

The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

ALLAH

theological issues and polemical works against different religious and philosophical groups. None of his works is extant, hence the only way to determine his views is to look at the works of figures such as al-Ash'ari, al-Baghdadi, al-Shahrastani, Khayyat and 'Abd al-Jabbar.

For Abu'l Hudayl, apart from the senses, reason and true reports are the sources of human knowledge. Any religious report can be accepted only if it is reported by at least one of the candidates for paradise; in other words, by a true believer. The world consists of atoms. Bodies are agglomerates of atoms held together through the accidents of composition, juxtaposition, contiguity and conjunction. There are basic accidents inherent in every single atom, such as movement or rest, contiguity or isolation, and being. Some of the accidents may endure over a succession of moments, some of them are instantaneous. Since atoms are finite and hence created, the world is also finite and created.

Abu'l Hudayl defines man as this visible body that eats and drinks. Although he uses the terms soul (*nafs*), spirit (*ruh*) and life, their relation to the body is not clear. Our power of acting is the permanent accident that characterizes us as fundamentally moral. Only voluntary actions belong to us. Will presupposes knowledge, which is either innate or acquired. Abu'l Hudayl considers sense perception, natural knowledge of God, perception of good and evil and that good may be pursued and evil avoided as all innate. Hence, every human being has an innate knowledge of God's existence. Although he affirms in God a number of attributes, he does not consider God's essence different from his attributes. God created humanity for their well-being. Hence, although he is able, God's doing evil to them is inconceivable.

Again, God always does what is most salutary for mankind.

Abu'l Hudayl considers the Qur'an as the greatest miracle. For him there will always be some saints in the world, protected from committing any sin. There will be reward and punishment in the life to come. However, since the world has a beginning and an end, at a certain moment all movement in heaven and hell will cease and will be converted into a state of eternal consummation.

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OLIVER LEAMAN

ALLAH

The concept of God in the Qur'an

All Muslims across the world believe that there is only one God, who has created 'the heavens, the earth and what is between'. The expression of this faith takes place in the first part of the *shahada*, or the statement of faith: 'there is no deity but God and Muhammad is His Messenger'. The statement is repeated by Muslims in their five daily prayers, in the call for prayer and in their daily lives. To believe in one God constitutes the central issue in Islam. The Qur'an presents the Arabic name of God as Allah. Unlike the ancient Greek god Zeus, or the Hindu god Vishnu, Allah, who has ninety-nine beautiful names, is the same God of Christianity and Judaism.

Etymology

According to Muslim theologians, the name Allah can be defined as 'The proper name of the One who is necessarily existent in himself and deserves all praises'. Indicating the oneness of God, the word has no plural form and no one can be named with it except God. Creatures can be related to it as 'abd or servant, such as 'Abd-Allah or the servant of God. The root of the name is *al-ilah*, meaning 'the God'. The word *ilah* (pl. '*aliha*') in Arabic is used as a generic term for deities. In order to ease the usage, Arabs frequently contract the words based on certain grammatical rules. Therefore, the two words, *al* and *ilah*, were contracted into one and became Allah. The name 'Allah' is referred to in the Qur'an 2,697 times.

Despite their polytheistic traditions, Arabs before Islam were also familiar with the name Allah as the name of the Supreme Being in heaven, which is evident in the Prophet's father's name, 'Abdullah, the servant of Allah. The Qur'an refers to their familiarity with Allah in the following verse: 'If you ask them who has created the heavens and the earth, they will say Allah'. Accordingly, the Holy Book speaks of false gods of Meccans, who were considered mediators between human beings and Allah. The Holy Book ridicules them for worshipping powerless stones and wood.

Although scholars link the name Allah with El or Elohim, terms for God in Hebrew, most Muslim theologians and linguists believe that the origin of the name is Arabic. Regardless of the origin of the name, Muslims believe that Allah is the same God as that of Christianity and Judaism. It is he who sent the Torah to Moses and the Gospel to Jesus. He is the true God of all creation.

Existence of God

Scholastic Muslim theologians have developed many arguments to prove the existence of God. Two of them are well known in Islamic theology: *huduth* (creation) and *imkan* (contingency) arguments. The first argument proves that the universe existed and cannot come into being without the One who originates it. Therefore it cannot be created by itself. Unlike the Aristotelian argument, which operates on the principle of causality, in this argument the world is not eternal. The Qur'an uses the *huduth* argument in various verses without referring to the term itself. Therefore, the world is originated and needs an originator. In other words, whatever exists must have a sufficient cause for its existence. The latter argument is based on the view that what exists is divided into two categories. The first category is one whose existence is necessary in itself. The other category is one whose existence depends on others. The goal of this argument is to prove that there is only one thing that necessarily exists. It argues that the world's creation is contingent (*mumkin*), and a contingent thing cannot be created by another contingent thing. Otherwise it would lead to an infinite series of contingent causes. Consequently, it needs the One who is necessarily existent in himself. All other causes found in the universe are contingent, thus there must be an uncaused cause or the Cause of Causes (*musabbib al-asbab*) to create them.

Through a sustained examination of the Qur'anic verses, one finds a variety of arguments to prove the existence of God. Besides the above-mentioned two arguments, the argument from universal consent and teleological argument are among those arguments found in the Qur'an under various names. The wonderful design of the universe, which is

ALLAH

the basis of the teleological argument, is frequently referred to as a point of contemplation in the Qur'an. This marvellous and interrelated system of order cannot have been brought about by chance. As thinkers such as Nursi point out, whoever created the eye of the mosquito is the same person who created the solar system. That is because they are interrelated; the eyes of a mosquito are designed in accordance with the level of the sunlight. 'It is He who has created seven heavens in harmony. You cannot see any fault in the Beneficent One's creation; then look again: Can you see any flaw?' (67.3)

The Holy Book invites human beings to contemplate the ways of God. The Qur'an calls it 'signs' or *ayat*. Various verses condemn those who do not use their minds and reason to understand the signs of God in the universe and in their own creation. The Qur'an encourages people to appreciate God's signs, since they are intelligent creatures. The verse says: 'We have sent down upon you signs, clear indications, and none denies their truth save the transgressors' (2.99). The word 'sign' is repeated many times in the Qur'an. Everything in the heavens and the earth gives news of God, and they are signs of God. Everything that happens tells us something about God. Therefore, in the heavens, in the natural world, in historical events, and inside us, are signs of God. 'We [God] have appointed the night and the day as two signs' (17.12). 'A sign for them is the dead earth which we brought to life, and from which we brought forth grain that they eat' (36.33). 'And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the variety of your tongues and colours' (30.22). 'Of His signs are the ships that run on the sea like landmarks' (42.32). 'In the earth are signs for those having certainty, and in yourselves' (51.20-21). In

short, everything is a sign because all things are God's creatures. Referring to the verse 'For people who think intelligently there are signs in the creation of the heavens and earth and in the alteration of night and day' (3.190), the Prophet of Islam says, 'Woe to those who read this and do not contemplate'. The Qur'anic text provides another significant reference to the signs of God:

Your God is one God: There is no God but He. He is the most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. For a people who think intelligently, there are signs in the creation of the heavens and earth, in the alteration of night and day, in ships which voyage on the seas to benefit people, in the waters God sends down from heaven giving life to the earth after it was dead, in the populating of the earth with every kind of living creature, in the hither and thither of winds and clouds harnessed to His purposes between sky and land. (2.163-4).

Muslim theologians such as Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 944 CE), Sayf al-Din al-Amidi (d. 1233 CE), Nasr al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274 CE), Adud al-Din al-Iji (d. 1355 CE) refer to the Qur'anic verses relating to the creation of heavens and earth as well as the creation of human beings in their arguments designed to prove the existence of God. The Qur'an contains many verses that refer to the amazing design and order in all creation. Abu Hanifa (d. 767 CE), founder of the Hanafi school of Islamic law, offers the parable of a ship in the ocean. Such a ship needs to have a captain who will guide it in the right direction.

The Qur'an also refers to aesthetic arguments on various occasions. On the creation of heavens and earth the Book says that God has ornamented (*zayanna*) the sky for you with stars (67.5), and that He has made your water pure (*ma'in*) (67.30). Furthermore it

eloquently refers to the beautiful creation of the human being and rebukes the heedless: 'man! What has seduced you from your gracious Lord? He who created you, and fashioned you, who proportioned you suitably, and in the form He wished He contrived you' (82.6-8). 'Surely We have created human beings in the best fashion' (95.4). The Qur'an emphatically refers to God's attribute of creation (*al-khaliq*): 'Have they not beheld the heaven above them, how We established and adorned it in its unbroken reach? The earth We stretched out, setting there on the mighty hills, where We made every kind of joyous thing to grow; a vision and a reminder for every penitent servant' (50.6-8). With reference to the creation of the human being, the Qur'an repeats again the beauty of its form. 'He created the heavens and the earth with the real, formed you and made your form beautiful, and to Him is your return' (64.3).

The nature of God

Muslim theologians believe that the first thing to learn is knowledge about God. Al-Razi (d. 1209) says that the knowledge which is compulsory for every Muslim is the knowledge of God. There have been many attempts to elaborate on God's essence. It is often assumed that the question of God's nature has occupied the minds of early Muslims, and as such the Prophet forbade them from thinking about it. 'Think about God's bounties, but do not think about God's essence (*dhat*). Otherwise, you will vanish.' God's essence (*dhat*) cannot be understood by the limited human capacity. A famous statement with regard to the nature of God has dominated Islamic theology for centuries: 'Whatever comes to your mind about His nature, God is different than that'. He is unique, is unlike all creation, and

nothing is like Him' (see 42.11). He is immeasurably distinct from every creature. According to the teachings of Islam, we, as human beings, are distant from God while he is closer to us than our jugular vein. A contemporary Islamic thinker, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (d. 1960), elaborates on this by employing the parable of the sun and its light. We are distant from the sun, but it is close to us through its heat, light and reflections, as the whole sun can be reflected in the eyes of an individual. Consequently, human beings are unable to comprehend the essence of God, but they are able to manifest his attributes and his names, and to conceive these manifestations in themselves as well as in other creatures. The concept of the creation of humans in God's image has no reference in the Qur'an; however, the *hadith* refers to the notion of his image. The Prophet says, 'God has created humans in the image of *al-rahman*.' According to some theologians, the Prophet indicates that a human being constitutes the most reflective mirror of *al-Rahman's* name, as far as the manifestation of God's names is concerned.

Yet the subtle question of the knowability of God remains. First of all, we cannot understand God's nature, but can comprehend and attain the knowledge of him according to our level through reflection on God's names. For instance, one of God's beautiful names is *al-'alim* ('the Most Knowledgeable'). Intuitively, humans know that their knowledge is limited, but at the same time they are fully aware of the concept of knowledge and the meaning of being knowledgeable about certain objects. This limited knowledge becomes a measure for human beings to imagine, although in a limited way, the unlimited knowledge of God. His essence is beyond knowledge, we know in a limited way, through his attributes. All his

ALLAH

attributes are absolute, because nothing can be compared to him. Even the Prophet Muhammad, the most knowledgeable man about God in Islam, in one of his invocations confesses his limitation: 'Lord, we have not known you as you deserve.' The only one who knows God's essence is God himself. Accordingly, prophets, saints and the righteous know God, yet they know him through his attributes and names, not his essence. And even this knowledge is not an easy task. Sufis, the mystics of Islam, believe that over seventy veils remain as obstacles in the way of attaining knowledge of God. To remove each veil requires an enormous amount of spiritual effort. One might try to reach God through removing all these veils. Paradoxically, the Prophet narrates a statement from God (*hadith qudsi*) in which he says: 'The heavens and the earth cannot encompass Me, but I dwell in the heart of My believers.' Students of the mystical path in Islam have made attempts to experience the knowledge of God. They developed a three-stage pattern: belief in God (*iman billah*); knowledge of God (*ma'rifatullah*); and love of God (*muhabetullah*). The highest of these stages seems to be love of God.

According to the Qur'an, God has revealed himself through his messengers in general and through Muhammad, the seal of the prophets, in particular. Muhammad received divine revelation from God over a period of twenty-three years, and the total of this revelation constitutes the Holy Book of Islam, the Qur'an. Muhammad's first experience of the divine presence and heavenly revelation represent a remarkable event in the history of Islam. In this very first experience, the archangel Gabriel (Jibril) becomes visible to Muhammad and reveals several short verses in which God describes himself as the One who has created humans (*khalaq al-insan*)

and has taught them (*'allama*) what they knew not. The active particle of both verbs has been repeatedly stated in the Qur'an among God's most beautiful names. Therefore, two points can be derived from these early verses. The first point is the concept of *tawhid*, the oneness of God: 'Your God is one God' (41.6). The opposite of *tawhid* is *shirk*, that is to claim a partnership with God, or to worship someone along with God: 'Worship God, and do not associate any others with Him' (4.36). Another verse says, 'Do not associate others with God. To associate others is a mighty wrong' (31.13). The central message of the Qur'an is the avoidance of associating others with God: 'God forgives not that any others should be associated with him, but less than that He forgives to whomsoever He will' (4.48). The Qur'an, by emphasizing the concept of *tawhid*, ultimately challenges the main religious traditions of the time, in particular the Meccan idol worshippers who had been housing 360 idols in the Holy Shrine, the *Ka'ba*, for centuries. The Qur'an also challenges the Christian Trinity as well as the claim of attributing a son to God. 'And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah and the Christians say: the Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old' (9.30). One of the short chapters of the Qur'an, which is considered one-third of the Holy Book in value as far as recitation is concerned, puts this challenge very eloquently: 'He is God, One, and God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one' (112.1-4). He is exalted from being physically involved in any act of creation. His command for creation is 'Be! And it is' (2.117). Nothing can be seen as too hard to him; for him there is no

difference between the creation of a fly and an elephant.

One of the most controversial issues in relation to the divine nature is the question of God's visibility (*ru'yatullah*). The Qur'anic verse says: 'The eyes cannot see him, but He can see eyes' (6.103). The majority of Muslim theologians accept that God can be seen, but not through our naked eyes. When a Companion asks the Prophet 'Have you seen your Lord?', the Prophet replies, 'Yes, with my heart.' Islamic scholars refer to the Qur'anic verses related to the story of Moses when he asks God to show himself to him. If it was impossible, a prominent messenger of God such as Moses would not ask such a question as this would imply ignorance about his Lord. Consequently, according to the Qur'an, God did not reject his request and asks him to look at the mountain. One of the Qur'anic verses represents a significant reference for the view of the majority, which suggests that on the Day of Judgement some of us will look joyfully at our Lord (75.22-23). Indeed, in the body of *hadith* one can find references to divine visibility in the afterlife when the Prophet says, 'You will see your Lord on the Day of Judgement, as you see the moon.'

Attributes and names of God

The Qur'an uses various names related to God. All chapters of the Qur'an with one exception, start with one of the most known phrases in the Islamic tradition: 'In the name of God the Most Compassionate (*al-Rahman*), the Most Merciful (*al-Rahim*)'. The term used in the Qur'an for name is '*i-s-m* (pl. '*asma*') and the Qur'an employs both singular and plural forms of the word in various verses. For God's attributes, Muslim theologians use the term *sifa* (pl. *sifat*). This term is not used in the Holy Book,

yet as a topic it comprises a great component of the Qur'an. Before examining the names of God, it is significant to give some examples of his attributes, which are divided into two groups. The first group are those related to God's essence:

1. *wujud* (Existence). This attribute designates that God is necessarily existent in himself (*Wajib al-Wujud*). In other words, God's existence is not preceded by non-existence. All other creatures are *hadith* or created in time. To come into the realm of existence, they need someone whose existence is necessary in himself.
2. *qidam* (Divine Eternity). God is eternal, and has no beginning and no end.
3. *baqa* (Divine Permanence). Everything in the universe eventually will vanish except God.
4. *mukhalafa li'l-hawadith* (Divine Dissimilarity to Created Things). Nothing is like God. He is different to everything that one can imagine.
5. *qiyam bi nafsih* (Divine Self Subsistence). In order to continue his existence, God does not need support from anyone or anywhere.

The second group of attributes are those related to God's actions:

1. *qudra* (Divine Power). God has power over everything; nothing can be out of his control or his power.
2. *irada* (Divine Will). Nothing can happen without God's will. His divine will encompasses everything in the universe. He has given human beings a limited will so they become responsible for their actions.
3. *'ilm* (Divine Knowledge). God is omniscient. He has infinite knowledge of all things both actual and

ALLAH

possible. A leaf cannot fall down without his knowledge.

4. *hayat* (Divine Life). God has an infinitely perfect life which is the source of all lives in the universe. Every living creature takes its life from the divine life.
5. *kalam* (Divine Speech). Allah speaks to his messengers from behind a veil. The divine scriptures such as the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospels and the Qur'an are his speeches at the level of humans. If they were at his level no one would be able to hear it. Muslim theologians refer to the story of Moses. On the Mount of Sinai he endured to hear only a few words of God's speech and then fainted. When Moses asked God if this was the way of his speech, God said, 'Moses, I have the power of all languages.' All speeches on the face of the earth are reflections of this divine speech.
6. *sam* (Divine Hearing). God hears everything from the lowest to the highest sounds. Theologians state that he hears the sound of the feet of an ant moving around in the darkness of the night. He hears the cry of all his servants, the supplications of all his righteous people, the prayer of all his creatures. 'Call on Me; I shall answer you' (40.60).
7. *basar* (Divine Sight). Nothing can be hidden from God's sight. He sees everything in the universe every moment. All eyes of creatures are the reflections of this divine attribute. Only the one who sees everything perfectly can give sight to God's creatures. The Qur'an refers to all these attributes virtually in every page. It would not be an exaggeration to state that one quarter of the Qur'an is about God.

In reference to God's names, the Qur'an employs the term *al-'asma' al-husna* (the Most Beautiful Names), which is referred to four times in the Qur'an on various occasions. 'Say Muhammad! Call upon God or call upon the Merciful (*al-Rahman*); whichever you call upon, to Him belongs the names, Most Beautiful' (17.110). The Qur'an portrays about fifteen names of God together in the following verses:

He is Allah, than whom there is no other God, the Knower of the invisible and the visible. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. He is Allah, than whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, and the Superb. Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him). He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner. To Him belong the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise'. (59.22-24)

The Qur'an does not present any reference to the number of God's beautiful names. Traditionally Muslim theologians speak of the ninety-nine names of God. The number can increase to 313, if the names related to God's actions are included. The number ninety-nine derives, in fact, from a tradition narrated by Abu Hurayra in which the Prophet says: 'There are ninety-nine names of God. Whosoever memorizes and accepts these names will enter paradise.' In another version of the same *hadith* all names are listed. Scholars of Islamic theology have come to a consensus that the above-mentioned tradition is not meant to limit the number of God's names, but to give an idea of his many names. In fact, there are some names, such as *al-nasir* (the Helper), *al-mawla* (the Friend) and *al-ghalib* (the

Defeater) cited in the Qur'an, but not found in the list provided by the aforementioned *hadith*. Furthermore, if one calculates the names mentioned in the two versions of the *hadith*, the number will rise to 124. The Prophet himself supplicates God with his known and his unknown names as well: 'I pray to You by the names that you have preserved for Yourself in the realm of the unseen.'

Muslim theologians have developed various categories of divine names. One might go on to elaborate on each categorization. Bekir Topaloğlu, a prominent theologian in modern Turkey, provides a comprehensive categorization. According to his categorization, the divine names are divided into four groups: those related to God's essence, to the Universe, to the natural world, and to the human being.

1. The names such as Allah, *al-haqq* (the True), *al-awwal* (the First), *al-akhir* (the Last), *al-baqi* (the Permanent), *al-warith* (the Inheritor), *al-samad* (the Refuge of All) constitute examples of the first group of this category. All of these names define God's essence, to make the unknowable, knowable and understandable by our mind.
2. The following names represent examples of the second group: *al-khaliq* (the Creator), *al-bari* (the Originator), *al-mubdi* (the Starter), *al-mu'id* (the Resurrector), *al-muhyi* (the Giver of Life) and *al-mumit* (the Giver of Death).
3. The names such as *malik al-mulk* (the Owner of the Kingdom), *al-malik* (the Owner), *al-qayyum* (the Sustainer), *al-wali* (the Ruler), *al-muhamaymin* (the Sovereign) and *al-hafiz* (the Guardian) comprise examples of the third group of this categorization.

4. The names related to human beings seem to be many. The following names represent some of those which involve the examples of the fourth group: *al-'adl* (Justice), *al-hakam* (the Keeper of Balance), *al-fattah* (the Opener), *al-afuww* (the Forgiver of Mistakes), *al-ghafur* (the Forgiver of Sins), *al-tawwab* (the One who Accepts Repentance), *al-halim* (the Kind), *al-mujib* (the One who Answers all Calls), *al-hasib* (the One who Reckons the Deeds of his Servants), *al-wahhab* (the One who Gives) and *al-wadud* (the Lover and Beloved).

The names of God represented in the Islamic teaching are for the practical purposes of human understanding. There are some names restricted to God, which cannot be used for any other being, for example Allah and *al-Rahman*. However, we relate some attributes such as living, knowing, desiring, power, hearing and seeing to humans as well as to God, albeit with an evident difference. Human attributes are transient and a pale reflection of reality, while God's attributes are eternal.

Further reading

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See also: ninety-nine names of God;
al-Rahman

ZEKI SARITOPRAK

AMARA / AMR

see: *ulu'l-amr*

ANGEL

see: *malak*

ANNE

see: Mary's mother

ANTICHRIST

see: *Dajjal*

'AQIDA

'*Aqida* (pl. *aq'id*) is a technical term used for the Muslim creed. The earliest and simplest '*aqida* (creed) of Islam appears in the *shahada* formula and it is generally believed that most of the later creedal formulas are expansions of it. The *shahada* is as follows:

I witness that there is no god but Allah and
that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

The *shahada* is frequently used liturgically as 'a confession of faith'. In practice, when anyone is converted to Islam, he or she is required to pronounce the *shahada* formula, and it is also required of every Muslim that it shall be pronounced at least once in a lifetime and also confessed by heart. It occurs in the *adhan*, which is an invitation to a Muslim to prayer five times a day. It is also regularly uttered by Muslims in the course of daily praying as it arises in every prayer as a recitation in *tahiyat* (in prayers).

'AQIDA

In terms of articles of faith, *shahada* contains two basic articles, namely: unity of God (deity) and the prophecy of Muhammad (prophecy). These two fundamental articles of faith presented in the *shahada* have always been stressed in the Qur'an, and as a creedal formula. The *shahada* has been declared in a *hadith* from al-Bukhari to be the first of the 'five Pillars of Islam': 'Islam has been built on five (pillars); testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.'

As another creedal formula *amantu* exists only in the Maturidi school of Islam. The term literally means 'I believed'. It arises first in Imam 'Azam's *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, then in Hakim es-Samarkandi's *al-Sawad al-A'zam* and Abu'l-Layth Samarkandi's *Bayanu 'Aqidati'l-usul*. The formula takes its name *amantu* from the first word of the formula and the word is used in the Qur'an in the same meaning and context and in *hadith* (Tirmidhi, *Fitan*: 63).

However, the etymological analysis of the Christian *Credo* and Muslim *amantu* leads to an interesting comparison between the Christian and Muslim traditions. This resemblance between the Christian *credo* and *amantu* formulation depends on the fact that both formulas start with 'I believe(d)' = *Credo* = *amantu*. It is likely that the *amantu* formula has come to Islamic literature as a contribution from Samarkand '*ulama* and from a broader Maturidi central Asian contribution which later spread with their migration to Asia Minor and India. Socio-religious and political motivations behind the formulation are well worth considering here also. As happened in Christian creedal formulations, the Muslim polemical and religious interaction with surrounding religions and faiths is very likely the origin of the *amantu* formula. It must be noted that this is just after the time of