, if read critically, can add to our existing knowledge 2/

The best clue is found in the famous accounts recorded in the S■rat Ras■l All■h (Biography of the Messenger of God) by the famous biographer Ibn Is■■q (d. 767) - translated with additional notes (from Ibn Hish■m; died 883) by Alfred Guillaume 3/



Ibn Is■■q (in Ibn Hish■m's recension) informs the reader that before the Call to Prophecy, Mu■ammad used to sojourn (■■■■■■■■■) on Mount ■ir■■ for a period of 30 days every year. During his meditative seclusion, Mu■ammad would feed the poor & needy when they called on him 4/

مولى آل الزُبير. قال: سمعت عبدالله بن الزُبير وهو يقول لعُبَيد بن عمير بن قَتَادة الليثي: حدِّثْنا يا عُبيد، كيف كان بدء ما ابتُديء به رسول الله ـ ﷺ ـ من النبوّة، حين جاءه جبريل عليه السلام؟ قال: فقال عُبيد ـ وأنا حاضر يُحدّث عبدَالله بن الزبير، ومَن عنده من الناس: كان رسول الله ـ ﷺ ـ يجاور في حِرَاء من كل سنة شهراً، وكان ذلك مما تَحنَّث به قريش في الجاهلية. والتحنث: التبَرُّر[1].

The operative word in Ibn Hish■m's biography is ta■annuth (■■■■). The term remains contentious both among medieval Muslim authorities and Western Islamicists. I decided to prepare an article on the term and its links to Late Antique religiosities largely because...5/

...nothing of profound detail has been written on the topic since Meir Jacob Kister 1968 article (which is the basis of my proposed piece). Before I summarise the views of Muslim and Western accounts, it's worth recalling the series of events in Ibn Hish■m 6/

First, Mu■ammad used to climb the Mt. ■ir■■ to sit in contemplative solitude in the famous cave. Two, the seclusion would last 30 days. In some medieval Arabic accounts the seclusion would include sexual abstinence; in others, Mu■ammad was accompanied by his wife Kh■dij■ 7/

That Mu■ammad practiced nightly mediations alone in ■ir■■ before the Call to Prophecy, is recorded in Bukh■r■ (with the isn■d including al-Zuhr■ -- ■Urwa b. Z -- ■■■isha), as evidenced by the textual mention of Mu■ammad returning to his wife after the end of his seclusion 8/

٤٧٦٥- حدثنا يحيى قال نا الليثُ عن عُقيل عن ابنِ شهاب... ح. وحدثني سعيد بن مروان قال نا محمدُ بن عبدالعزيز بن أبي رِزْمةَ قال أنا أبوصالح سلموية قال حدثني عبدُالله عن يونس بن يزيد قال أخبرني ابنُ شهاب أنَّ عروةَ بن الزبير أخبره أن عائشةَ قالتْ: كان أولُ ما بُدئَ به رسولُ الله صلى اللهُ عليه الرؤيا الصادقة في النوم، فكان لا يرى رؤيا إلا جاءت مثلَ فلقِ الصبحِ، ثم حُبِّبَ إليه الخلاء فكان يلحقُ بغارِ حراء فيتحنَّثُ فيه -قال: والتحنثُ: التعبد الليالي ذوات العدد- قبل أن يرجعَ إلى أهله، ويتزود لذلكَ، ثمَّ يرجعُ إلى خديجة، فيتزود لمثلها، حتى فجئهُ الحقُّ وهو في غارِ حِراء، فجاءهُ الملكُ فقال: اقرأ. فقال رسولُ الله صلى اللهُ عليه: «ما أنا بقارئ». قال: «فأخذني فغطَّني حتى بلغَ مني الجهدُ، ثمَّ أرسلني فقال: اقرأ. قلت: ما أنا بقارئ». قال: «فأخذني فغطني الثانية حتى بلغَ مني الجهد، ثم أرسلني فقال: اقرأ. قلتُ: ما أنا بقارئ. فأخذني فغطني الثالثة حتى بلغَ مني الجهد، ثم أرسلني

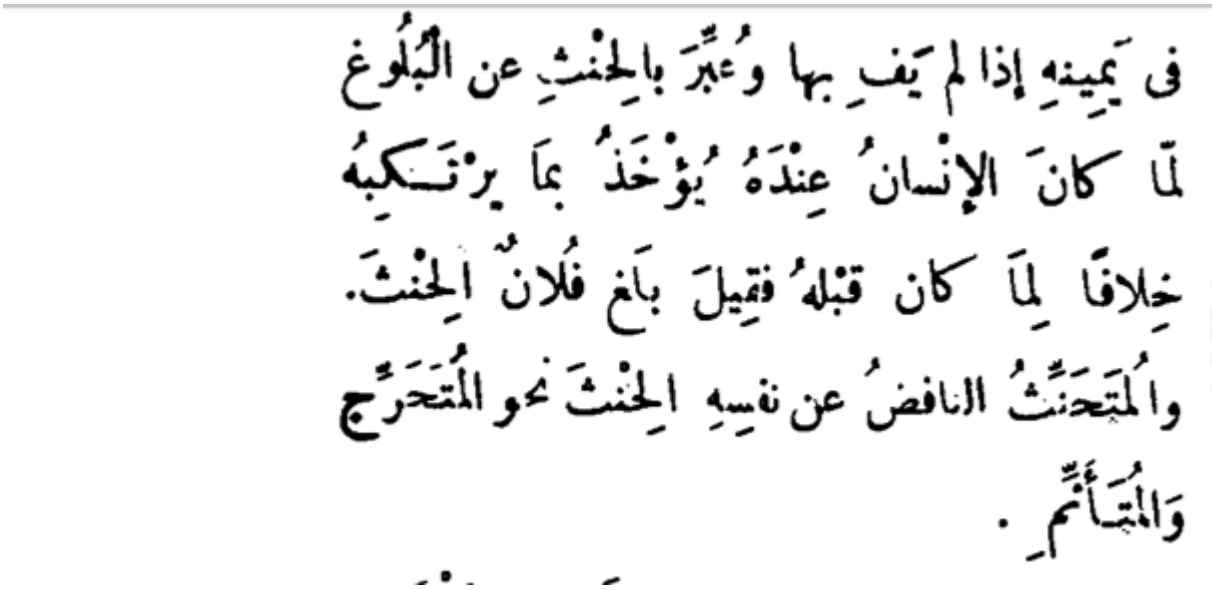
Third, Mu■ammad would give food the needy and poor - presumably in the area of ■ir■■. Fourth, at the end of the meditative seclusion, Mu■ammad would go to the Ka■bah (approx. 4 km away) and circumambulate (i.e., go around) seven times, or more. 9/

Fifth, in some accounts (e.g., Bukh■r■) Mu■ammad prepared for the monthly seclusion by taking with him provisions (food and water) to the Cave of ■ir■■. Sixth, sometimes Mu■ammad would break his seclusion to go back to Mecca to stock up on provisions 10/

I am keen to investigate the origin of the word ta■annuth and the ethical-spiritual rituals associated with them, and to place these practices in context of Late Antique religion and philosophy 11/

But since I am still at the nascent stages of my research, let's summarise the main views and perspectives neatly listed in Kister's introductory study (around fourteen pages) 12/

Muslim philologists, lexicographers, and ■ad■th folk were divided on the original meaning of ta■annuth. The common explanation given to ta■annuth is "to remove sin (■■■) from oneself" - the definition given by al-R■ghib al-I■fah■n■ (d. 1109) in his al-Mufrad■t 13/


فى يَمِينِهِ إذا لم يَفِ بها وعُبِّرَ بالحِنْثِ عن البُلُوغ
لمّا كانَ الإنْسانُ عِنْدَهُ يُؤْخَذُ بما يرْتَكِبُهُ
خِلافًا لِمَا كان قبْلهُ فقِيلَ بَلَغ فُلانٌ الحِنْثَ.
والمُتَحَنِّثُ النافضُ عن نفسِهِ الحِنْثَ نحو المُتَحَرِّجِ
والمُتَأَثِّمِ .

For al-Qas■all■n■ (d. 1517), commenting on Bukh■r■, the term ta■annuth is equated with ta■abbud: devotional rituals that include seclusion (■■■■) and watching of the Ka■bah (■■■■■ ■■■ ■■■■■■). Similarly, Al-Suy■■■ finds parallels between ta■annuth & seclusion (■■■■■■)n 14/

The earliest biography of Mu■ammad, Ibn Is■■q, however, uses neither ta■abbud nor ta■annuth, but tanassuk, that is, verb of ■■■ from which mansik (ritual place) comes. Early Sufis were known as nuss■k (renunciationists) 15/

شماله فلا يرى إلا الشجر وما حوله من الحجارة وهي تحييه بتحية النبوة: السلام عليك، رسول الله، فكان رسول الله ﷺ يخرج إلى حراء في كل عام شهراً من السنة ينسك فيه، وكان من نسك في الجاهلية من قريش يطعم من جاءه من المساكين، حتى إذا انصرف من مجاورته وقضاه لم يدخل بيته حتى يطوف بالكعبة حتى إذا كان الشهر الآخر الذي أراد الله عز وجل ما أراد من كرامته

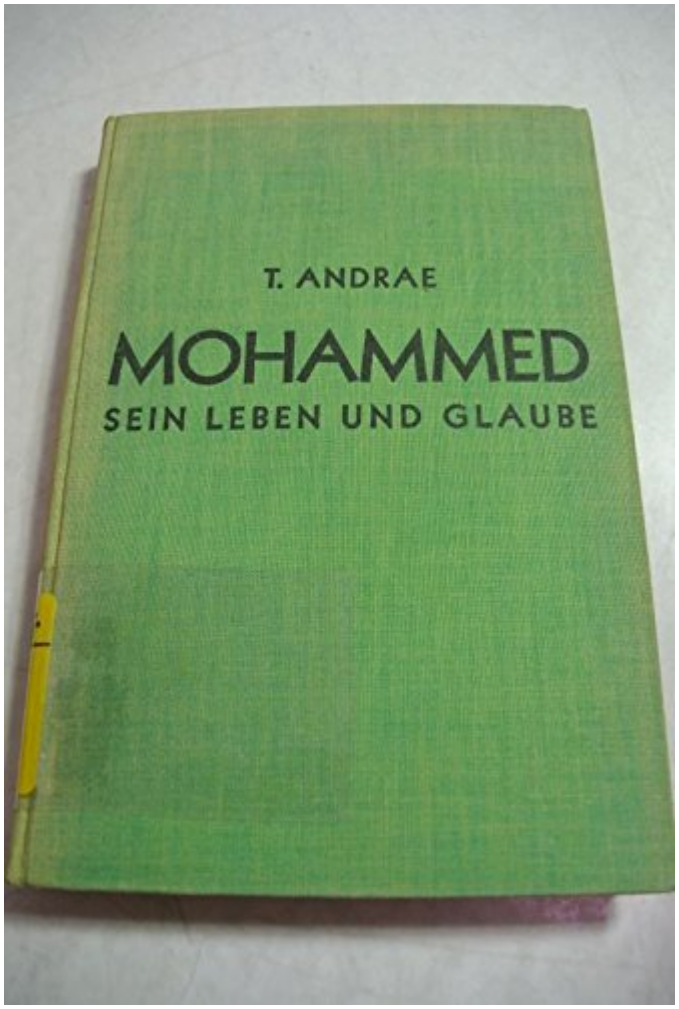
So for Muslims the term ta■annuth came to be associated with related terms of devotionalisms like ta■abbud, tanassuk, and sometimes tabarrur (from ■■). But by far the most interesting gloss is that of Ibn Hish■m who read ta■annuth as (■■■■) ta■annuf 16/

For Ibn Hish■m ta■annuth is a corruption of ta■annuf, the latter being a form derived from ■an■f, the Quran-mentioned Abrahamic monotheism practiced by some Arabs before Islam, suggesting that Mu■ammad did not slide into paganism before Islam 17/

Modern orientalists are divided too, with the jury still out on the origin of the term ta■annuth. The Austrian orientalist Aloys Sprenger took an odd view, arguing that ta■annuth was not an ancient Arabian practice and was incompatible with the spirit of J■hiliyyah 18/



Tor Andrae connects ta■annuth to devotional rituals in Syrian Christianity, though without providing detailed examples 19/



Hartwig Hirschfeld links ta■annuth to Jewish devotionalism, claiming that the Arabic ta■annuth is based on the Hebrew te■innoth ■■■■■ - common term for voluntary devotional but non-liturgical prayers in Judaism. For Hirschfeld, Mu■ammad learnt the practice from Jews 20/

New Researches Into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran



HARTWIG HIRSCHFELD

The key takeaway and follow up questions is, when the medieval accounts inform us that Mu■ammad's practice of meditative seclusion before the Call to Prophecy was part of the devotional religiosities of Quraysh before Islam, should we, then... 21/

...revise our views on the starting point of Islam? Surely Mu■ammad's meditative devotional rituals predisposed him to receive the revelation (as the Muslim sources affirm). If that is the case, did Mu■ammad find (partial) efficacy in the Arabian ethical-devotional rituals? 22/

And should we consider rituals of ta■annuth (assuming Hirschfeld is wrong, as Goitein did) to belong to a pre-Islamic semitic form of ethical and spiritual devotionalism? We will have to wait to find out. END.