ON THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUR'ÂNIC USE OF *ÂMANA*

by

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Thesis directed by Professor Frederick M. Denny

In pre-Islamic literature the Arabic verb *âmana* and its derivatives were used to mean 'to make secure.' In the Qur'ân, however, these terms come to be used in the sense of 'to believe' or 'to have faith.' This essay takes these starting and ending meanings as given, and attempts to connect them in a way that makes sense of the historical circumstances in which the change of meaning took place. Previous models of *âmana*'s development have fallen short of this objective in various ways.

Âmana's most common function in the Qur'ân is to designate the Muslim community. I propose that it was first applied to Muhammad's followers in its original sense, as a title of honor for those who protected him from his Meccan opponents, as well as for those who supported the Muslim community by their allegiance in a more general way. The emphasis on supporting and protecting the community was important for the establishment of a new social unit based on Muhammad's message. Controversy with opponents over both the messenger and the message made belief an important defining characteristic of the community. As the name of the community, *âmana* therefore came to imply belief, eventually taking over this meaning from the term *ṣaddaqa*.

As Muhammad's need for security diminished, and as he in turn began to offer protection to others, including non-Muslims, the notions of protection and

allegiance could no longer define the community. The example of the hypocrites at Uḥud encouraged an emphasis on the inner dimension of *âmana,* and before the end of Muhammad's life *âmana* had been redefined as a matter of the heart. This set the stage for later theology, which almost universally regarded the belief of the heart as the fundamental component of *îmân.*

This model of development has significant implications for our understanding of the Qur'ân, and provides valuable perspective on the early Muslim community and later theology. It also reveals the value of a semantic analysis that is based in historical considerations.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE TASK

To define the Arabic word *îmân*, usually translated 'faith,' is to explain the ideal of Muslim life. This term, along with others derived from the verb *âmana*, once stood for the Muslim community much the way *islâm* does today. It has come to be regarded as the essential mark of the true Muslim. Consequently, its meaning has been the subject of much debate among theologians, and their conclusions have influenced the interpretation of its use in the Qur'ân. This essay will argue that a significant shift in the meaning of *âmana* took place during Muhammad's life, from its first pre-Qur'ânic application to the Muslim community, to the concept of faith which became the foundation for later theological definitions.

My task may be compared to a problem in mathematics, in which the coordinates of two points on a curve are known, and the trajectory between them is to be determined. The starting point is the meaning of *âmana* in pre-Islamic literature. The ending point is the late Qur'ânic concept that provides the basis for post-Qur'ânic theological reflection.

It is tempting to draw a straight line between these two points, by showing how the final meaning is semantically related to the initial one, or can be logically derived from it. Some previous scholarship has relied heavily on such reasoning, as if one could explain a historical development by demonstrating that it was logically

possible. Other studies have disregarded one of the two points, focusing on one meaning as if it was a timeless concept, and projecting it forward into later thought or backward onto the earliest Qur'ânic uses of *âmana.*

Historical patterns of usage, however, do not necessarily follow the shortest path between two points. I will attempt to reconstruct something closer to the actual trajectory of the meaning of *âmana,* by plotting some additional points on the curve. The data for these points will be gleaned from research into the historical circumstances in which the development took place, and from the Qur'ân's responses to some of these situations. Since *âmana* is most often used in the Qur'ân in ways that presuppose rather than define its meaning, arguing from Qur'ânic passages can lead to a variety of interpretations, as the scholarly literature illustrates.[1] I will therefore anchor my proposal in the extra-Qur'ânic reference points of pre-Islamic usage and history, and use this perspective to shed some light on Qur'ânic usage.

My goal will be to offer a historically plausible pattern that is not only consistent with Qur'ânic usage, but actually adds to our understanding of it. I will propose a trajectory that passes through both the starting and ending meanings of *âmana*, and fits within the constraints of historical developments. Such a model has

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[1] Helmer Ringgren remarks that "it is often a very difficult task to define the exact sense of a word in the Koran because of Muhammed's predilection for stereotyped phrases, the loose composition of the Sûras, and, in many cases, a remarkable lack of logical stringency and consistency." *Islâm, 'Aslama and Muslim,* Horae Soederblomianae (Travaux publiés par la Société Nathan Söderblom), II (Uppsala: C. W. K. Gleerup, Lund, 1949), 1.

not previously been proposed. While my discussion will be limited to the period of Muhammad's lifetime, it will have important implications for a general understanding of *îmân.*

The Starting Point

Îmân is a nominal form of the verb *âmana,* which is itself a derivative of the root *amina ('-m-n)*, whose basic meaning is 'to be or feel secure.' As the fourth form of this root, *âmana* would be expected to mean 'to make secure,' and this is in fact how the verb is used by pre-Islamic poets. Indeed, this is the *only* sense in which they use it, according to the research of Helmer Ringgren.[2] Since these poets supply what limited insight we have into "the linguistic milieu of the Koran,"[3] the meaning which they accord to *âmana* must serve as our starting point.

This same meaning, 'to make secure,' is clearly intended in what is probably the word's earliest occurrence in the Qur'ân (106:3-4):[4]

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[2] Helmer Ringgren, "The Conception of Faith in the Koran," *Oriens* 4 (1951), 8.

[3] Helmer Ringgren (from whom I have borrowed this phrase) discusses the importance of these poets for our understanding of the Qur'ân in *Islâm, 'Aslama and Muslim,* 1-2. He cites Régis Blachère, who argues that the Qur'ân was revealed in the language of the poets. Régis Blachère, *Introduction au Coran,* second ed. (Paris: Besson & Chantemerle, 1959), 164.

[4] This is the only occurrence of *âmana* in a passage from Theodor Nöldeke's first Meccan period whose early date Richard Bell leaves unquestioned in his translation of the Qur'ân. Although the traditional chronology of the official Egyptian text of the Qur'ân makes this the 29th sûrah, Western scholars place it among the very earliest sûrahs.

> So let them [the Quraysh of Mecca] worship the lord of this house [the Ka`ba], the one who has fed them against hunger and has made them secure (*âmanahum*) from fear.

This meaning also appears to be intended in a much later Qur'ânic passage (59:23), dating from the Medinan period, in which Allah is called among other things "the granter of security (*al-mu'min*), the protector."[5] A post-Qur'ânic account uses *âmana* in this sense in reference to Muhammad: "the 'emigrants' wished that [Ka`b b. Zuhayr] embrace Islam and that the Prophet afford him security (*yu'minahû*), and he afforded him security (*âmanahû*) . . ."[6] Thus it is clear that while other meanings soon come to dominate the use of *âmana*, its pre-Qur'ânic sense is not entirely forgotten.

The Ending Point

The meaning of *âmana* that finally emerges from the Qur'ân may be summed up in the word *taṣdîq*, which is understood to be an action of the heart, and is usually translated belief. This does not do justice to the full Qur'ânic concept, but it

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[5] Richard Bell translates *al-mu'min* here by "the Faithful," an unusual translation of *mu'min,* but offers "the Giver of security" as an alternative. Helmer Ringgren ("The Conception of Faith," 9) favors the meaning "the one who gives *'amn,* protection, security." Arthur Jeffery (*The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ân* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 71) cites A. Fischer (*Glossar to Brünnow's Arabische Chrestomathie* (Berlin 1928), 9a), saying that *mu'min* in 59:23 and *îmân* in 59:9 "may be genuine Arabic," as opposed to representing the meaning Jeffery claims was borrowed from Ethiopic.

[6] Ibn Qutaybah, *Kit. ash-Shi`r wash-Shu`arâ'*, p. 98, l. I ff., cited and translated in M. M. Bravmann, "The Spiritual Background of Early Islam and the History of Its Principal Concepts," chap. in *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam: Studies in Ancient Arab Concepts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 29.

represents the direction in which the development of *âmana* is moving at the end of Muhammad's life. The very late sûrah 49 represents *îmân* as an internal quality, which nevertheless has external ramifications.

Taṣdîq is the definition that most later theologians take to be the basic meaning of *îmân*. But because the Qur'ân and the *ḥadîth* link a wide variety of qualities with *îmân*, *taṣdîq* alone is not generally taken to fully represent the concept of *îmân*.[7] The elements of verbal confession and outward action are also typically held to be essential, as is clear from the standard rhyming formula that becomes the most widely accepted definition of *îmân*:[8]

taṣdîq bi-al-janân	belief with the heart,
wa-iqrâr bi-al-lisân	confession with the tongue,
wa-`amal bi-al-arkân.	and work with the limbs.

While this triad represents a complex notion of *îmân*, involving the whole individual, *taṣdîq* remains its fundamental component. The other two elements are

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[7] Wilfred Cantwell Smith has argued at length that *îmân* is not simply belief in the sense of intellectual assent, and that even *taṣdîq* has a richer meaning than this. See for example "Faith, in Later Islamic History; the Meaning of *Taṣdîq*," in *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies,* Religion and Reason, ed. Jacques Waardenburg, no. 19 (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981).

While I agree that 'belief' does not do justice to the concept of *îmân*, I am using *taṣdîq* in the limited sense of an action of the heart centrally involving belief. The richer connotations of *taṣdîq* appear to represent an edifying exposition of what *taṣdîq* should be, rather than common usage.

[8] Wilfred Cantwell Smith quotes this formula in "Faith, in Later Islamic History; the Meaning of *Arkân*," chap. in *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies,* Religion and Reason, ed. Jacques Waardenburg, no. 19 (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981), 164. He states that it "was characterized standardly in later centuries as 'the position of the generality' of scholars."

generally regarded as resulting from the action of the heart. It is this emphasis on the inner dimension of *âmana* that most sets off the fully developed Qur'ânic concept from the initial meaning of 'making secure.' I will therefore take *taṣdîq* as the end point of my model of the Qur'ânic development of *âmana*.

***Âmana*'s Use as a Community Label**

In seeking a trajectory of meaning from 'making secure' to 'believing with the heart,' it will be crucial to bear in mind that *âmana* in the Qur'ân does not primarily designate an abstract concept, state, or quality, as it does in later theology. Instead its main function is to designate a particular community of people, namely Muhammad's followers. This will be made clear by a few statistical observations about the Qur'ân's use of *âmana* in its various forms.

Those we today call Muslims are more frequently designated *al-mu'minûn* (plural of *al-mu'min*, 'the one who *âmana*') in the Qur'ân. 78 percent[9] of all Qur'ânic occurrences of the active participle *mu'min* are in the masculine plural, most often with the definite article, which implies that this term usually serves to designate a certain group of people. The other noun form found in the Qur'ân, *îmân*, conceptualizes that which makes one a *mu'min*. It is noteworthy that *îmân* occurs only forty-five times (a mere 6 percent of all occurrences of *âmana*), and then only

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[9] Statistics are based on the concordance of Muḥammad Fû'âd `Abd al-Bâqî, *Al-mu`jam al-mufahrus,* 4th ed. (N.p.: Dâr al-fakr, 1414 A.H./1994 A.D.).

relatively late.[10] This suggests that *âmana* is used to designate a group before it is conceptualized as a state or quality.

Turning to strictly verbal forms of *âmana*, we find that 88 percent of all occurrences are in the plural, which reveals a strong tendency to apply *âmana* to groups. Nearly half of the verbal occurrences of *âmana* are in the form 'those who *âmanû* (third person plural of *âmana*),' a stock phrase which serves more to designate a group of people than to describe or characterize them. The most frequent context of this phrase is the expression "oh ye who *âmanû,*" which is a form of address rather than a description. Thus the dominant function of *âmana* in the Qur'ân is not to designate a concept or state or quality, but to refer to a particular group, calling them by what becomes almost a proper name or "a technical term for Muhammad's followers."[11]

Frederick M. Denny has cautioned against understanding *mu'min* as primarily a group term. The Arabic participle, he notes, is active, "not reified as participles and

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[10] It occurs only in Nöldeke's third Meccan period and in the Medinan period. The only potential exception is 52:21, which may be as early as the second Meccan period, but which Régis Blachère considers Medinan (*Le Coran* (Paris: 1957), 558, cited in Muhammad Abdul Rauf, "Some Notes on the Qur'ânic Use of the Terms Islâm and Îmân," *The Muslim World* 57 (Ap. 1967), 101, note 30). Since *îmân* in this verse serves to designate a group of people ('those who *âmanû* and whose descendants followed them in *îmân*') rather than to reify or conceptualize *âmana*, the date of this verse does not affect my analysis.

[11] This expression is borrowed from Helmer Ringgren, "The Conception of Faith," 9.

gerundials become in English."[12] My emphasis on the role of *mu'min* as a substantive term is justified, however, by W. Wright's comment that participles formed from transitive verbs "are not only real participles, indicating a temporary, transitory, or accidental action or state of being, but also serve as adjectives or substantives, expressing a continuous action, a habitual state of being, or a permanent quality."[13] Thus my conclusions about the role of *âmana* as a group term are consistent with the grammar of the language. Although Denny does not stress *âmana*'s role as a group term to the extent that I have argued is apparent from Qur'ânic usage, he does note that by virtue of its meaning, *mu'min* functions as an important "religio-communal term."[14]

There is no direct evidence in the Qur'ân itself for the process by which *âmana* came to be used as a community term, since it is already used as such in early Qur'ânic passages.[15] Thus the Qur'ân provides evidence only for the development of

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[12] Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Some Religio-Communal Terms and Concepts in the Qur'ân," *Numen* 24, Fasc. 1 (Ap 1977): 41.

[13] W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language: Translated from the German of Caspari and edited with numerous additions and corrections,* revised by W. Robertson Smith and M. J. De Goeje, 3rd. edition, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896-98; reprint in one volume, 1995), vol. i, 131-132, §230, Rem. a. His remark is made with reference to the first form of the verb, but is apparently intended to apply to other forms as well, since he does not discuss the other forms in detail.

[14] Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Some Religio-Communal Terms," 41.

[15] Helmer Ringgren cites 85:7 as an early occurrence, in which *al-mu'minûn* "is already a technical term for Mohammed's followers." "The Conception of Faith," 9. Richard Bell (*The Qur'ân: Translated, with a Critical Re-Arrangement of the Surahs,* 2 Vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937; reprint 1960)) would push most

this previously established community designator. The group to which it was initially applied may not have been very self-conscious about being a religious community, but *âmana* did serve to delimit a particular group of people over against Muhammad's adversaries. It is therefore necessary to establish how *âmana* could have first been applied to the early community. The exploration of its further development will then be greatly facilitated if it is recalled that we are tracing the development not of an abstract concept, but of a community's name, which may change in meaning as the community's self-understanding develops.

PREVIOUS SOLUTIONS

Since *îmân* is understood today to mean *taṣdîq* or belief, it is generally assumed that *âmana* was initially applied to members of the Muslim community because they were essentially characterized by belief. This assumption ignores the starting point of *âmana*'s pre-Qur'ânic meaning, which is also its linguistically basic meaning: 'to make secure.' To solve this problem while staying within the limits of the Arabic language, one lexicographer quoted by Lane proposed the following derivation: 'to make someone secure' is an elliptical expression meaning 'to make someone secure from being charged with lying,' and hence to trust and to believe that

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Qur'ânic passages into the late Meccan or Medinan periods, so that *al-mu'minûn* may have come into use only at this later stage; but his dating still leaves unanswered the question of how *âmana* was first applied to the community, because it leaves virtually no evidence for early Qur'ânic developments.

person.[16] Taken as a solution to the question of how *âmana* first came to be applied to Muhammad's followers, this would be an extreme case of answering a historical question with a bare proof of logical possibility.

Scholars desiring a more plausible solution have taken two general approaches to the problem. Some Western students of Islam, not being concerned to work strictly within the limits of Arabic, have assumed that the meaning of belief was imported or borrowed from another Semitic language. Others have dropped the assumption that *âmana*'s application to the Muslim community was initially based on the meaning of belief, and have focused instead on the notion of security that is implicit in *âmana*, suggesting that the *mu'minûn* were those who sought security in the Muslim community or in God. I will point out some difficulties with both of these approaches before proceeding to my own proposal.

Borrowing from Another Language

The word *âmana* is not foreign to pre-Qur'ânic Arabic. Only the meaning of belief is held to have been imported and superimposed on the existing Arabic verb.

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[16] E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon,* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863-1893), s.v. *amina*, Book I, p. 100, col. 3.

Another possible solution is suggested by one of the meanings Lane mentions for *amina*: 'to be trusted or trustworthy' (ibid.). Based on this meaning, the fourth form *âmana* could mean 'to declare or consider trustworthy.' This meaning of *amina* appears to be post-Qur'ânic, however, since Helmer Ringgren does not find it in pre-Islamic poetry or the Qur'ân ("The Conception of Faith," 2-3), and John Penrice does not list it as occurring in the Qur'ân (*Silku al-bayâni fi manâqibi al-qur'âni: A Dictionary and Glossary of the Qur'ân: With Copious Grammatical References and Explanations of the Text,* New revised ed. (Des Plaines, Ill.: Library of Islam, 1988), s.v. *amina*, 10).

The authority usually quoted in support of this position is Josef Horovitz, whose discussion of the matter is quite brief:

> Daß âmana im Arabischen nicht ursprünglich die Bedeutung »glauben« gehabt haben kann, bedarf keines Beweises. Vermutlich ist diese Bedeutung unter dem Einfluß des äthiop. amna oder eher des hebr. he'emîn bzw. dessen Derivaten ma'amîn oder ja'amin auf die vierte Form des arabischen amina übertragen worden.[17]

"This meaning has presumably been transferred to the fourth form of the Arabic *amina* under the influence of the Ethiopic *amna* or more likely of the Hebrew *he'emîn,* or rather of their respective derivatives *ma'amîn* or *ja'amin.*" Such a statement hardly constitutes an argument, but it has been cited favorably in most subsequent scholarship.[18]

Horovitz's position may do little more than illustrate a habit of Western scholars to instinctively explain similarities in terms of borrowing, on the tacit assumption that Arab culture could not have developed certain ideas independently. This alone is ground for a careful reexamination of his position. His view is even more problematic, however, for the many Muslims who hold to the doctrine that the language of the Qur'ân is pure Arabic, devoid of foreign elements.

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[17] Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1926), 55-56.

[18] Horovitz's general position is followed by Karl Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter,* Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1935), 111; by Helmer Ringgren, "The Conception of Faith," 1; and by Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary,* 70.

Mainstream Muslim scholars have advanced a variety of arguments in support of this doctrine, though some Muslim authorities (especially the earliest interpreters of the Qur'ân) have allowed for the presence of foreign words.[19] The position of as-Suyûṭî, which Arthur Jeffery regards as the most reasonable, is that many Qur'ânic words are indeed of foreign origin, but were adopted into Arabic and used in literature before the Qur'ân, so that by the time they appeared in the Qur'ân they were truly Arabic words.[20]

As-Suyûṭî's solution cannot be applied in the case of *âmana*, however, because the meaning of 'belief' is unattested in pre-Qur'ânic literature. Thus the importation would have had to occur over a relatively short time. The single major event of the seventh century with the potential to bring about such change in religious vocabulary was Muhammad's brief but eventful career. Since *âmana* is well established in Qur'ânic usage as a term for the community before the Hijrah,[21] the change would have had to occur during the twelve or so years of Muhammad's mission in Mecca. This amounts to a direct borrowing of Qur'ânic vocabulary from

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[19] See Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary,* 5-11.

[20] Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary,* 10-11.

[21] A dating of Qur'ânic passages such as Richard Bell's, that allows for very little Meccan material that has not been edited at Medina, might allow the slim possibility of a later date for the Qur'ânic use of *âmana.* I am roughly following Nöldeke's dating, which leads to the position that *âmana* was well established as a community designator long before the Hijrah.

other languages. Thus the position that *âmana* acquired the sense of belief through the influence of another language would be untenable for many Muslims.

Nevertheless, those who are unconstrained by the doctrine of the purity of Qur'ânic Arabic will want to consider direct borrowing as a possibility. It is therefore worthwhile to ask whether this theory is historically plausible.

Horovitz prefers to posit a Hebrew origin for the meaning of belief attached to *âmana*. Several factors, however, combine to make this unlikely. First, there appears to have been very little Jewish presence in Mecca.[22] While there were important Jewish groups in Medina, Jeffery questions the extent of their knowledge of Hebrew.[23] Gordon Newby has suggested that the importation of vocabulary from Hebrew could have occurred via a Judaeo-Arabic dialect, to which he finds a reference in the account of a Muslim who penetrated a Jewish town thanks to his knowledge of a dialect called *al-yahûdîyah*.[24] But the record of this incident reveals that most of Muhammad's followers did not know this dialect, so that they would scarcely have understood such new vocabulary if Muhammad had used it. In any event, almost all of Muhammad's contact with Jews (as likewise the incident referenced by Newby) probably took place during the Medinan period, well after

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[22] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 27.

[23] Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 25.

[24] Gordon D. Newby, "Observations About an Early Judaeo-Arabic," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 61 (January 1971): 217-221.

âmana was first used to designate the community, and even after *âmana* became associated with the notion of belief in the Qur'ân. Since we have already seen that the borrowing would almost certainly have occurred during Muhammad's lifetime, the chronology of Muhammad's contact with Jews virtually rules out Hebrew as the source for the new meaning of *âmana.*

Arthur Jeffery has suggested that the most likely source is Ethiopic, the language of Abyssinia. He suggests that "the word actually borrowed would seem to have been the participle *mu'min* from Eth. [*ma'amîn*]."[25] The meaning of belief would then have been transferred to the verb *âmana* and to the noun *îmân,* through the normal process of development of related Arabic forms.[26]

It is not implausible that Muhammad could have learned some useful Ethiopic terminology before he left Mecca. Tradition indicates that Muhammad's first nurse was Abyssinian, and suggests that he was familiar with Ethiopic.[27] There was a good deal of contact between Mecca and Abyssinia during Muhammad's lifetime, and

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[25] Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary,* 70.

[26] Jeffery claims that "words of this class [whose root exists in Arabic but which are used in a sense which developed in another language] when once naturalized in Arabic may and do develop nominal and verbal forms in a truly Arabic manner." *Foreign Vocabulary,* 39.

[27] Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary,* 13, and 8, note 1.

there appears to have been a significant lower-class Abyssinian presence in Mecca, though there is no sign of a unified Christian Abyssinian community there.[28]

It is thus conceivable that Muhammad could have learned some vocabulary, including *âmana* in the sense of belief, from Ethiopic. The process of development of additional verbal and nominal forms that Jeffery suggests, however, would normally be supposed to take place over a substantial length of time, whereas we have seen that this borrowing would have had to occur quickly. Even more problematic is the question of how those around Muhammad, including his upper-class supporters and adversaries, learned this new meaning from the peripheral lower-class Abyssinian population, and popularized it to the extent that the revelations made sense to all and could be referred to as pure Arabic. Muhammad's purported skill in Ethiopic, if historical, was certainly exceptional rather than the rule. If he made use of *âmana* in reference to his followers, there is no reason to think they would have understood him to mean anything but the established Arabic meaning, "to make secure."

The importation theory has been presented by Horovitz and Jeffery on the basis of linguistic similarities, without any attempt at demonstration or historical explanation. Jeffery states outright that he considers similarity (which he calls "the philological argument") to be sufficient proof of borrowing, without any need for

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[28] See Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary,* 13; and H. Lammens, S. J., *L'Arabie occidentale avant l'hégire* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1928), 1-49 (see especially the summary p. 48).

"elaborate demonstration of cultural contact with dates and names and historical connections."[29] The standard of explanation that I have set for this essay, however, is more ambitious. The philological evidence certainly establishes the abstract possibility of borrowing; but the untenability of this thesis for many Muslims, the possibility that it reflects a condescending Western attitude towards Arab civilization, and especially the difficulties encountered in trying to establish a plausible mechanism for the borrowing, all point to the need for a more historically sophisticated and credible solution.

The Search for Security

Two scholars who have given more weight to the basic meaning of *âmana*, and to the historical circumstances of Muhammad's mission, are Muhammad Abdul Rauf and M. M. Bravmann. Both recognize the concept of security that is intimately tied to *amina* and to its derivative forms, including *âmana*. But both effectively invert the force of *âmana*, so that it takes on a meaning closer to that of the passive voice ('to be made secure') than to the active sense ('to make secure').

Abdul Rauf acknowledges that the basic meaning of *âmana* is "to cause someone to feel secure against a danger," but then states that the present participle *mu'min* means "he whose security is assured." He does not explain this shift from the active to the passive sense, though he may be supposing it to happen by an ellipse of the Arabic equivalent of a reflexive pronoun, since he also interprets *mu'min* as "one

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[29] Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary,* 41.

who assures *himself* security and safety." His contention is that accepting Muhammad's faith meant losing the protection of one's tribe, and that the Muslim community therefore had to serve as a substitute for the tribe by guaranteeing the security of its members. The designation *al-mu'minûn* encouraged those who might be reticent to convert, by alleviating fears of a loss of security. *Âmana* is therefore an important sociological notion which refers to joining a community, with special reference to the security this provides. Eventually, however, as the community became better established and the concern for individual security diminished, the notion of belief (which was the basis for the community) came to dominate *âmana.*[30]

The most interesting aspect of Abdul Rauf's proposal is his emphasis on the importance of individual security as a social issue at the time of Muhammad, and on the role of the Muslim community in meeting this need. These will be important factors in my own model. The specific way in which he understands them to have played out, however, is difficult to fit with historical circumstances.

The Muslim community was not really in a situation to protect its members until well into the Medinan period, by which point *âmana* was well established as a community designator, and included the idea of belief. According to William Montgomery Watt, during the Meccan period the personal security of Muhammad's followers continued to be guaranteed primarily by their own clans, except for those few who were formally disowned by their clans. It is precisely those

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[30] Muhammad Abdul Rauf, "Some Notes," 96-102.

who did not have strong clan connections who suffered the most severe persecution.[31] The very inability of the Muslim community to protect its own weaker members is what led to the Abyssinian emigration.[32] Thus Abdul Rauf's model cannot apply to the early use of *âmana*. Abdul Rauf recognizes this difficulty in a general way, and explains that *îmân* appears only in later passages,[33] but this argument cannot be extended to other forms of *âmana*, which appear frequently at least as early as Theodor Nöldeke's second Meccan period.

On the other hand, according to Watt, as soon as the Muslim community became well established, it extended its protection to non-Muslims as well as to the *mu'minûn*. In fact the word *dhimmah,* meaning a guarantee of security from God and/or the Prophet, came eventually to be applied primarily to non-Muslims in an Islamic state.[34] Thus at no time during Muhammad's life was 'he whose security is assured by the Muslim community' an accurate definition of a *mu'min*, neither before Islam's rise to power, nor subsequently.

Abdul Rauf's model introduces some important social-historical considerations, but fails to relate these convincingly to the development of *âmana* as

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[31] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 117-119.

[32] See A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥâq's* Sîrat Rasûl Allâh (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1955; reprinted 1982), 146 (p. 208 in Wüstenfeld's Arabic edition.)

[33] Muhammad Abdul Rauf, "Some Notes," 101.

[34] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad At Medina,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 245-246.

a community term. His solution does begin from the starting point of *âmana*'s basic meaning, but immediately makes a major unexplained leap from the active to the passive sense. He does at least offer a basic explanation of how *âmana* reached our ending point, by suggesting that the concept of belief became more prominent as concern for security diminished. The value of Abdul Rauf's model will be reflected in my own use of a similar argument as part of my explanation of the emergence of belief, and in my parallel concern for the community's relationship to security. The specifics of his theory, however, fall short of the goal set for this essay.

M. M. Bravmann's proposal is similar in that it focuses on the notion of security. He suggests that *âmana,* on the part of God or Muhammad, can mean 'to make secure,' but that generally it has the same meaning as the root form *amina*, "to be (or feel) secure (from danger)." "Thus both God and the Prophet afford security to [*âmanû*] their *mu'minûn,* to those who seek shelter with them, i.e., feel secure under their protection." The *mu'minûn* seek military protection from the Prophet, and from God they seek protection against the dangers of fate, which were a major preoccupation among the Arabs of Muhammad's time. Thus the meaning of *âmana* shifted from its basic sense of making secure, to the passive sense of being made secure, and as a corollary, to the meaning of the first form, 'to be or feel secure.' To show that such a shift is possible, Bravmann cites a parallel but inverse development in Ethiopic, and mentions other Arabic words (*jâr, mawlâ*) that designate both the

giver and the recipient of security (and thus reveal the reciprocal nature of security relations).[35]

By taking into account the importance of military security and fate, Bravmann attempts to fit his theory to what is known of Muhammad's historical circumstances. Like Abdul Rauf's model, however, Bravmann's is weakened by the observation that Muhammad was not in a position to grant security for the first half of his career. Thus only one half of his theory, the aspect of seeking security with God from the dangers of fate, can possibly be applied to the Meccan period, which is when *âmana* became established as a designator for the Muslim community. Bravmann does recognize the security component of *âmana*, which is an important aspect of our starting point, but still his theory begins at some remove from the true starting point, since it inverts the meaning of *âmana* without explaining this development (except by pointing out that it is logically and linguistically possible). Furthermore, his theory does not account for our ending point, because it does not show how the word later came to be identified with *taṣdîq*.

Both Abdul Rauf and Bravmann introduce important socio-historical considerations, but their proposals run into historical difficulties. They also rely on significant but unexplained shifts in the meaning of *âmana*. My own proposal will attempt to avoid this pitfall by taking the pre-Qur'ânic meaning of *âmana* at face value.

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[35] M. M. Bravmann, "Spiritual Background," 26-31.

THE INITIAL APPLICATION TO THE COMMUNITY

None of the above theories has given due consideration to Helmer Ringgren's observation that *âmana* is used by the pre-Islamic poets exclusively in the sense of 'to make secure.' The key to bridging the gap between our starting and ending points is to begin by asking how this basic meaning of *âmana* could have been applied to the earliest Muslims.

The Protection of the Prophet

Upon reflection, it is clear that no development in meaning would have been necessary before the term could be applied to at least a very significant part of Muhammad's earliest entourage. The term *mu'min*, in the sense of 'one who makes secure,' describes perfectly the role of those who took Muhammad under their protection and preserved him from the hostility of his Meccan opponents during the early years of his apostleship. I therefore propose that during the earliest years of the Muslim community, before most of the Qur'ânic use of *âmana*, this verb and its derivatives were used to designate Muhammad's followers by referring to their role as protectors.

Two traditional accounts of incidents from the Meccan period will illustrate the close connection between following Muhammad and protecting him. The following episode from the traditional life of the Prophet dramatizes the hostility of the Meccans, and the crucial mediating role of Muhammad's supporters:

> While they were talking thus the apostle appeared, and they leaped upon him as one man and encircled him, saying, 'Are you the one who said so-and-so against our gods and our religion?' The apostle said, 'Yes, I am the one who said that.' And I saw one of them seize his robe. Then Abû Bakr interposed

> himself weeping and saying, 'Would you kill a man for saying Allah is my Lord?' Then they left him. That is the worst that I ever saw Quraysh do to him.[36]

The traditional account of Ḥamzah's conversion sees an intimate connection between his becoming a Muslim and his defense of Muhammad:

> Abû Jahl passed by the apostle at al-Ṣafâ, insulted him and behaved most offensively . . . . [When Muhammad's uncle Ḥamza heard of this, he] was filled with rage . . . . [When he found Abû Jahl, he] went up to him until he stood over him, when he lifted up his bow and struck him a violent blow with it, saying, 'Will you insult him when I follow his religion, and say what he says? Hit me back if you can!' . . . Ḥamza's Islam was complete, and he followed the apostle's commands. When he became a Muslim the Quraysh recognized that the apostle had become strong, and had found a protector in Ḥamza, and so they abandoned some of their ways of harassing him.[37]

These anecdotes are preserved in the context of a later perspective, which would never equate *âmana* and its derivatives with protecting the Prophet. They use the vocabulary that later became standard, which makes much use of the term *aslama* and related forms, rather than *âmana*. These accounts nevertheless reveal that the concept of ensuring Muhammad's security was intimately linked to being a convert during the Meccan period. *Âmana* and its derivatives could therefore have served quite naturally as a designation for the earliest Muslims without any change from its pre-Qur'ânic meaning.

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[36] A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 131 (p. 184 in Wüstenfeld's Arabic edition).

[37] A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 131-132 (pp. 184-185 in Wüstenfeld's Arabic edition).

The Issue of Security up to the Hijrah

This suggestion will be supported by a consideration of the importance of security for the early Muslims. This issue was a major concern for Muhammad throughout his time in Mecca, and was perhaps the greatest single reason for the Hijrah.

It appears that Meccan opposition to him was not fierce at first, but that hostility grew as his mission progressed.

> The Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) summoned to *Islâm* secretly and openly, and there responded to God whom He would of the young men and weak people, so that those who believed in Him (or 'him') were numerous and the unbelieving Quraysh did not criticize what he said. . . . This lasted until God (in the Qur'ân) spoke shamefully of the idols they worshipped other than Himself and mentioned the perdition of their fathers who died in unbelief. At that they came to hate the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) and to be hostile to him."[38]

This passage reflects a tendency to regard the first converts as weaker members of society, which would cast doubt on their ability to provide any kind of protection to Muhammad. But William Montgomery Watt has argued that "those considered weak" refers only to a small and distinct class among the early followers. Of the "young men," some were from "the most influential families in Mecca and

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[38] This passage from az-Zuhrî, in Ibn Sa`d, *Ṭabaqât,* ed. E. Sachau (9 vols.), Leiden, 1905, &c., i. I. 133, is translated in William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 87.

could not be called 'weak.'"[39] Islam, he argues, "was *not* a movement of 'down-and-outs.'"[40]

Hostility increased to the point that Muhammad recommended to his persecuted followers that they emigrate to Abyssinia. Muhammad himself, however, was able to remain in Mecca, as tradition says, thanks to "his standing with Allah and his uncle Abû Ṭâlib."[41]

Abû Ṭâlib, who had become Muhammad's guardian upon the death of his father, was the head of Muhammad's clan, the Banû Hâshim. During his lifetime he kept the clan committed to including Muhammad in the traditional guarantee of security afforded to clan members. He could not perform this group responsibility alone, but he sought and received the support of his own clan and of the related clan Banû al-Muṭṭalib.[42] Thus Abû Ṭâlib was perhaps the most crucial of the Prophet's allies, without whose protection Muhammad might have had to leave Mecca much earlier than he did.[43] I will demonstrate below that the fact that Abû Ṭâlib was not later reckoned a Muslim does not in any way contradict the thesis I am proposing about the meaning of *âmana*.

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[39] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 88.

[40] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 96.

[41] A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 146 (p. 208 in Wüstenfeld's Arabic edition.)

[42] A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 120 (p. 170 in Wüstenfeld's Arabic edition.)

[43] See William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 18 and 119.

When Abû Ṭâlib died in the year 619, another of Muhammad's relatives, Abû Lahab, apparently became the head of the Banû Hâshim. He at first promised to continue granting Muhammad the customary guarantee of security, but later withdrew his protection.[44] He is the only one of Muhammad's opponents to be attacked by name in the Qur'ân (in sûrah 111). The singular bitterness expressed towards him gives an indication of just how serious was the clan's obligation to protect its members.

This turn of events precipitated an intensified search for protection. Muhammad went to the town of al-Ṭâif looking for protection and converts. He was rejected, and on his return, before he re-entered Mecca, he negotiated for the protection of the clan of Banû Nawfal.[45] Still his situation must have remained unsatisfactory, for he continued to seek a place beyond Mecca where he could become better established.

His discussions with people from Yathrib (later called Medina) culminated in the Pledge of War, or the oath of the Second `Aqabah, in which seventy-three men ("the chief of those who had been converted") swore to obey Muhammad and to protect him from his enemies: "we are of you, and you are of us," and "if you or any of your companions come to us, we will defend you from whatever we defend

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[44] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 137-138.

[45] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 139-140.

ourselves from."[46] The role of *mu'min* was here formalized by an oath. The Hijrah followed shortly.

The name given to the Medinan converts, who initially provided lodging as well as protection to the emigrants from Mecca, provides an interesting parallel to the name *al-mu'minûn.* They were called *al-anṣâr* (the Helpers), a designation which makes no mention of changed beliefs, but focuses instead on their role as Muhammad's allies. This title appears to grant them an honor similar but subordinate to that of the *mu'minûn* from Mecca, who despite their inability to adequately protect Muhammad were still seen as his allies *par excellence.* In due course the *Anṣâr* were considered *mu'minûn* along with all the other converts.

The role of the *Anṣâr* as the Prophet's protectors became a source of great pride for their descendants, as is seen in the following verses, which set protection alongside belief, and seem to elevate the *Anṣâr* above the emigrants on account of their special role:

> My people it was who sheltered their prophet
> And believed in him (*ṣaddaqûhu*) when all the world
> were unbelievers (*kuffâr*),
> Except a chosen few who were forerunners
> To the righteous, helpers with the Helpers.[47]

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[46] Aṭ-Ṭabarî, *Ta'rîkh ar-Rusul wa 'l-Mulûk,* ed. M. de Goeje (Leyden: 1879-1901), Prima Series, vol. 3, 1224-5; translated in William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 146.

[47] A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad,* 320; from p. 474 in Wüstenfeld's Arabic edition. Guillaume argues on page xxviii of his introduction that this poem could not have come from the first generation of Medinan converts, as the text states, but only from one of their descendants.

Thus the search for allies and security remained a major preoccupation throughout the Meccan period, and the role of ensuring the security of the Prophet was a highly honored dimension of being one of his followers. The Qur'ân itself portrays the role of the *mu'minûn* as a form of aid to Muhammad, coming from God and parallel to God's own help, when it refers to God as "the one who has strengthened you by His help, and by the believers" (8:64). It therefore seems natural to suggest that the designation *al-mu'minûn* was at first a title of honor conferred on Muhammad's followers as a straightforward application of the pre-Qur'ânic meaning of *âmana,* 'to make secure.'

The System of *Tha'r*

The specific concrete form of granting security that would have been most naturally envisioned in the world of early Islam would have been the system of vendetta, or *tha'r.* This traditional, unwritten Arab law imposed on each clan the duty to avenge the killing of any of its members, by killing the murderer or some other member of his clan.[48] This responsibility was the primary deterrent to violence between clans in Arabia before the rise of Islam, and as we have seen, this formal protection from Muhammad's clan was an important factor in his ability to remain in Mecca as long as he did. Since a clan's honor depended on its ability and willingness to carry out the responsibility of *tha'r,* the designation of *mu'min,* insofar as it

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[48] On the vendetta system, see William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina,* 261-264, and H. Lammens, "Le caractère religieux du «ṯâr» ou vendetta chez les Arabes préislamites," chap. in *L'Arabie occidentale.*

implied this kind of protection, would have been a title of honor for those courageous enough to stand up for Muhammad.

H. Lammens has argued that *tha'r* was "the most sacred law of the desert, the most worthy manifestation . . . of the religion of the Arabs," precisely because it was a completely disinterested act.[49] If he is even partially justified in claiming a religious quality for the responsibility of granting security, then it should come as no surprise that this same value should have been considered a vital part of joining Muhammad's religious community, and that this community should be designated by the title "granters of security."

One does not have to share Lammens' definition of what constitutes a "worthy manifestation of religion" to see that a disinterested dedication to the security of the community would have been of immense value for Muhammad's mission. William Montgomery Watt has argued that the sense of duty towards members of one's clan was weakening in seventh century Mecca, as individual interests and commercial associations were gaining in importance over blood relationships.[50] If Islam could provide a new basis for social solidarity and security, it would be addressing a very real need. The use of *âmana* as a banner for the new community was ideally suited to address this issue.

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[49] H. Lammens, *L'Arabie occidentale*, 195.

[50] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 72-73.

The Case of Abû Ṭâlib

Although the institution of *tha'r* was an ancient and honorable means of achieving security, it was not in itself a sufficient basis for the new community. This is perhaps best illustrated by the example of Abû Ṭâlib.

We have noted that he was the foremost protector of the Prophet, at least in terms of the system of *tha'r,* since he kept the clan committed to its traditional obligation to guarantee Muhammad's security. At first glance this appears to present a difficulty for my thesis, because Abû Ṭâlib is represented in tradition as having died without becoming a Muslim:

> The Messenger of Allah said to his uncle (at the time of his death): Make a profession of it that there is no god but Allah and I will bear testimony (of your being a Muslim) on the Day of Judgment. He (Abû Ṭâlib) said: Were it not [for] the fear of the Quraysh blaming me (and) saying that it was the fear of (approaching death) that induced me to do so, I would have certainly delighted your eyes.[51]

Another version of this tradition adds that some of Muhammad's opponents were also present during this conversation, and pressured Abû Ṭâlib to remain loyal to his clan by holding to the religion of his forefathers. They asked him repeatedly "do you abandon the religion of `Abdul-Muṭṭalib?"[52]

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[51] Muslim, *X,* 38, translated in Imâm Muslim, Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim: *Being Traditions of the Sayings and Doings of the Prophet Muḥammad as Narrated by His Companions and Compiled Under the Title* al-jâmi`-uṣ-ṣaḥîḥ, translated by `Abdul Ḥamîd Ṣiddîqî, four volumes (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, [1971]; reprint, 1990), vol. 1, 19.

[52] Muslim, *X,* 36, translated in `Abdul Ḥamîd Ṣiddîqî, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim,* vol. 1, 18.

I will argue below that by the time of Abû Ṭâlib's death (in 619), belief was becoming an important component of the meaning of *âmana*. Thus the judgment of tradition that his failure to profess the doctrine of monotheism excluded him from *îmân* is not anachronistic. Abû Ṭâlib's own reaction to Muhammad's request, however, supports my thesis that this emphasis on belief was still relatively new at this time. For Abû Ṭâlib, the issue was not doctrine. A statement of monotheism would not have been conceptually problematic for him. What held him back was his tie to his clan. Religion was to his mind more a matter of allegiance than of belief. Up to this point his allegiance to his clan and his support of Muhammad had gone hand in hand, but now doctrine had been made a test of loyalty, and he was forced to choose. He died knowing that his allegiance to his clan had finally separated him from Muhammad.

Thus while Abû Ṭâlib is excluded from *îmân* by later opinion, on the basis of the criterion of belief, his own attitude reveals that during his lifetime religion was widely viewed as a matter of allegiance. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that Abû Ṭâlib was regarded as a *mu'min* before this point, or at least before belief became associated with *âmana*, since his protection of Muhammad stood in stark contrast to the opposition of many others. It has often been noted that the Qur'ân divides the world into two clear camps, the *mu'minûn* and the *kâfirûn*. I will point out below that this distinction eventually became more complex, as hypocrites and supposedly lukewarm Muslims (such as the Bedouins) demonstrated the ambiguity of community boundaries. Early on, however, the line may well have been drawn

sharply between those who supported Muhammad and those who opposed him, especially if, as I am suggesting, the boundaries of the community were defined in terms of protection versus hostility. In this situation Abû Ṭâlib would have clearly fallen into Muhammad's camp. Indeed the Quraysh saw him as the Prophet's ally, as their threat against Abû Ṭâlib illustrates: "Until you rid us of him [Muhammad] we will fight the pair of you until one side perishes."[53]

If my thesis is correct, Abû Ṭâlib was considered a *mu'min* during the early stages of the Prophet's Meccan career. His case therefore does not present the least obstacle to my proposal. The reason he was later regarded as never having been a *mu'min* is that the later concept of *îmân* was projected back into his lifetime. As we will see, this later perspective was concerned with defining not an earthly community based on allegiance, but a heavenly community based on faith. From this perspective, Abû Ṭâlib clearly never was a *mu'min,* though a tradition which specifies his exclusion from paradise makes it clear that he was as close to heaven as the later perspective allowed:

> `Abbâs b. `Abd al-Muṭṭalib asked: "Messenger of Allah, have you benefited Abû Ṭâlib in any way for he defended you [*ghadiba lika*] and was fervent in your defense?" The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: "Yes; he would be in the most shallow part of the Fire: and but for me he would have been in the lowest part of Hell."[54]

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[53] A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 119 (p. 168 in Wüstenfeld's Arabic edition.)

[54] Muslim, LXXXVIII, 408, translated in `Abdul Ḥamîd Ṣiddîqî, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim,* vol. 1, 138.

The reason given for Abû Ṭâlib's relative closeness to the community of paradise is precisely his protection of Muhammad. Thus later tradition still honored his role as a *mu'min* in the old sense, and recognized his closeness to the early community, but judged this form of *îmân* to be insufficient. As *âmana* came to stand for a more complex kind of commitment, Abû Ṭâlib no longer qualified.

Although Abû Ṭâlib was the epitome of a *mu'min* in the sense of 'one who makes secure,' his example suggests why the definition of the community could not have been understood exclusively in terms of the institution of *tha'r*. Most importantly, the acceptance of Muhammad's message had to be made a formal part of community membership, if the community was to be based on that message. This implies the incorporation of belief into the meaning of *âmana,* which will be discussed in the second half of this essay. More immediately, not everyone in the community could be an Abû Ṭâlib, and in any case Muhammad would not have wanted the community to develop strictly along the lines of the old system of *tha'r*. *Âmana* implied a sense of allegiance much broader than *tha'r*, as I will show before turning to the issue of belief.

The Broader Concept of Allegiance

The old system of *tha'r* was an honorable institution, and probably the most obvious form of protection offered to the Prophet. But the notion of making secure was not limited to this one institution. As a designator for the Muslim community, *âmana* could not have been understood this narrowly. Two considerations suggest

that *âmana* implied a much broader notion of allegiance than simply the physical protection of Muhammad under the system of *tha'r*.

A More Inclusive Definition of the Community

First of all, not everyone was in a position to help assure the Prophet's physical security. We have already noted the presence among the early converts of some who were considered "weak," who could have committed themselves to fighting for Muhammad if necessary, but who most likely played no significant role in defending the Prophet during the Meccan period. Furthermore, women who converted to Islam were not expected to fight. The two women among the Medinans who swore allegiance to Muhammad at the Second `Aqabah omitted the portion of the oath that called for fighting. But this did not prevent them from allying themselves to the Prophet in a more general sense. In fact, their form of the oath became a model oath, known as the "Oath of Women."[55]

As for the "weak," the Qur'ân regards the poor emigrants from Mecca as having helped not only Muhammad but even God (59:8). The weaker members of the early community in Mecca may not have been able to literally guarantee Muhammad's security, but all were nonetheless considered to have been allies in a more general sense.

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[55] Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam,* with an introduction by Huston Smith (HarperSanFrancisco, a division of HarperCollinsPublishers, 1989; first paperback ed. 1991), s.v. `Aqabah, 44-45.

The identification that I am suggesting between being the Prophet's ally and being a member of the Muslim community is illustrated in the following traditional autobiographical account of the conversion of `Amr b. al-`Âṣ:

> I found myself averse to none else more than I was averse to the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) and there was no other desire stronger in me than the one that I should overpower him and kill him. Had I died in this state, I would have been definitely one among the denizens of Fire. When Allah instilled the love of Islam in my heart, I came to the Apostle (may peace be upon him) and said: Stretch out your right hand so that I pledge my allegiance to you. He stretched out his right hand. . . ."[56]

Becoming a member of the community was assumed to mean declaring one's allegiance to Muhammad. *Âmana* implied "making secure" in this general sense, and not only in the narrow sense of *tha'r*.

The Vision for a New Kind of Community

A second reason for understanding *âmana* to represent a broader notion of allegiance is that the institution of *tha'r* was unsuitable for the development of a unified Arab community, which was to be one of Muhammad's most remarkable achievements. The defining characteristic of an overarching Arab community could not be embedded in a system of rivalry between clans. A perpetual string of blood feuds between elite members of rival clans would hardly promote the kind of community in which the injustices of Meccan society could be rectified. What was required was not only allegiance to Muhammad, but also a sense of allegiance to the

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[56] Muslim, *LV*, 220, translated in `Abdul Ḥamîd Ṣiddîqî, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim*, vol. 1, 69-70.

whole community. The designator *âmana* encouraged the development of this type of commitment.

Two factors point to the need to develop a sense of community loyalty among the Muslims. First, we have already noted William Montgomery Watt's argument that the sense of clan loyalty was weakening in seventh century Mecca, and being replaced by individual interests and commercial associations.[57] The need for security and solidarity was a general social problem. Second, it became a particularly Muslim problem as converts lost the protection of their clans. We have seen that only rarely was a Muslim formally disowned by his or her clan during the Meccan period, but as the Muslim community moved to Medina and became an independent entity, a new way to guarantee security was needed. In Mecca the community had not yet been able to protect its members, and this had to change.

The use of the term *mu'min* may be interpreted in part as an appeal to the members of the community to take on the responsibility of protecting each other. An early Qur'ânic verse, 85:7, refers to the situation of the *mu'minûn* as a persecuted group; and in 90:17, also very early, 'those who *âmanû*' are identified with those who 'exhort one another to perseverance and mercy.' This last verse is set in the context of urging care for the more unfortunate members of society, and calls to mind the image of a tightly knit, struggling community within which the *mu'minûn* grant sustenance to the weaker members, and encourage their fellow *mu'minûn* in the

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[57] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 72-73.

struggle. The vision of a community whose members would be a support to each other in the face of conflict was thus linked to *âmana* quite early.

When Muhammad emigrated to Medina, he had the opportunity to start implementing his vision for the *ummah*, or Muslim community. The Constitution of Medina, a document that lays out the relationships between the various groups in Medina, provides a glimpse of this vision. Articles 15 and 19, which Watt dates to the agreement at al-`Aqabah or to shortly after the Hijrah,[58] show the responsibility of all members of the community to guarantee the security of others:

> 15. The security (*dhimmah*) of God is one; the granting of 'neighbourly protection' (*yujîr*) by the least of them (the believers) is binding on them; the believers are patrons (or clients - *mawâlî*) of one another to the exclusion of (other) people.
>
> 19. The believers exact vengeance for one another where a man gives his blood in the way of God. The God-fearing believers are under the best and most correct guidance.[59]

The community of *mu'minûn* was to take over the role of the clan. In the relationship of the Muslim community to other groups, the normal system of *tha'r* seems to have continued, with the *ummah* serving as a new kind of tribe.[60] The right of the next-of-kin to avenge a murder was also upheld within the community,[61] but this continuation of *tha'r* was restrained by the limitation that only one life could be

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[58] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina,* 227.

[59] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina,* 222-223.

[60] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina,* 264-266.

[61] See the Qur'ân, 17:33.

taken for a life, and also by the encouragement to forgive offenses, or at least to accept blood-money in place of vengeance.[62] Both of these restrictions run contrary to the earlier Arab ideal, and reveal a concern to dampen feuds within the *ummah.* Ideally, the entire community was to unite against injustice, regardless of family ties.[63]

The use of *âmana* as a community term preserved and promoted the honored values associated with *tha'r*, such as the unselfish commitment to the security of one's clan. But this loyalty was transferred from the small blood-based social unit of the clan to the larger religiously defined entity of the *ummah.* The Prophet is said to have made this explicit: "Behold! the posterity of my fathers, that is, so and so, are not my friends. Verily Allah and the pious believers (*mu'minûn*) are my friends [or protectors (*walî*)]."[64] This shift in allegiance from clan to *ummah* meant that *âmana,* as a symbol and definition of the community, could not refer merely to a clan-based system of security, but implied a broader commitment to the security and well-being of a new kind of community.

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[62] See the Qur'ân, 5:45.

[63] See Article 21 of the Constitution of Medina, translated in William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina,* 223. My summary of justice within the *ummah* is based on Watt's discussion on pages 266-270.

[64] Muslim, XC, 417, translated in `Abdul Ḥamîd Ṣiddîqî, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim,* vol. 1, 140. The Arabic may be found numbered as bâb XCIII, number 366/215 in Abu'l-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Ḥajjâj al-Qushayrî al-Naysâbûrî, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim,* [Ed.] Muḥammad Fû'âd `Abd al-Bâqî (Beirut: *Dâr al-fakr*, 1398 A.H./1978 A.D. (second printing)), 197.

I have pointed out two considerations - inclusiveness and the vision of a new type of social unit - that both suggest *âmana* meant more than ensuring Muhammad's personal security after the model of *tha'r.* The Muslim community's self-understanding, and therefore also the meaning of *âmana,* included a much broader sense of granting security to the whole community through support and allegiance. This general notion of allegiance provided a definition of the community that was more comprehensive and more conducive to unity than a definition limited to the old institution of *tha'r* would have been.

The Plausibility of Allegiance as an Early Defining Concept

So far I have proposed that *âmana,* as applied to the earliest Muslim community, did not refer to a personal intellectual position, but to a public stance of allegiance to the Prophet and to his community. The element of belief, so prominent in later understandings of *îmân,* still needs to be introduced. Before turning to this issue, however, let me offer several general reasons why it is not unreasonable, but rather quite plausible, to hypothesize that the earliest use of *âmana* focused on allegiance without reference to belief.

Karl Ahrens has suggested that the idea of belief as a precondition to salvation points to Christian influence on Islam.[65] The assumption that belief would not have independently become a central concept in Islam may again illustrate the scholarly habit of assuming borrowing wherever there is similarity. Nevertheless, this claim

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[65] Karl Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter,* 110.

does raise an important question: would belief have been a defining religious concept in the context of pre-Islamic Arabia?

H. Lammens has described the pre-Islamic *waṣyya,* the final instructions of the dying head of a clan to his successor, which included prominently directions for the maintenance of the clan's religious shrine and cult, alongside admonitions to remain faithful to established alliances and to resolve any unfinished blood feuds.[66] This hereditary transmission of a proprietary cult centered in the clan suggests that religion was much more a matter of tribal loyalty than of independent intellectual judgment and assent to doctrines. The example of Abû Ṭâlib supports this conclusion. It will be recalled that he would have been happy to affirm the unity of God as Muhammad requested, had it not been for the tug of loyalty to his clan and forefathers.

Ahrens' doubt about the importance of individual belief in pre-Islamic Arabian religious thinking thus seems to be somewhat justified. It appears that the conceptual environment during the earliest years of Muhammad's mission would not have been conducive to naming a new religious community with a word meaning belief.

One must of course recognize that the Qur'ân represents a significant break with pre-Islamic religious thought, so that a radically new definition of what constitutes a religious community is not inconceivable. Indeed such a redefinition

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[66] H. Lammens, *L'Arabie occidentale*, 200-202.

did eventually take place over the course of the Prophet's lifetime. But Muhammad apparently used *âmana* in reference to his followers very early, before it was used this way in the Qur'ân, since it appears almost as a "technical term" in early sûrahs. His initial application of *âmana* to the community must have been sufficiently related to pre-Islamic categories that it could make sense to his contemporaries. It is therefore unlikely that the community was first defined in terms of belief.

Furthermore, the Qur'ân itself does not appear to stress doctrine at the outset. Professing one God and accepting the message Muhammad brings are early themes, but the longer lists of specific things one must believe in tend to appear in later passages. And several key Qur'ânic terms that are closely linked to *âmana* and are often assumed to relate to belief (or the lack thereof), actually share connotations not unlike the meaning of allegiance that I have proposed for *âmana.*

The Qur'ân often places *âmana* in diametrical opposition to *kafara,* which basically means to cover or conceal something, but is usually taken to mean disbelieve, in the sense of concealing and being ungrateful for the favor of God. But *kafara* can also mean "he declared himself to be clear, or quit," of something, according to E. W. Lane, who says it is used in this sense in the Qur'ân at 14:22,[67] where Satan reneges on an agreement with the people. Thus the Qur'ân illustrates a use of *kafara* that opposes it to *âmana* in the sense of allegiance.

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[67] E. W. Lane, *Lexicon,* Book I, s.v., p. 2620, col. 3.

Kaffârah, from the same root, referred in pre-Islamic Arabia to compensation accepted by the clan of one who had been killed, in place of vengeance for a murder[68] - in other words, a substitute that covered the killing. Since accepting *kaffârah* was considered a weak and dishonorable evasion of the duty of *tha'r*,[69] this is another hint that the root *k-f-r* has the connotation of opposition to the ancient system of 'making secure.'

Thus *k-f-r* is linked in two ways to a failure to perform one's obligation in the area of protection. This is not to say that *kafara* does not primarily mean disbelief in the Qur'ân. I am suggesting only that when we find *âmana* opposed to *kafara* in the Qur'ân, this does not necessarily imply that *âmana* simply means belief; it can still be related to allegiance and protection, since *kafara* can imply failure with respect to these things.

A second key root closely linked with *âmana* in the Qur'ân is *ṣ-d-q*, from which is derived *taṣdîq*. This root likewise reveals clues that allegiance was a significant religious concept in seventh century Arabia. Helmer Ringgren's analysis of the root *ṣ-d-q* in early Arabic poetry and in the Qur'ân[70] reveals a range of meaning. It can indicate personal excellence, especially with respect to the qualities

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[68] H. Lammens, *L'Arabie occidentale,* 192.

[69] H. Lammens, *L'Arabie occidentale,* 192. See also 198-199.

[70] Helmer Ringgren, "The Root ṢDQ In Poetry and the Koran," in *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren,* Pars Altera (v. 2), Kees W. Bolle, et al., Studies in the History of Religions (Supplements to *Numen*), no. 22 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 134-142.

of an excellent fighter, such as strength and courage. Some Qur'ânic passages link *ṣ-d-q* with the responsibility to fight for Muhammad.[71] A more prominent meaning in the Qur'ân is the notion of truth, which can be understood in two senses: the idea of being true *to* one's word, and the truth or reliability *of* one's words. The latter meaning relates to the notion of belief, since one believes in the truth of a statement. The sense of courage in battle, however, and the notion of being true to one's commitments, both give the root *ṣ-d-q* a coloring similar to *âmana*'s connotation of allegiance.

Finally, the word *islâm*, which is usually translated submission, can readily be understood in the sense of allegiance. This is seen for example in the Qur'ânic anecdote of the Bedouins (49:14) whose allegiance Muhammad accepts as constituting *islâm*. The Semitic root from which *islâm* derives bore the meaning of allegiance already in ancient times. It was used in Akkadian, Hittite, and Syrian treaties "to express central aspects of the treaty relationship: 'union, amity,' and in the concrete 'ally, comrade.'"[72] *Islâm* is the term which eventually came to take the place of *îmân* in designating the Muslim community on earth, and I will suggest below that this is not unrelated to the fact that *islâm* retains the sense of allegiance that *âmana* eventually loses.

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[71] See 9:42-43, 47:2-21. 59:8 links *ṣ-d-q* with helping God and his Messenger.

[72] Dennis J. McCarthy, "Ebla, horchia temnein, *tb*, *šlm*: Addenda to *Treaty and Covenant*," *Biblica* 60 No. 2 (1979): 252.

This linguistic evidence supports the contention that intellectual belief was not at first as central a religious concept as one might assume from later developments. *K-f-r*, *ṣ-d-q*, and *s-l-m* all bear connotations linked to allegiance. Thus it is not unreasonable to envision a religious community defining itself largely in terms of allegiance rather than belief, in a context where religion had long been much more a matter of clan loyalty than of doctrine.

THE EMERGENCE OF BELIEF

Now that we have seen how *âmana* was first applied to the Muslim community, it remains to be seen how it became connected to the notion of belief and separated from the notion of allegiance. These developments can be explained quite naturally in terms of historical events and circumstances.

Controversy Makes Belief a Defining Issue

That the meaning of *âmana* eventually included belief, and became identified with *taṣdîq*, is unquestionable. Later Muslim authorities are virtually unanimous on this point. The question that remains is when, why, and how did this happen?

I have argued that *âmana* was applied to the early Muslim community because it represented the central characteristic of allegiance to and protection of the Prophet and the community. This does not imply that the early Muslims were not characterized by belief; it only suggests that allegiance was more central to the concept of what the community was or should be. The Qur'ân makes it clear that

belief in the validity and divine origin of the message brought by Muhammad was significant from a fairly early date, and *âmana* is linked to this belief.

Helmer Ringgren states that besides two verses that apply *âmana* to God (see page 3 above), all other Qur'ânic occurrences of *âmana* (810 of them in various noun and verb forms) carry the meaning 'to believe' - a bold claim, considering his statement that this sense is unattested in pre-Qur'ânic literature.[73] Such a broad claim is perhaps impossible to prove, especially given the Qur'ân's tendency to use *âmana* in ways that assume its meaning rather than defining it. It is clear, nevertheless, that *âmana* is connected to something like belief in some apparently early Qur'ânic passages.

84:20-22, possibly from Nöldeke's first Meccan period, places *âmana* in opposition to *kadhdhaba*, which means 'to charge with falsehood' or 'to falsely deny.' 77:49-50, also possibly early Meccan, suggests the same opposition, and makes 'a report' the object of *âmana*, which implies some kind of acknowledgment of truth. 69:41-42, possibly from the first Meccan period, and 52:29-33, from the second Meccan period, oppose *âmana* to the charge that the Prophet was merely a 'poet,' a 'soothsayer,' or a 'madman,' rather than a messenger from God.

These examples do not prove that *âmana* specifically meant belief at this early stage, since the passages might be intended not to contrast belief with the charge of lying, but to contrast the Prophet's allies with his detractors. Nevertheless,

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[73] Helmer Ringgren, "The Conception of Faith," 8-9.

these passages clearly show that the charge of falsehood, or at least the claim of a less than divine origin for the revelations, was an important form of attack against Muhammad fairly early in the Meccan period. The notion of belief in specific doctrines, such as the last day or angels, is not evident in the earliest occurrences of *âmana*. But acceptance of the Prophet as bringing a message from God is clearly an issue, and one's position on this question would naturally tend to correlate with being allied to Muhammad and his community.

William Montgomery Watt has noted several types of charges made by Muhammad's opposition that were designed to deprive his message of authority. The suggestion that Muhammad was a soothsayer or a poet did not necessarily imply that his message was sheer invention, but such a charge did attribute the revelations to supernatural sources that were less than divine, and thus stripped them of the kind of authority Muhammad understood them to have. This allegation seems to have been made quite early. A second charge, which Watt finds indicated in later passages, is that the revelations were invented by Muhammad, perhaps with the help of someone familiar with Jewish or Christian sources. Some also questioned Muhammad's qualification to receive divine revelations, or demanded supernatural signs to validate them.[74]

I propose that it is not necessary to posit foreign influence to understand how belief became a defining concept in Islam. The accusations of Muhammad's

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[74] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 127-129.

opponents made defense of the Messenger (and therefore of the message as well) an important concern for Muhammad's supporters. The question remains, how did this notion of affirming the truth of Muhammad's revelations come to be linked to *âmana,* as we have just seen that it is, if *âmana* did not at first imply belief? At the beginning of this essay I rejected the argument that this meaning of *âmana* must have been borrowed from foreign vocabulary.[75] It is likewise unnecessary to resort to remote logical connections between making secure and believing. I propose that conflict over the truthfulness of Muhammad's apostleship led to the incorporation of the meaning of *ṣaddaqa* (the verbal form of *taṣdîq*) into the definition of the community, and thus into the semantic sphere of *âmana.*

Early Qur'ânic references to the controversy over the validity of Muhammad's prophetic role are permeated with the term *ṣâdiq* (one who is truthful or sincere), which comes from the same root as *ṣaddaqa.*[76] Like *âmana*, the verb *ṣaddaqa* (meaning "to regard as true" or "to confirm"[77]) is opposed in early sûrahs to *kadhdhaba,* which expresses the charge of falsehood that was leveled against

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[75] I argued that *âmana* was applied to the community too early for Muhammad and his followers to have adopted an entirely new meaning. The same argument applies to the possibility that the meaning of belief was borrowed after the first application of *âmana* to the community: the notion of belief is connected with *âmana* too early in the Qur'ân. It is still possible, however, that contact with other languages over time would have reinforced the identification of *âmana* with belief.

[76] See Helmer Ringgren, "The Root ṢDQ," 140.

[77] Helmer Ringgren, "The Root ṢDQ," 141.

Muhammad's revelations.[78] But *ṣaddaqa* is used in the sense of belief only in early Qur'ânic verses. By contrast, *âmana* becomes much more frequent in later sûrahs, where it takes on more clearly the meaning of belief.[79] Thus *âmana* not only takes *on*, but actually takes *over* the meaning and function of *ṣaddaqa*. This has been noted by Karl Ahrens,[80] and later by Helmer Ringgren, whom I quote:

> It can be noticed that this use of *ṣaddaqa* ["to regard as true"] is almost entirely confined to the first Meccan period (one instance, 37:50, from the beginning of the second period; 66:12 from Medinah is somewhat different). In the later Surahs the word is principally used about the confirmation that the preaching of other prophets receives from later revelations, especially those of Mohammed himself (e.g. 2:83, 95, 3:75, 6:92, 10:38, 12:111, 46:11, 29). The concept of belief is now entirely taken over by *âmana*; its opposite is still *kadhdhaba* and, in addition, *kafara*, which grows more and more common.[81]

That *âmana* could be closely linked to *ṣaddaqa* is not surprising. We have already seen (page 41) that the root *ṣ-d-q* shares some of the connotations of allegiance. In the context of the Meccan controversy over the genuineness of Muhammad's apostleship, allegiance to and protection of the Prophet would seem to naturally go hand in hand with belief (though not necessarily so, as the case of

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[78] See 75:31-32 and 92:5-10, which are noted by Helmer Ringgren in "The Root ṢDQ," 141.

[79] This is seen, for instance, in the long lists of things to be believed in that appear in later passages. 2:172 (God, the last day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets), 2:285, and 4:135, all Medinan, are offered as examples by Helmer Ringgren, "The Conception of Faith," 11.

[80] Karl Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter,* 110.

[81] Helmer Ringgren, "The Conception of Faith," 10-11. See also idem, "The Root ṢDQ," 141-142.

Abû Ṭâlib demonstrates). This connection is noted in retrospect by a verse from the traditional life of the Prophet, which we have already considered: "My people it was who sheltered their prophet and believed in him (*ṣaddaqûhu*) when all the world were unbelievers (*kuffâr*)."[82] Furthermore, if the community Muhammad envisioned was to be defined by religious commitment rather than by ties of blood, the message he brought would have to be accepted as authoritative. Thus the association between *âmana* and *ṣaddaqa* was natural, and what fused the two meanings together was the heat of conflict over the divine origin of Muhammad's revelations.

What I have proposed so far is that *âmana* was first applied to the Muslim community in its original sense, as a recognition of the *mu'minûn*'s allegiance to and protection of Muhammad and the community. Acceptance of the Prophet's message was a natural corollary of such allegiance, but it was not until the divine origin of the revelations became a major point of controversy that defending the truth of the message became a defining characteristic of the *mu'minûn*. This occurred fairly early in the Meccan period, so that by the time of Abû Ṭâlib's death, a confession of belief could be used as a test of community membership. As belief became a defining mark of the *mu'minûn*, it was only natural that it should become one of the implications brought to mind by the term which defined the community. *Âmana*'s role as a

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[82] A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 320; from p. 474 of Wüstenfeld's Arabic edition.

community designator made such a shift in meaning possible.[83] That *ṣaddaqa* did not replace *âmana* in this role suggests that even as the notion of belief gained in importance, allegiance remained a significant aspect of belonging to the early community.

The Broadest Meaning of *Âmana*

At this point *âmana* has reached its broadest and most complex meaning, logically and chronologically midway between the starting point of 'making secure' and the ending point of *taṣdîq*. It has acquired the sense of belief, but has not yet been divested of the connotation of allegiance and protection. This is the multifaceted meaning that characterizes *âmana* throughout most of the Qur'ân, and that should therefore be borne in mind when reading most Qur'ânic passages.

The English expression 'to stand up for' (or 'take a stand for') someone or something expresses well the complexity and ambiguity of this notion. The idea of 'standing up for' Muhammad, God, the last day, or any of *âmana*'s other objects, conveys the sense of protection, allegiance, and belief that I suggest characterizes *âmana* at this point in its development.

This English phrase is a useful translation because it can apply to a person or to an idea. When one stands up for someone, one is defending and supporting that

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[83] The flexibility of the meaning of a community term is observable among Christians in America today: the word 'believer' is often used without much thought as to the nature or content of belief. It is used to designate the "in" group, and just what this means depends not on the meaning of belief, but on the speaker's presuppositions about what defines a Christian.

person, affirming the truth of his or her words, or declaring one's allegiance. In this sense one can stand up for Muhammad, for the Muslim community, or even for God: the Qur'ân (59:8) is not embarrassed to speak of the emigrants helping God and His Messenger. One can also stand up for an idea, a belief, or a principle, if it is being challenged. Muhammad's Meccan opponents certainly offered challenges not only to the Prophet himself, but also to the ideas he was proclaiming. There were early controversies over the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment, and over idols and the unity of God.[84] On the whole, however, doctrine seems to have been a later emphasis. The early meaning of *âmana* has a relational quality, emphasizing one's relationship to God, the Prophet, and the community, whereas the later meaning connotes something more intellectual, individual, or internal.

'To stand up for' represents the most complex point in the development of *âmana*, when the ideas of granting security, allegiance, and belief are bound together. I suggest that keeping in mind the several aspects of this rich notion will help to make sense of the wide range of ideas linked to *âmana* over the span of its use in the Qur'ân. One may expect that one or the other aspect may be emphasized in each individual passage. For instance, when a long list of objects of *âmana* is given, one may understand the focus to be on believing in the angels, the last day, etc., though the idea of defending their reality may also be in view. When one is urged to *âmana* in God, the meaning is more ambiguous: it could refer to acknowledging His

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[84] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca,* 123-126.

existence and qualities, or it could imply 'being on His side,' since the Qur'ân takes the existence of God for granted and focuses instead on one's response to Him. Finally, when *âmana* is linked to good works, as in the expression *alladhîna yu'minûna wa ya`malûna al-ṣâliḥâti* (those who [*âmana*] and do good works), the emphasis may be on the *mu'min*'s responsibility towards the community. A multifaceted understanding of *âmana* not only provides a bridge between its starting and ending meanings; it also helps explain the complexity of Qur'ânic usage that has so frustrated and stimulated later theological analysis.

Granting Security Loses Importance

I have proposed a model of the process by which *âmana* took on the meaning of belief; it now remains to show how Qur'ânic usage paved the way for the later assumption that *îmân* is essentially *taṣdîq,* exclusive of protection and allegiance.

The first and most obvious relevant change in historical circumstances is that after the Hijrah, as the *ummah* established itself as a major local power, the Prophet's personal security eventually ceased to be an issue. In time it was said that Muhammad 'granted security to' (*âmana*) others.[85] Since collecting taxes in pre-Islamic Arabia placed one under the obligation to avenge the death of a taxpayer,[86] the institution of the *zakât* could have been taken to imply Muhammad's

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[85] M. M. Bravmann ("Spiritual Background," 29) cites an example from Ibn Qutaybah, *Kit. ash-Shi`r wash-Shu`arâ'*, p. 98, l. I ff.

[86] H. Lammens mentions a "contribule" (contributor or taxpayer) as one whose death is to be avenged. *L'Arabie occidentale,* 183.

responsibility to protect his followers. By the end of his life, treaties and letters used the expressions "the security-guarantee (*dhimmah*) of God and of Muḥammad b. `Abdallâh" and "secure with the security (*âmin bi-amân*) of God and the security of Muḥammad."[87] Tradition records the Prophet's words to the effect that when people "testify the fact that there is no god but Allah, and believe in me (that) I am the messenger (from the Lord) and in all that I have brought," "their blood and riches are guaranteed protection on my behalf except where it is justified by law, and their affairs rest with Allah."[88]

Thus while the name *al-mu'minûn* was retained by Muhammad's followers, the sense of *âmana* that had first led to its use disappeared from the self-understanding of the community, and thus from the meaning of *âmana.* The more general idea of allegiance did remain important, but the power relationship shifted, so that allegiance meant something closer to submission than to granting protection. Eventually allegiance came to be designated more and more by other terms, as we will see when we come to the Qur'ânic episode of the Bedouin. For now it is

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[87] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina,* 235, citing Ibn Sa`d, *Ṭabaqât,* ed. E. Sachau (9 vols.), Leiden, 1905 &c., i/2. 23. 26 (Wellhausen's §25), 25. 2 (§30 d), &c. Note that God and Muhammad are here mentioned together as granting security, just as they are often the objects of *âmana* in the Qur'ân. See also William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina,* 239.

[88] Muslim *IX,* 31, translated in `Abdul Ḥamîd Ṣiddîqî, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim,* vol. 1, 17.

instructive to recognize that part of the early meaning of *âmana* became irrelevant, so that the weight of the term shifted towards belief.

The Interiorization of *Âmana*

The last step on the trajectory connecting the starting and ending meanings of *âmana* is the rejection of its aspect of allegiance, which reduces *îmân* to a basically internal quality of the individual, centered on belief. I will present two historical incidents, and the Qur'ân's responses to them, as milestones in this final development.

The Hypocrites Focus Attention on the Heart

Ideally, those who are included in the Muslim community on earth by virtue of their declaration of allegiance and profession of belief, should be the true Muslims who will constitute the community of paradise. But the defection of the 'hypocrites' before the Battle of Uḥud, in which the Muslims were defeated by the Quraysh of Mecca in the third year after the Hijrah, brought to light a discrepancy between the apparent community and the true *mu'minûn*. The Qur'ân refers to this event in 3:166-167:

> What befell you on the day the two armies met was by the permission of Allah, so that he might know the *mu'minûn,* and so that he might know the hypocrites. It was said to them, "come, fight in the way of Allah, or defend." They said, "if we knew of a battle we would indeed follow you." On that day they were closer to *kufr* [the opposite of *îmân*] than to *îmân*. They were speaking with their mouths what was not in their hearts, but Allah knew best what they were hiding.

This passage addresses the problem of an allegiance that is spoken with the mouth but not intended with the heart, and therefore does not materialize as action when put to the test. The hypocrites had been members of the community by virtue of their formal profession, but their failure to act revealed a deficiency in their hearts that only God had been aware of. The ideal - in which the tongue and the heart and the limbs all act in concord, and the earthly community equals the people of paradise - was disrupted by the aberration of hypocrisy. The Qur'ân's response was to clarify that *îmân* is not a matter of mere formal allegiance, but of the heart.

"Those in whose hearts is disease" is a Qur'ânic phrase describing the opposition to Muhammad within the Muslim camp at Medina.[89] In the case of the hypocrites of Uḥud, this disease did not manifest itself until they were put to the test, but it is understood to have been present all along. Thus a lack of sincerity in the heart can invalidate one's profession of allegiance and exclude one in principle from the *mu'minûn*, even if one is still outwardly a Muslim and part of the visible community.

It is noteworthy that the Qur'ân's response to the hypocrites does not completely exclude them from *îmân*. By implicitly introducing the notion of degrees of faith (which becomes quite controversial in later theology) it distances the hypocrites from *îmân* without entirely cutting them off from the community. William Montgomery Watt points out that they are not accused of disobedience but only of

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[89] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina,* 182.

cowardice (creeping into their holes, the literal meaning of 'hypocrite'), and he infers that their leader Ibn Ubayy "did not formally break his league with Muḥammad" and "was still nominally a Muslim," so that Muhammad "could take no violent measures against him, much as his followers desired this."[90] Thus allegiance remained intact on the surface, but it was so insincere as to be clearly insufficient, and by the late Medinan period the hypocrites had come to be regarded as equivalent to *kâfirûn* (the opposite of *mu'minûn*).[91]

The Qur'ânic response to the hypocrites did not dismiss the value of genuine allegiance, but it did highlight the insufficiency of mere formal allegiance as a definition of the true community. It thus began the process of separating allegiance from *âmana*. More importantly, the incident of the hypocrites focused attention on the sincerity of the heart. This interiorization of *âmana* is what made it possible for *taṣdîq bi-al-janân*, belief with the heart, to become the basis for later concepts of *îmân*.

The Separation of Allegiance from *Âmana*

The Qur'ânic development we have been tracing culminates in a very late Medinan passage (49:14) which became a standard point of reference in later

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[90] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 184.

[91] Watt cites the Qur'ân (9:73-74 and 66:9) to show that in the late Medinan period "those now called 'Hypocrites' were practically excluded from the community; they were to be treated roughly and threatened with Hell as apostates." William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 190.

discussions of *îmân*. This famous verse continues the interiorizing trend by making the heart the locus of *îmân*. Even more importantly, it separates the notion of allegiance from *âmana*, and identifies it with another term which also came to stand for the community: *islâm*.

> The Bedouins have said: "we [*âmana*]." Say: "you do not [*âmana*.] Say rather, 'we have submitted (*aslamnâ*).' *Îmân* has not yet entered into your hearts. But if you obey God and His messenger, He will not defraud you of anything of your works. Truly God is forgiving, merciful."

The historical context of this verse is the period near the end of the Prophet's life when many Arab tribes were coming and declaring their allegiance to him. The Bedouins' declaration of *îmân* was essentially a declaration of allegiance.[92] The fact that they used *âmana* in this way shows that *âmana* was still regarded as a term of allegiance at this late date. But the Qur'ân's response completes the dissociation between allegiance and *âmana* that the incident of the hypocrites began. It does not question the value of their allegiance, but accepts it as an appropriate first step of submission. At the same time it makes clear that this does not constitute *îmân*, but only *islâm*. Usually translated submission, *islâm* represents well the new balance of power in the relationship of allegiance, in which Muhammad now grants security rather than receiving it.

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[92] Helmer Ringgren says this passage "presupposes a situation when Islam was taken as a purely outward act of submission to Muhammed accompanied by the profession of the *shahâda*." *Islâm, 'Aslama and Muslim*, 31.

It is evident that even though the Prophet's personal security was no longer an issue at this point, allegiance remained vitally important, as may be seen from a sample of Ibn Sa`d's record of Muhammad's political correspondence:

> The Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) wrote to B. Ghifâr that they are of the Muslims, with the privileges of the Muslims and the obligations of the Muslims; and that the prophet covenants to them the *dhimmah* [guarantee of security, protection] of God and the *dhimmah* of His messenger, for their goods and persons; succour is due to them against whoever begins wrong against them; when the prophet summons them to succour him, they are to respond to him; (incumbent) on them is his succour, except (on) those who are fighting about religion, so long as the sea wets a piece of wool; this writing does not come in front of (and protect from the penalties of) crime.[93]

This letter highlights the importance of formal allegiance as a mark of inclusion in the Muslim community. But note that *âmana* does not appear in the text. Its sense of allegiance has been taken over by words such as *dhimmah* and *islâm*. *Dhimmah* eventually came to designate the allied or protected status of non-Muslims, whereas *islâm* came to refer to the special allegiance of those who submitted to God and the Prophet not only in a political sense, but also by accepting their authority in matters of belief and practice. The very fact that a form of protection was eventually extended even to people who did not accept this authority in every area of life, such as Christians and Jews, is one reason why allegiance could not have remained the sole defining characteristic of the submitted (Muslim) community. On the other

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[93] Ibn Sa`d, *Ṭabaqât,* ed. E. Sachau (9 vols.), Leiden, 1905 &c., i/2. 26, lines 26ff. (Wellhausen's §39), translated in William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina,* 354-355.

hand, the fact that *aslama* eventually predominated over *âmana* as the name of the religion and its adherents, suggests that allegiance did remain a very important practical criterion for delimiting the visible earthly community, though the true community of paradise would still be defined by the more exclusive and idealistic criterion of *îmân*.

Having severed the connection between allegiance and *îmân*, the Qur'ân redefines *îmân* as a matter of the heart, following the same internalizing trend suggested by the incident of the hypocrites. We have thus reached the internalized meaning of *âmana* that marks the ending point of our investigation. The very next verse (49:15) elaborates on this definition:

> The *mu'minûn* are only those who *âmanû* in God and His messenger, then do not doubt, but strive with their wealth and with their own selves in the way of God. These are the sincere (*al-ṣâdiqûn*, from the same root as *taṣdîq*).

This definition includes belief, or *taṣdîq*, as the exclusion of doubt demonstrates. But as I emphasized when establishing our ending point at the beginning of this essay, neither *îmân* nor *taṣdîq* is fully captured by the translation 'belief,' when this is thought of as a purely intellectual assent to propositional truth. This verse specifies that *îmân* also requires sincerity (or truthfulness,) which is linguistically related to *taṣdîq*. This is the requirement, made necessary by the example of the hypocrites, that one's words and actions truthfully reflect the intent of one's heart. Furthermore, though *îmân* is located in the heart, it has external implications. Striving with one's wealth and with one's self (or with one's life, in the context of fighting) is not an action of the heart, but it is a necessary consequence of

îmân. The importance of one's visible works was generally affirmed in later theology, but the problem of their exact relationship to *îmân* caused considerable debate and even bloodshed. The solution that eventually became most widely accepted, as reflected in the rhyming formula quoted at the beginning of this essay, was that *îmân* does include works and verbal confession; but these were typically regarded as extensions of the more fundamental element of *taṣdîq*.[94]

By focusing on *taṣdîq* as the final Qur'ânic meaning of *îmân*, I am not contradicting the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who has argued at length that both *îmân* and *taṣdîq* designate concepts much richer than mere intellectual assent.[95] This richness is clear in later theoretical discussions of *îmân*, as Smith's work demonstrates. I suggest that it is also visible in the complexity of the combined notion of allegiance and belief that pervades most of the Qur'ân, and even in the more limited internalized definition of *îmân* given by sûrah 49. But the story of how this richness was sorted out and elaborated belongs to the history of theology.

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[94] For example, Abû `Ubayd holds that belief is most fundamental, while confession is a testimony [to the belief] and works are a confirmation [of it]. Wilferd Madelung, "Early Sunnî Doctrine Concerning Faith as Reflected in the *Kitâb al-Îmân* of Abû `Ubayd al-Qâsim b. Sallâm (d. 224/839)," *Studia Islamica* XXXII (1970), 233-254; reprinted in *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam,* Collected Studies Series (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), I:246.

[95] See especially Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "*Taṣdîq*."

CONCLUSION

Summary

In pre-Islamic literature the Arabic verb *âmana* and its derivatives were used to mean 'to make secure.' In the Qur'ân, however, these terms came to be used in the sense of 'to believe' or 'to have faith.' This essay has taken these starting and ending meanings as given, and has attempted to connect them in a way that makes sense of the historical circumstances in which the change of meaning took place. Previous models of *âmana*'s development fall short of this objective in various ways.

Âmana's most common function in the Qur'ân is to designate the Muslim community. I have proposed that it was first applied to Muhammad's followers in its original sense, as a title of honor for those who protected him from his Meccan opponents, as well as for those who supported the Muslim community by their allegiance in a more general way. The emphasis on supporting and protecting the community was important for the establishment of a new social unit based on Muhammad's message. Controversy with opponents over both the messenger and the message made belief an important defining characteristic of the community. As the name of the community, *âmana* therefore came to imply belief, eventually taking over this meaning from the term *ṣaddaqa*.

As Muhammad's need for protection diminished, and as he in turn began to offer protection to others, including non-Muslims, the notions of protection and allegiance could no longer define the community. The example of the hypocrites at Uḥud encouraged an emphasis on the inner dimension of *âmana,* and before the time

of Muhammad's death, *âmana* had been redefined as a matter of the heart. This set the stage for later theology, which almost universally regarded the belief of the heart as the fundamental component of *îmân*.

Implications of This Study

Most of my proposal has not relied very heavily on Qur'ânic passages to demonstrate development in the use of *âmana*. In part this is because the early part of my model probably predates most Qur'ânic occurrences of *âmana*, which cannot anyway be dated with certainty. More importantly, however, the Qur'ân tends to use *âmana* in ways which presuppose its meaning rather than defining it. It links *âmana* with a wide variety of concepts, from fighting to feeding the poor to believing in angels. The interpretation of Qur'ânic usage is more often a question to be answered than data to be used in argument. This essay has therefore worked from historical circumstances and events to find a historically plausible model that is not only consistent with Qur'ânic usage, but actually helps to understand it.

The most important test of my model, and perhaps its most valuable point of application, will therefore be its helpfulness in understanding the Qur'ânic use of *âmana*. I have suggested that throughout most of the Qur'ân, *âmana* should be read as a complex term implying both allegiance and belief, similar to the English expression 'to stand up for' someone or something. Emphasis in individual passages may be on one or the other aspect. This helps to explain how *âmana* can be linked in the Qur'ân with a great variety of concepts. It also suggests an emphasis on the

relational aspects of *âmana*, and particularly the notion of allegiance, especially in reading earlier Qur'ânic passages. This has often been overlooked, because the later emphasis on *taṣdîq* has been quite naturally read back into the text.

It would be irresponsible to push the application of my proposal much beyond the time of the Qur'ân. Nevertheless, my model provides valuable perspective on later developments. It is relevant, for example, to our understanding of the linguistic milieu of the period of the first Caliphs. Although *îmân* had come to be formally defined as a matter of the heart by the time of the Prophet's death, it is likely that for the first generation of Muslims, other forms such as *mu'min* still carried the old connotations. For example, `Umar's title of *amîr al-mu'minîn* would have seemed particularly fitting for a military leader, to people who still heard in the word *mu'min* echoes of the old sense of allegiance to God, the Prophet, and the community.

This essay also provides interesting perspective on the later theological debates about the nature of *îmân*. For example, *taṣdîq* has generally been taken to be the fundamental component of the traditional three-part definition of *îmân*, while *iqrâr* (verbal confession) and *`amal* (works) have been viewed as the expression or result of *taṣdîq*. But since allegiance is a matter of declaring one's position, and then backing up one's words with one's actions, my model implies that *iqrâr* and *`amal* were more prominent components of *îmân* in its earlier meaning. This suggests that

those theological definitions that reverse the order by placing *iqrâr* first[96] reflect the early concern with defining the visible community. The majority of theologians, by placing *taṣdîq* first, reflect the later interest in defining the community of paradise, an issue that came to the fore after the hypocrites revealed a discrepancy between the two communities.

Finally, the approach which sets this study apart from others is significant in its own right. The specific sequence of steps by which I propose that *âmana* developed from one meaning to another is in some respects only a hypothesis, a suggestion of which historical circumstances seem most likely to have caused the change. Specific points along this path may be debated and modified. But the larger significance of this essay is methodological: I hope to have shown that it is possible to bind oneself to the relatively fixed points imposed by language and history, and come up with a model that makes sense of both. Comparative linguistics and verse-by-verse analysis are certainly important for an understanding of Qur'ânic vocabulary. But given the insight my model provides into the Qur'ân, the early

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[96] In what is perhaps the earliest occurrence of the three-part formula, *iqrâr* is placed before *taṣdîq*. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Arkân,* note 2, p. 320, cites Ibn Baṭṭah, who lists *qawl* (speech) *bi-al-lisân* before *taṣdîq* and *`amal*. Ḥanafite creeds also typically put *iqrâr* first. (Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of* Îmân *and* Islâm (Tokyo: Keio University; Yokohama: Yurindo, 1965), 149-150.) In one edition of such a creed the editor has reverted to the standard order in his table of contents, presumably influenced by the usual view that *taṣdîq* is fundamental. Compare the text of the creed on p. 76 with the corresponding entry in the table of contents, p. (2), of `Alî al-Qârî, *Kitâb al-fiqh al-akbar* (1323 A.H. [1905 A.D.] (first printing)).

community, and theology, it seems that there is also much to be gained from relating key vocabulary to the historical circumstances and events that impacted its use.

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