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A Sickness in the Heart:

Were the Qur'ān's Hypocrites a late Antique Sect?

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Who were the persons described as "hypocrites" (*al-munāfiqūn*) in the Qur'ān? While the later Muslim commentary and biographical literature makes assertions in this regard, academics now treat with caution these materials from the Abbasid era 750-1258, written long after the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632). The Qur'ān itself is our only early seventh-century primary source for the earliest formation of Muhammad's community. Patricia Crone made this point in a concerted way, distinguishing between the quranic primary source and the late Abbasid secondary sources and arguing that the Qur'ān should be read "on its own," even though this practice is "deeply defamiliarizing."[1] Appealing primarily to the text of the Muslim scripture itself, can we discern the sociological and religious meaning of this term? Was "hypocrisy" a moral fault, so that it was a generalized condition across social groups, or does the term "hypocrites" refer to a bounded sectarian or tribal group?

The Qur'ān itself can illuminate the context and meaning of its own technical terms, a principle recognized by Muslim exegetes.[2] It is my thesis here that Qur'ān chapters, in addition, can be read for the social history of Mecca and Medina in the early seventh-century Hijaz. Historians of late antiquity likewise are increasingly turning to surviving homilies of figures such as John Chrysostom (d. 407) to explore issues such as Christianization and the social history of

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[1] Patricia Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica*, 57, 2/3 (2010):151-200, at 153; see also her "Two Legal Problems Bearing on the Early History of the Qur'ān," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994) 1-37.

[2] Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, *Le coran par lui-même* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

the congregations addressed in cities such as Antioch and Constantinople.[3] Qur'ān chapters often take the form of homilies, as well.

Muhammad engaged in three main tasks with regard to identity formation. He strove to create a community of followers loyal to him and his scripture. He sought to differentiate that community from the surrounding pagans who followed the old North Arabian religion. At the same time, he endeavored to create a coalition of monotheists, joining with Jews and Christians politically against the pagans. Some verses about hypocrisy exhibit anxiety about the steadfastness of Muhammad's believers and their willingness to differentiate themselves from the pagans and from those Christians or Jews who aligned with the militant polytheists. The father of academic quranic studies, Theodore Nöldeke, observed, "The expression *munāfiq* [hypocrite] is occasionally extended also to include true believers, if they became disobedient or lax in the performance of obligations for any reason."[4] Still, in other instances the hypocrites are described in terms that make them appear to have been a distinct sect. Here, I will examine the passages on hypocrisy in crab-wise fashion, considering thematic threads but moving in a generally chronological fashion (following Nöldeke).[5]

The quranic term for hypocrite, *munāfiq*, appears to come from the Ge'ez, as argued by Nöldeke and Arthur Jeffreys.[6] Suleyman Dost has shown that it was used in Aksum Bible translation to render the Greek *hupokriseis* in 1 Peter 2:1. It could also mean "weakness in

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[3] Jaclyn LaRae Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity : John Chrysostom and His Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Christine Shepardson, *Controlling Contested Places: Late Antique Antioch and the Spatial Politics of Religious Controversy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[4] Theodore Nöldeke with Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur'ān*, trans. and ed. Wolfgang H. Behn (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 137-138.

[5] Ibid., 135-167.

[6] Theodor Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1910), 48-49; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 272.

belief" and "dissension" or "heresy."[7] Karla Pollman writes that late antique thinkers saw hypocrisy and heresy as closely related notions, since theologians such as Origen felt that heretics were intrinsically duplicitous.[8] It should be noted that Aksum used Greek as an official language for coinage, monumental inscriptions, diplomacy and scripture study, and clearly both some temporal elites and some of its Christian priests, who looked to Grecophone Alexandria as their theological cynosure, cultivated this language.[9] Hence, in its original setting, it is likely that *munāfiq* should be viewed, with regard to elite culture, as a loanshift for the Greek *hupokrasis*. *Munāfiq* could have come into Hijazi Arabic in the early sixth century, when the Aksumite general Abraha and his Ethiopian courtiers conquered and ruled Yemen and promoted their Christian faith. In any case, Walid Saleh has in my view correctly argued that we cannot "read off" the meaning of quranic vocabulary from a linguistic knowledge of cognates and etymology but must excavate the meaning of terms from a close reading of the text itself.[10] It is this task to which we will now turn.

A straightforward sociological account of hypocrisy paints it as mere deception. "It conspires," writes Kieran Flanagan, "to exploit a misattribution in a way in which the deceiver gains and the deceived lose."[11] Esteem, for instance, accrues to hypocrites for the claim of outward attributes that they do not actually possess, but the claim to which is difficult or

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[7] Suleyman Dost, "An Arabian Qur'ān: Toward a Theory of Peninsular Origins" (Ph.D. Diss.: University of Chicago, 2017), 215-217.

[8] See e.g. for the views of Origen of Alexandria, Karla Pollmann, "Hypocrisy and the History of Salvation: Medieval Interpretations of Matthew 23," *Wiener Studien* 114 (2001), pp. 469-482 at 476; and John Chrysostom, "Homiliae XVIII in Epistolam Primam ad Timotheum," *Opera Omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca, 62 (Paris, 1862): 557-558.

[9] Stuart C. Munro-Hay , *Aksum: An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991); G. W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[10] W. A. Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy and Qurʾanic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity," in *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, ed. A. Neuwirth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 649–94.

[11] Kieran Flanagan, *Sociology and Liturgy: Re-presentations of the Holy* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 138.

impossible to falsify. In Christianity, he asserts, hypocrisy largely consists in the lack of holiness and the false assertion of its presence. Hypocrisy, both in Christianity and Islam, is a form of deviance. In contrast to this individual-centered view of the phenomenon, April D. DeConick points out that transgression and deviance are not fixed categories but rather are "about limits that are ever on the move . . . Transgression is known by the consequential creation of orthodoxy and heresy, when rightness and wrongness are inscribed, when value is placed on certain differences."[12] As DeConick points out, groups branded as transgressive such as the Gnostics often develop "false façades" and ways of disguising their deviance, such that the very naming of heretics as such perhaps can often push them toward dissimulation.

Here, I will make some comparisons with late antique writers in the Near East, reacting against the tendency of later Muslim authors to depict the Hijaz, the birthplace of the Qur'ān, as culturally isolated or linked mainly to inner Arabia.[13] At the same time, they maintained that the Hijaz was intensively connected to the Eastern Roman Empire through regular trade, repeatedly mentioning cities such as Bostra and Damascus. It is impossible that the thick trade links they posited should have left the Hijazis unfamiliar with the Greek administration of the Eastern Roman Empire, and Greek and Aramaic culture and religion. Nearby regions such as Transjordan maintained Greek as an urban standard and deeply valued their relationship with Constantinople, as the Petra Papyri demonstrate.[14] That the Qur'ān was in dialogue with the idea of hypocrisy in the Gospels seems plausible, and some parallels will be noted below.

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[12] April D. DeConick, "Gnostic Spirituality at the Crossroads of Christianity: Transgressing Boundaries and Creating Orthodoxy," in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels*, edited by Eduard Iricinschi et al. (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 148-184, this quote on 150.

[13] James E. Montgomery, "The Empty Ḥijāz" in James E. Montgomery, ed., *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 37-100.

[14] Omar Al-Ghul, "Preliminary Notes on the Arabic Material in the Petra Papyri," *Topoi* (2006) 14/1:139-169, Jaakko Frösén, et al., eds., *The Petra Papyri*, 5 vols. (Amman: American Center of Oriental Research, 2002-2018), including Ahmad Al-Jallad, "The Arabic of the Petra Papyri," in volume 5, pp. 35-55. See also Juan Cole, "Muhammad and Justinian: Roman Legal Traditions and the Qurʾān." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 79, 2 (2020):183–196.

Occasionally reference will be made to late antique Christian figures who wrote on hypocrisy, not to argue influence but to wring from comparative history what insights it can offer.

A Sickness in the Heart

The Prophet Muhammad's Medina-era war effort of c. 624-630 clearly forms one crux of the dispute between him and some of his lukewarm followers. The Abbasid-era sources say that Muhammad, a long-distance merchant and spiritual seeker, received his first revelations in 610 CE while in his hometown of Mecca. In the Meccan period, c. 610-622, pacifist policies had been urged on the believers in the Qur'ān, with the monotheistic believers being told to respond graciously and peacefully to harassment from militant pagans. *Al-Furqān* 25:63 observes, "And the servants of the All-Merciful who walk humbly upon the earth—and when the unruly taunt them, they reply, 'Peace!'"[15] (See also *Fuṣṣilat* 41:34.) In part, this irenic approach to social tensions may have been mandated by the status of Mecca as a holy city (*ḥaram*) with a major shrine to Allah, the Kaaba, where social conventions forbade feuding and vendettas.[16] The later sources depict the Banū Hāshim, the clan of the Prophet, as caretakers of the Kaaba, and they would have borne some responsibility for maintaining the peace through mediation efforts.[17]

Once Muhammad and the believers left Mecca in 622 and took refuge in Medina, they no longer enjoyed the protection the sanctuary city and became fair game for military assault. As the Qur'ān tells the story, the truculent pagans of Mecca determined to come after the Prophet and his community in their new city of refuge. The Prophet and his followers are instructed to abandon pacifism for the prosecution of a just war of defense against their attackers (*Al-Baqara*

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[15] Qur'ān translations in this article are by the author.

[16] Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chap. 1; Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 130

[17] Juan Cole, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace amid the Clash of Empires* (New York: Nation Books, 2018), chapters 2-3; Juan Cole, "The Qur'ān on doing Good to Enemies," in *Peace Movements in Islam*, edited by Juan Cole (London: IB Tauris, 2021), chapter 2; Fred Donner, "Fight for God—but Do So with Kindness: Reflections on War, Peace, and Communal Identity in Early Islam," in *War and Peace in the Ancient World*, ed. Kurt Raaflaub (Oxford: Blackwell's, 2006), 297–311

2:216). It is possible that a faction of the Emigrants (*Muhājirūn*), formed in the sanctuary of Mecca and used to practices of peace in the *ḥaram*, had difficulty abandoning their role as mediators in favor of taking up arms. In contrast, the Constitution of Medina laid out this responsibility to defend the city quite clearly, as acknowledged by its signatories, including many of the city's Jewish clans.[18] The later tradition speaks of Muhammad and the believers in Medina fighting three major battles with the Meccan pagans and launching some smaller expeditions, with the ultimate goal of defending Medina and of regaining pilgrimage rights in Mecca and restitution for their lost homes and property when the pagans violated the practices of sanctuary, forcing them out.[19]

The hypocrites in the Qur'ān appear to be related to, or identical with, a group described as "those with a sickness in their hearts."[20] In Medina, we first encounter them in the opening verses of *al-Baqara* 2:8-20, thought to derive from 624 CE, suggesting that the underlying dilemma emerged soon after the Emigration or Hijra of 622. *Al-Baqara* 2:10 says, "In their hearts is a sickness, and God has increased them in sickness." Verse 2:8 had observed, "Among the people are some who say, 'We have believed in God and in the Last Day,' but they are not believers." This first mention of those with a sickness in their hearts depicts a group separate

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[18] Saïd Amir Arjomand, "The Constitution of Medina: A Sociolegal Interpretation of Muhammad's Acts of Foundation of the 'Umma,'" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 4 (2009): 555–575; Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's First Legal Document* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2004); and Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chap. 2.

[19] Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 90-96; Cole, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace*, chapters 4-7.

[20] One of the first academic authors to problematize the Qur'ān's hypocrites was Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Qur'ān: A Study in Semantics* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Philological Studies, 1959), chap. 11. His account has the virtue of drawing heavily on the Qur'ān itself, but it is inflected by the late Muslim commentary tradition. A recent survey is Camilla P. Adang, "Hypocrites and Hypocrisy", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān Online,* ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill Online, 2001-2006). (hereafter EQO) <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00089>

from Muhammad's followers, who are denounced as "not believers" (*mā hum bi-mu'minīn*). Fred Donner has argued that the "believers" (*alladhīna āmanū*) were an ecumenical body of followers of the Prophet.[21] In contrast, this theologically deviant group maintains they are monotheists, but are declared outside the community of believers.

This group maintained a distinctive theology. Verse 2:13 reports, "When they are told, believe as the people believe, they reply, should we believe as the simple-minded (*al-sufahā'*) believe?" It is unclear how they departed theologically from the unsubtle doctrine held by Muhammad's ordinary believers, but they appear to have considered themselves superior, rather as Gnostics and Manichaeans did in Christianity. The spiritually ill are also told (2:11), not to commit moral corruption, or perhaps theft, in the land (*lā tufsidū fī al-arḍ*). Those with a sickness in their hearts deny that they are engaged in such activities, claiming to be instead "reformers" or possibly "peacemakers" (*musliḥūn*).

The later exegetical tradition does not account for the apparently sectarian features of those with sickness in their hearts.[22] The author of one of the first Abbasid-era extensive Qur'ān commentaries, Muqātil b. Sulaymān, suggests that they are Jews or disgruntled clan leaders in Medina. The Qur'ān, however, calls Jews "Jews" (*yahūd*, *alladhīna hādū)*, so why would it use this obscure phrase for them here? Jews are, moreover, praised in *al-Baqara* 2:62 as among the saved monotheists. As for the allegation that the Hypocrites are a faction of the Khazraj clan in Medina, the complaints about the spiritually ill here do not appear to concern mere tribalism but a sect with a characteristic and exaggerated doctrine. The modernist commentator, Muḥammad `Izzat Darwaza (d. 1984), appears to have noticed this contradiction at *al-Baqara* 2:13, despite his general willingness to see the hypocrites as Khazraj.  He writes that the reference could be to "another powerful person mentioned by the narratives, from the Aws, and he is Abū `Āmir,

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[21] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*; see also Juan Cole, "Paradosis and monotheism: a late antique approach to the meaning of islām in the Quran," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 82, 3 (October 2019):405-425.

[22] Muqātil b. Sulaymān [al-Balkhī], *Tafsīr*, ed. `Abdullāh Maḥmūd Shiḥāta, 5 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assat al-Ta'rīkh al-`Arabī, 2002), 1:89.

called 'the monk,' who led a band of Sabian monotheists."[23] Whether this suggestion is correct or not, certainly movements existed in late antiquity, termed by Stephen Mitchell "pagan monotheism," where pagans moved from polytheism to a form of monotheism without converting to Judaism or Christianity.[24] If the Qur'ān referred with regard to "those with a sickness in their hearts" to a doctrinal heresy, that usage would accord with the practice in late antiquity. Heresy was a common referent of the term "hypocrisy" in Christianity, as well. Pollmann observes that Origen and others felt that "hypocrisy is the quality that makes heresies so dangerous as they are secretive and their damaging snares are not easily looked through."[25]

In a society polarized between Muhammad's believers and the pagans, the spiritually sick are not wholly the one nor the other. Like the Prophet's faithful, they affirm their belief in God (though they seem to hold a somewhat different theology) and the Resurrection. In contrast, the pagans make God part of a pantheon and, *Taghābun* 64:7 says, "The pagans allege that they will

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[23] Muḥammad `Izzat Darwaza, *al-Tafsīr al-Hadīth*, 12 vols. (Cairo: `Isā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabī, 1963), 7:163. For this figure see `Abd al-Mālik ibn Hishām, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, 2 vols. (Gottingen: Dieterichsche Universitäts- Buchhandlung, 1858–1860), 1:411-412; Muhammad ibn Ishaq [`Abd al-Malik ibn Hisham], *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (1955; reprint, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 278; Cole, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace*, 100-101; and Uri Rubin, "Hanifiyya and Ka`ba: An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of din Ibrahim," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 86–89. For an interpretation of the Arabian Sabians as Manichaeans see François de Blois, "The 'Sabians' (ṣābi'ūn) in Pre-Islamic Arabia," *Acta Orientalia*, 56 (1995):39-61.

[24] Stephen Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos Between Pagans, Jews, and Christians," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Polymnia Athanassidadi and Michael Frede (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 81–148; Stephen Mitchell, "Further Thoughts on the Cult of Theos Hypsistos," in *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman*

never be resurrected . . ."[26] The hypocrites are like the believers on the whole but remain outsiders because of their distinctive doctrines and their independence. It is this ambiguous status that makes them problematic for the Qur'ān.

Those with a sickness in their hearts appear to have had a field day when Muhammad momentarily misspoke while delivering the revelation (*Al-Ḥajj* 22:52-53). Worst of all, however, is that the secular politics of the sick in heart are ambivalent. The spiritually ill declined to stand straightforwardly with Muhammad. *Al-Baqara* 2:14 complains bitterly of this group, "When they meet those who have believed, they say, 'We have believed.' But when they repair to their devil, they say, 'We are with you, we were just having some fun.'" The identity of the "devil" (*shayṭān*) here is not clear. It could be a leader from among themselves, or it could be a pejorative for hostile pagans with whom this group kept in touch.

That fighting was one of the issues between Muhammad and the spiritually ill is indicated in the chapter of *Muḥammad* 47:20. It contrasts the lukewarm with the believers, who showed eagerness for more passages of the Qur'ān to be revealed, "but when a decisive chapter is sent down in which fighting is mentioned, you see those with a sickness in their hearts staring at you with the gaze of one who is about to faint before death." Here, the spiritually ill are viewed as

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Empire, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 167–208; Patricia Crone, "Pagan Arabs as God-Fearers," chap. 11 in *The Qur'ānic Pagans and Related Matters: Collected Studies* (Leiden: E. J. Brill 2016), vol. 1. For the survival of forms of paganism into this period even in the Christian Roman Empire, see K. W. Harl, "Sacrifice and Pagan Belief in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Byzantium," *Past & Present*, no. 128 (August 1990): 7–27.

[25] Pollmann, "Hypocrisy and the History of Salvation," 475-476, at 476.

[26] Patricia Crone, "The Quranic Mushrikūn and the resurrection (Part I)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* [hereafter BSOAS], 75, 3 (2012), 445–472; idem, "The Quranic Mushrikūn and the resurrection (Part II)," BSOAS 76, 1 (2013), pp. 1-20; these are thorough studies of the issue but I do not accept some of her premises; it seems to me obvious that the *mushrikūn* as a sociological group are pagans and never Jews or Christians as the Qur'ān uses these words. See Juan Cole, "Infidel or Paganus? The Polysemy of kafara in the Quran." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 140, 3 (2020):615-635.

cowards, trembling with fear and on the verge of passing out at the thought of having to defend their city.

The sura of *Muḥammad* 47:26 equates the spiritually ill with apostates, who had left the community of believers to rejoin the militant pagans, alleging that they pledged to the pagans, "we will obey you in some matters." Again, the group is portrayed as trying to stay on the good side both of the believers and their Meccan foes. They are menaced with hellfire because (47:28) "they followed what angered God." Verse 47:29 concludes by asking, "Or did those with a sickness in their hearts consider that God would never expose their hatreds?" It is not clear exactly what the hypocrites hated, but they are characterized as possessed by powerful negative emotions. They also appear to have spoken lewdly to the Prophet's wives, being "inspired by lust" (*al-Aḥzāb* 33:32).

The Qur'ān's condemnation of the extreme emotions of the spiritually ill, such as corruption, lust, cowardice and hatred, might be fruitfully compared to the thinking of some Church Fathers on hypocrisy. The Christian Middle Platonist Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395) argued that it would be wrong to blame the vices of human beings solely on their brute natures, since these moral defects actually derive from the ways in which the intellect magnifies animal passions when unconstrained. As a result, humans sin by seeking pleasures far beyond what irrational animals do. He wrote, "Thus the rising of anger in us is indeed akin to the impulse of the brutes, but it grows by the alliance of thought: for thence come malignity [*mēnis*], envy [*phthonos*], deceit [*pseudos*], conspiracy [*epiboulē*], hypocrisy [*hupokrisis*]; all these are the result of the evil husbandry of the mind; for if the passion were divested of the aid it receives from thought, the anger that is left behind is short-lived and not sustained, like a bubble, perishing straightway as soon as it comes into being."[27]

Gregory's emphasis on affect was typical of late antique Christian writing on hypocrisy. Pollmann points out that "People indulging in hypocrisy are considered as sick with passions like

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[27] Gregory of Nyssa, "De hominis opificio," in Gregorii Nysseni, *Opera* 1, in *Patrologia græca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 44 (Paris, 1858), 194 (18.4); quoted from Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Making of Man," in *Select Writings and Letters of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, New Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 5 (Oxford and London: Parker, 1893), 408 (18.4).

envy or ambition, and therefore as behaving in a basically irrational manner."[28] She observes that John Chrysostom in particular emphasizes the emotion of envy, which he called a disease of the soul, as the basis for hypocritical behavior.[29] The Qur'ān's conception of a sickness in the heart that leads to hypocrisy, lust, cowardice and uncontrolled rage can be compared in some respects the late antique Christian interpretation of Stoic principles, though of course there are also differences. Still, the two traditions share a focus on sickness as a metaphor for hypocrisy, and both describe hypocrites as beset by unhealthy emotions and drives.

<div align="center">Hypocrites</div>

The chapter of *al-Anfāl* 8:49 is the first to mention the term *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites), and it seems to identify them with those who have a sickness in their hearts. This chapter is traditionally thought to describe the victory of Muhammad's faithful over the Meccan pagans at the Battle of Badr in spring, 624. *Al-Anfāl* 8:48 describes how a duplicitous and cowardly Satan enticed the pagans into a war with Muhammad's followers. The next verse turns to the lukewarm in Medina itself: "The hypocrites and those who have a sickness in their hearts say, 'Their religion has deluded them . . .'" It appears that this is a parallelism and suggests that the two terms are synonyms. The verse may be complaining that the hypocrites, unenthusiastic about joining the Battle of Badr, saw Muhammad's faithful as enticed into an unnecessary conflict by their religious delusions.

The theme of reluctance for battle emerges again after the Battle of Uhud in the spring of 625, a battle that Muhammad's faithful fought only to a draw, then made an orderly retreat before the Meccan Quraysh. It is clear from the Qur'ān that some in Medina viewed it as a significant defeat. *Āl Imrān* 3:166-167 says, "What befell you on the day the two armies met was

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[28] Pollmann, "Hypocrisy and the History of Salvation," pp. 469-482, at 477-478; Karla Pollman, "The Splitting of Morality in Matthew 23 and Its Exegetical Consequences," in Karla Pollmann, ed., *Double Standards in the Ancient and Medieval World* (Göttingen: Gottinger Forum fuer Altertumswissenschaft, 2000), 263-295, at 279-280. See Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*, The Gifford Lectures (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[29] John Chrysostom, "Homiliarum in Matthaeum," *Opera Omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca, 58 (Paris, 1862), 676; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, Part III (London: Walter Smith, 1885), 977.

by the leave of God, so that he might discern the true believers, and so that he might discern the hypocrites. For it was said to them, come and fight in the way of God or at least take a defensive position. They said, 'If only we knew how to fight, we would have followed you.' On that day they were closer to faithlessness than to belief, for they said with their mouths what was not in their hearts. God knows best what they conceal." The last verse puts the hypocrites on a spectrum from belief to faithlessness (*kufr*), and judges them in this instance to be closer to the latter because they lied about being willing in principle to fight for Medina but demurred that they lacked martial skills. The Qur'ān does not denounce the lukewarm for being pacifists but for misrepresenting themselves as entirely willing to fight, when, it is implied, they were not. This conception of hypocrisy resembles Matt. 23:3, where Jesus says of the Pharisees, "they do not practice what they teach."[30] This critique of hypocrisy as a mismatch between words and deeds is also implied in *al-Aḥzāb* 33:23-24, which contrasts the hypocrites with those who stood firm in their commitments. In *al-`Ankabūt* 29:10-11, Medinan verses inserted into an earlier, Meccan chapter, those who are injured in a battle and find it a test of their faith are called hypocrites. This verse treats spinelessness as a source of hypocrisy.

Some of the hypocrites may have been, as the Qur'ān charges, mere cowards. It is possible, though, that some philosophically opposed the wars that had broken out and therefore declined to serve in Muhammad's army. Others yet may have dismissed the battles as routine raids, a view that allowed them to continue to pursue as patrons those powerful pagans with ambiguous allegiances who were not actually carrying out raids at that moment.

The themes so far discussed, of an overly complicated theology and aversion to war recall the polemics of Augustine of Hippo against his former coreligionists, Manichaean Christians. The latter rejected much of the Old Testament as warlike and earthy, whereas they considered the material world evil and held that Jesus, a figure of light, taught pacifism. Like the quranic hypocrites, Manichaeans held a complicated theology and derided what they considered the simplistic beliefs of orthodox Christians. Augustine's polemics against the Christian Manichaeans, whom he saw as hypocrites, rebuked them for their opposition to war. Augustine denied that Mt 5:39, which instructs the faithful not to resist evil and urges them to turn the other cheek, required pacifism. Turning the other cheek, he said, was a "disposition" that "lies not in

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[30] David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 99-101.

the body but in the heart."[31] He held that the believer could obey Jesus' commandment to wish well for one's enemies spiritually and yet could wage physical war on them when needed. He also defended the Old Testament prophets who took up the sword, writing, "Slanderous ignorance, therefore, criticizes Moses because he waged war. For he ought to have been criticized less if he waged war on his own initiative than if he did not wage war when God commanded him to."[32] Muhammad was not the first late antique religious leader to face criticism from a group that appeared to acknowledge his truth (just as the African Manichaeans claimed to be Christians) but held extravagant theological ideas and rejected even just warfare.

<div align="center">A Chapter of their Own</div>

Medinan chapters of the Qur'ān underline the liminality of the hypocrites, as insufficiently committed to Muhammad's religion. *Al-Nisā'* 4:142 says, "The hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*) think to deceive God, but he deceived them. When they arise to pray, they do so lazily, showing off to the people, and they seldom remember God." This verse strongly recalls Matthew 6:2-5, verses which also depict Jesus as criticizing the Pharisees as "hypocrites" (*hupokritai)* for their exaggerated public piety, censuring ostentation in almsgiving and adding in 6:5, "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward." They are also condemned in Matt. 23:3-10 for this sort of behavior, which David E. Garland described as, "an ostentatious piety which masked an inner corruption and disobedience."[33] Margaret M. Mitchell remarks that the Matthean employment of the term

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[31] Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, Brepolis Library of Latin Texts - Series A. Online (Turnhout : Brepols Publishers, 2010), 22:76; Augustine of Hippo, "Answer to Faustus, a Manichean," *The Works of Saint Augustine* (3rd Release). Electronic Edition. Volume I/20 (Charlottesville, Va.: InteLex Corporation, 2001), 93, 180, 352. For Augustine and Faustus see Jason David BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1:106-134; for this religion see Nicholas J. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism: An Ancient Faith Rediscovered* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

[32] Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22:78, "Faustus" 354; see also Evgenïa Moiseeva, "The Old Testament in Fourth-Century Christian-Manichaean Polemic," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 11, 2 (Fall 2018): 274-297.

[33] Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 100.

for external religious observance at odds with internal disposition had "an influential role in the history of the development of the concept" of hypocrisy and differed somewhat from the old classical Greek connotation of playing a part, on analogy to actors in the theater.[34]

Matt. 23:34-35 implies that hypocrisy leads to violence against the righteous: "Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth." Pollmann argues that "lawlessness" (*anomias*) is one synonym for hypocrisy in Matthew. She makes the further point that the hypocrites are not so much a concrete group, the contemporary scribes and Pharisees, but rather are put forward as "a paradigm for certain people in general."[35] The parallel between *al-Nisā'* 4:142 and Matt. 6:5 is so close that the Qur'ān verse may well be a paraphrase of the latter.

The hypocrites' indifference toward or complicity in pagan mockery of the Qur'ān is also implied in *al-Nisā'* 4:140. The two-faced are depicted as increasingly obstructing the Prophet and his message, even though they proclaimed themselves his followers (63:1). *Al-Nisā'* 4:61 complains, "When it is said to them, come to what God revealed and to the messenger, you see the hypocrites erecting barriers to you." Worse, some of his faithful continued to associate with and think well of the lukewarm. *Al-Nisā'* 4:88 complains, "What is the matter with you, that you have divided into two factions in your views of the hypocrites? For God has visited on them a reversal because of the consequences of their deeds . . ." In this verse, hypocrisy is characterizing not a generalized character flaw but a distinct group with a sociological reality. Subsequent passages, e.g. *al-Ḥadīd* 57:13, increasingly portray the hypocrites as damned to hell if they did not repent.

The hypocrites themselves continued sometimes to ally with powerful pagans in and around Medina about whose allegiances Muhammad entertained the severest doubts. *Al-Nisā'* 4:138-139 explains, "Give the hypocrites the tidings that for them there is a painful chastisement -- those who took the pagans as patrons rather than the believers. Do they seek glory among them? All glory belongs to God." The political implications of such patronage also are seen as

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[34] Margaret M. Mitchell, "Peter's 'Hypocrisy' and Paul's: Two 'Hypocrites' at the Foundation of Earliest Christianity?" *New Testament Studies* 58 (2012): 213-234, this quote on 219 n. 15.

[35] Pollmann, "Hypocrisy and the History of Salvation," 470.

pernicious in the Qur'ān. *Al-Nisā'* 4:141 says that when the believers have a success (*fatḥ)*, which does not necessarily mean a military victory here, the lukewarm say "Were we not with you?" But when the pagans come out on top, the fickle say to them, "Did we not cheer you on (*nastaḥwidh*) and did we not protect you from the believers?" This complaint is directed at the hypocrites, who were explicitly mentioned just before in 4:138-39. *Al-Nisā'* 4:143 concludes, "They go back and forth, neither adhering to the one nor the other. Those whom God has led astray you will never find for them a path." Still, while these fickle individuals are in danger of perdition, they are not doomed to it if only they will change their ways. *Al-Nisā'* 4:145-146 warns that they will be consigned to the lowest rank of hell, "save for those who repent and reform themselves and hold fast to God and render their religion sincere to God." This threat of hellfire for hypocrites and their colleagues among the unrighteous recalls Matt. 24:51, "with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

At some point Muhammad and the believers came into conflict with a faction among the biblical communities, "those who paganized from among the people of the book," who despite their belief in the Bible appear to have thrown their lot in politically with the Meccan pagans. Those denounced as two-faced seem to have insisted on maintaining warm relations with this renegade Bible-believing group. *Al-Ḥashr* 59:11 says, "Have you not observed how the hypocrites say to their siblings, those who paganized from among the people of the book, 'If you were expelled, we would depart with you, and we will not obey, in regard to you, anyone at all. If you are fought, we will come to your aid.' God bears witness that they are liars." This chapter of the Qur'ān tells the story (59:2-3) of how Muhammad's believers besieged a walled village of such monotheistic turncoats and chopped down their palm orchards. Those within the walls, seeing that their livelihood was gone, it says, surrendered and went into exile.[36]

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[36] Ma`mar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muhammad* [*Kitāb al-Maghāzī*], ed. and trans. Sean W. Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 66–67; Abū Ja`far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi` al-bayān `an tawīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. `Abd Allāh ibn `Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turk, 26 vols. (Cairo: Dār Hijr, 2001), 22:496ff.; Marco Schöller, "In welchem Jahr wurden die Banū l-Naḍīr aus Medina vertrieben?," *Der Islam* 73 (1996): 1–39; Marco Schöller, *Exegetisches Denken und Prophetenbiographie: Eine quellenkritische Analyse der Sira-Uberlieferung zu Muhammads Konflict mit den Juden* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), chaps. 6 and 7.

Thereafter the Qurʾān demonstrates extreme impatience with this group of hypocrites. *Al-Ahzāb* 33:60 appears to threaten them with banishment if they continue to make trouble: "If the hypocrites and those with a sickness in their hearts and troublemakers in the city do not cease, we will urge you on against them, and they will only remain around you for a little while." Later chapters of the Qurʾān increasingly class the lukewarm directly with the pagans. *Al-Ahzāb* 33:73 says, "So that God may chastise male and female hypocrites and male and female polytheists, and so that God may forgive the male and female believers. God is forgiving and merciful."

In the late Medina period a whole chapter, *al-Munāfiqūn* 63:1-11, treated them.[37] In contrast to the sura of *al-Aḥzāb*, where they are grouped with the polytheists, 63:1 returns to underlining the ambiguity of their situation, accepting that they bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God, but questioning the sincerity of this declaration: "When the hypocrites come to you, they say, 'We bear witness that you are the messenger of God, and God knows that you are indeed his messenger.'" Despite their affirmation of the prophecy of Muhammad, they appear to have maintained that they could decline to obey him in certain matters because of a binding oath they had earlier taken. *Al-Munāfiqūn* 63:2 says, "They have made their oath a pretext for obstructing the path of God. How evil is what they are doing." It is possible, given what else the Qurʾān says about them, that some of these persons had taken vows of clientelage toward powerful pagans before accepting Muhammad, and refused to breach them, or that they made pledges of non-violence and so declined to join battles, seeking instead to mediate the conflict.

In 63:4 the hypocrites are likened to a pleasing veneer that disguises a rotten reality, "When you see them, their bodies please you, and when they speak, you listen to their discourse. They are like a propped-up wooden façade. They think every sharp word is directed against them. May God cause them to perish, for they are profoundly deluded." The metaphor of the wooden panel or screen may refer to those with painted images. If so, the phrase could have

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[37] Nöldeke, *The History of the Qurʾān*, 169; Paul Neuenkirchen, "Sourate 63: al-Munāfiqūn (Les Hypocrites)," in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds., *Le coran des historiens*, 3 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2019), 2:1733-38, notes that Nöldeke, Richard Bell and others proposed that the chapter is a combination of two originally separate sections, with 63:9-11 addressing different concerns.

derived from Eastern Roman painting practices in Syria, with its abundant wood. Painting scenes on wooden panels secured to a wall was a common practice in antiquity and late antiquity.[38] These would have been familiar to Hijazi travelers and may occasionally have been imported. The Qur'ān may be remarking that such paintings evoke a three-dimensional reality, but they prove to be an insubstantial mirage when one looks behind them. If this interpretation is correct, the imagery is reminiscent of Matt. 23:28-29, where Jesus is depicted as saying, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Amory underlines that Jesus likens the Pharisees to "Near Eastern tombs, whitewashed on the outside, but dark and foul within."[39]

The Prophet offered to forgive the hypocrites, but they "turn their heads, and you see them haughtily blocking it out" (64:5). Despite Muhammad's own forbearance, the Qur'ān in

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[38] Ellen Zimmi, "Polygnotus," in Nigel Wilson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 2006), 598; for general background see James A. Francis, "Visual and Verbal Representation: Image, Text, Person, and Power," and Felicity Harley, "Christianity and the Transformation of Classical Art," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, edited by Philip Rousseau et al. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), chaps. 20 and 21 respectively. As Neuenkirchen "Sourate 63," 2:1735-36, notes, Wahib Atallah, "Une nouvelle lecture du verset 4 de la sourate 63 'Les Hypocrites,'" *Arabica*, 55, 3/4 (Jul., 2008), 445-453 observes that the later exegetical tradition is confused about the meaning of this phrase, and argues that it instead refers to wooden idols of Sindh, which seems to me a stretch. Elmaz Orhan, "*Khushub musannadah* (Qur'ān 63. 4) and Epigraphic South Arabian ms'nd "*Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 41 (2011): 83–94, argues for *musannad* as meaning "written in the *masnad* script of Himyar." This is plausible, but it does not really explain why inscriptions on wood would be compared to hypocrisy. I think painted wooden panels that seek to imitate reality but cannot hold up to closer scrutiny fit the verse better.

[39] Frédéric Amory, "Whited Sepulchres: The Semantic History of Hypocrisy to the High Middle Ages," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 53 (Janvier-Décembre 1986), pp. 5-39, at 7-8; Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti, "The Multi-Layered Meaning of 'Hypocrisy' in the Gospels ," *Theology Annual* 25 (2004):87-127.

this late chapter asserts that the hypocrites are so far beyond the pale that divine forgiveness is no longer possible (64:6). One reason for this opprobrium is offered in 63:7, which complains that "They are the ones who say, 'Do not spend on those who are with the messenger of God until they disperse.'" The implication may be that as long as Muhammad's believers insist on mounting military expeditions, the lukewarm refused to contribute. Only if the believers demobilized (*yanfaḍḍu*) would it be legitimate to donate to the community. If this was indeed the motivation for their miserliness, it would fit with other complaints in the Qur'ān about the hypocrites' unwillingness to fight in Muhammad's battles. The Muslim commentary literature implausibly again sees this verse as about `Abdullāh b. Ubayy b. Salūl, leader of a faction of the urban Khazraj clan, and as reporting his instruction to them to avoid giving charity to the Emigrants in hopes that they might disperse.[40] Such open hostility to Muhammad and his community, however, would hardly be mere hypocrisy.

The conflict-averse character of this ambiguous group is again alluded to in 63:8, where it is reported of them, "They say, 'If we return to the city, its great ones will expel the humble.' But to God and his messenger and the believers belongs greatness, though the hypocrites do not know." If this chapter precedes *al-Fatḥ* (48) and the return of Muhammad and his believers to Mecca, it may be "the city" referred to here. They may stand accused of pessimism about the project of returning from Medina to the sanctuary city, on the grounds that its polytheist magnates would simply once again expel the poverty-stricken believers. This verse introduces a social distinction. The lukewarm appear to have thought of themselves as the poor and abject (*al-adhall*), and as lacking the wherewithal to oppose Mecca's grandees. Their poverty would also make sense of their constant temptation to accept the patronage of pagans (*al-Nisā'* 4:138-139), as well as of Christians and Jews, which is condemned in the Qur'ān. Verses 63:9-10 contain a warning that the believers should not let their wealth and children divert them from the mention of God, and that they should expend generously on charity from the means provided to them by the divine, before death comes for them and it is too late to change their ways.

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[40]Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī,* 22:660ff.

The later Muslim commentators again see this passage as revolving around the Medinan notable `Abdullāh b. Ubayy.[41] He is said to have remained neutral during the 617 Battle of Bu`āth or civil war in Medina between the Aws and Khazraj before Muhammad moved there as a peacemaker. Nöldeke was misled by these late materials into seeing the hypocrites as Medinan tribesmen who harbored Muhammad ill will, "neither recognizing him as a prophet nor being inclined to accept him as a ruler."[42] As we have seen, this characterization is incorrect. In 63:1 those branded hypocrites say they do believe in Muhammad. While `Abdullāh b. Ubayy and his faction of the Khazraj may have been among the persons referred to in the Qur'ān as hypocrites, the verses do not depict hypocrites as rich and powerful Medinans but as the abject. If the "city" referred to in 63:8 is Mecca, it would rule out a reference to `Abdullāh b. Ubayy. He was not from Mecca and so would not be returning there, and as a baron of Medina would have no reason to fear that city's magnates.

Some sources tried to explain away these discrepancies by telling the story that `Abdullāh b. Ubayy joined a campaign of the believers against a tribe that had planned to attack Medina. During this campaign, the story goes, a clash took place between the Quraysh Emigrants and the Medinan Helpers (*al-Anṣār*, i.e. those Medinans who followed Muhammad, as opposed to the Emigrants from Mecca). In this story, it was `Abdullāh b. Ubayy who said, "If we return to the city, its great ones will expel the humble," meaning it as a threat.[43] Like many of the "occasions of revelation" anecdotes in the later sources, this story makes no sense. If he so opposed Muhammad and the believers, why did he go out with them on this campaign? Why would the Khazraj leader say "if" he returns to his own city? Why did he speak of the "great ones" in the third person if he was referring to his own group? Rather, if we read the Qur'ān in a defamiliarizing way and on its own terms, the verse likely speaks of an Emigrant faction

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[41] Muqātil b. Sulaymān [al-Balkhī], *Tafsīr*, ed. `Abdullāh Maḥmūd Shiḥāta, 5 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assat al-Ta'rīkh al-`Arabī, 2002), 4:337-339; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 22:655. For Ibn Ubayy see Michael Lecker, "King Ibn Ubayy and the quṣṣāṣ," in H. Berg, ed., *Methods and Theories in the Study of Islamic Origins*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003, 29-71.

[42] Nöldeke, *The History of the Qur'ān*, 137.

[43] Muḥammad al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Abu Suhayb al-Karmī (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliya, 1998), 965 (n. 4904).

originally from Mecca who had been impoverished by their expulsion to Medina, who feared returning to the reprisals of that city's dignitaries.

Hypocrites and Pagans

In *al-Fatḥ* 48:6, the two-faced are grouped with the pagans as holding pernicious doctrines and attracting severe divine displeasure, inasmuch as both groups "entertain wicked conjectures about God." In the late chapter *al-Taḥrīm* 66:9, the Qur'ān instructs Muhammad to keep up his efforts: "Prophet, struggle (*jāhid*) against the pagans and the hypocrites and be stern with them. Their abode is Gehenna, a wretched destination." A similar sentiment is repeated in *al-Tawba* 9:73, "Prophet, struggle against the pagans and the hypocrites and stand firm against them . . . " Some later exegetes interpreted these verses as a command to fight the hypocrites militarily.[44] Others construed the struggle against the hypocrites as purely verbal. Ṭabarī cites a saying that he represents as going back to Ibn `Abbās: "God commanded him to struggle against the pagans with the sword, and the hypocrites with the tongue, and withdrew friendship from them."[45] The root j-h-d in the Qur'ān is generally not used to mean "to fight on the battlefield." That term is usually *qitāl* or some permutation of that root. The root *j-h-d* means to struggle, with the implication of exerting oneself by speaking out (*Al-Furqān* 25:52). That 9:73 commanded the believers to fight the hypocrites militarily would make no sense, as many exegetes realized, since this group is depicted as avowed followers of Muhammad, even if they are defective ones. Nor is it plausible that *jāhid* should mean in the same sentence "to make war" in the case of the pagans but "to preach against" in the case of the hypocrites. Rather, the believers are being urged here to wage a spiritual struggle against both. In the Qur'ān the hypocrites are never depicted as belligerents against Medina. It is true that in the late Medinan period the Qur'ān contains (33:60) a threat to exile them, but that would involve the imposition by a municipal authority of a civil penalty against misbehaving or traitorous residents, not a jihad against outsiders.

The last two chapters of the Qur'ān, from 630-632, contain some final mentions of the hypocrites or those with a sickness in their hearts. *Al-Tawba* (9) treats the Battle of Hunayn of late January 630 after Mecca had acceded to Muhammad's commonwealth. A verse in this

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[44] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī,* 11:566, citing `Abd Allāh b. Mas`ūd (d. c. 653).

[45] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī,* 11:566-67.

chapter (9:64) mentions that the hypocrites stand in fear lest a chapter be revealed against them that makes explicit what is in their hearts and warns them (ḥ-dh-r), using a term only directed at believers in the Qur'ān.[46] *Al-Tawba* 9:67 says, "Male and female hypocrites are as one another; they command the commission of wrongs and forbid the performance of good works, and are tightfisted. They forgot God, so he has forgotten them. The hypocrites are debauched (*fāsiqūn*)." This last phrase recalls Matt. 23:28, with its equation of hypocrisy with lawlessness (*anomias*). In 9:68 they are condemned to eternal damnation. In 9:75-77, they are castigated for having covenanted with God to act in an upright way if he bestowed on them bounties, but for having been stingy with this largesse. He then punished them by casting hypocrisy into their hearts because "they broke their promise to God and because they were liars."

The social dimension of hypocrisy is again referred to in *al-Tawba* 9:97, which says, "The Bedouin are the most egregiously pagan and hypocritical and more likely to remain unaware of the limits God has set by what he revealed to his messenger, and God is All-Knowing, All-Wise." This character flaw can, however, characterize both urban and rural populations, as is explained in 9:101: "Some of the Bedouins in your environs are hypocrites, and some from the people of the city persist in hypocrisy . . ."

In the last two instances where the group is mentioned in the Qur'ān, they are referred to not as hypocrites but as those with a sickness in their hearts. *Al-Tawba* 9:125 says, "As for those with a sickness in their hearts, he added to their wickedness further wickedness, and they died while still blasphemers (*kāfirīn*)." What is likely the last chapter of the Qur'ān, *al-Mā'ida* 5:52-53, mentions this group one last time. In 5:51 the Believers are instructed not to take Jews and Christians as their patrons. The complaint is voiced, however, that ̈You see those with a sickness in their hearts hurrying to them. They say, 'We fear that a change of fortune will befall us, for perhaps God will, himself, grant a success or a grand affair.' And then they will regret the secrets they kept within. Then the believers will say, 'Those are the ones who swore by God their strongest oaths that they were with you?' Their efforts have failed, and they have become losers." The implication appears to be that taking Christian and Jewish patrons is incompatible

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[46] Eric S. Ohlander, "Fear of God (Taqwā) in the Qur'ān: Some notes on Semantic Shift and Thematic Context," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 50, 1 (2005), 137-152, this point on 144.

at this point with "being with" Muhammad's believers. Earlier, we saw (*al-Nisā'* 4:138-139) that the hypocrites had insisted also on continuing to serve as clients of powerful pagans.

Conclusion

Muhammad's followers ("those who have believed") are portrayed in the Qur'ān as a reified group. In reality, they must have been a small, diverse lot, many having grown up in North Arabian paganism and others having been reared as Jews or Christians, and possibly a few having been devotees of Iranian religions. Their level of knowledge and of commitment would have varied wildly. What conversion to Muhammad's new faith meant is now difficult to discern, but it may only occasionally have been an informed, individual decision as opposed to a mass conversion following a clan leader.[47] The pagans are likewise depicted as a bounded community. In reality, many in the Hijaz during the lifetime of the Prophet must have been in-between, what Maijestina has called *incerti*, a common phenomenon in late antiquity where paganism survived.[48] That realm of the in-between was likely one of the referents of "hypocrisy" in the Qur'ān.

It is sometimes difficult to tell in the Qur'ān when hypocrisy is being condemned as a character flaw, as opposed to being an epithet for a distinct social group. Certainly, at some points, the term "hypocrite" is abstract and paradigmatic.[49] For comparison, we might consider that, as Pollmann pointed out, Jesus's hypocrites in Matt. 23:34-35 are not a concrete group but rather "a paradigm for certain people in general." Reasoning backward from the Qur'ān verses, the paradigmatic quranic hypocrites lacked fervent piety, showing too little enthusiasm when praying and mentioning God; allowed the ridicule of passages of the Qur'ān; occasionally made fun of the Prophet when he misspoke during an act of revelation; acted lewdly toward the Prophet's wives, were unwilling to pull their weight in defending Medina; and offered

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[47] Arietta Papaconstantinou et al., *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam and Beyond*, ed. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

[48] Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures, c . 360–430* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), chap. 2.

[49] Nicolai Sinai, "The Unknown Known: some groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur'ān," *Mélanges de l'université de St. Joseph*, 66 (2015-2016), 47-96, at 58-59.

themselves as clients to powerful pagans.   Those marked by hypocrisy as a character flaw might be either urbanites or pastoralists, and pastoralists in particular are said in the Qur'ān to have suffered from it.

Two related concrete groups are condemned, or perhaps one to which two different epithets are applied. The first is "those with a sickness in their hearts." This group is said to believe in the one God and in the Resurrection Day, but these virtues are cast into the shade by their complex and unacceptable theology, condemned in *al-Baqara* 2:13. The spiritually ill are bad monotheists with deviant doctrines. In this respect, the Qur'ān's usage resembles that of late antique Christian preachers, who often used the term "hypocrite" interchangeably with "heretic," and the Ge'ez term *munāfiq* also bears both meanings. Those with a sickness in their hearts, as we saw, are accused of committing corrupt acts and of declaring themselves believers in Muhammad's cause at some points but then at others embracing instead their "Satan." They pale at the thought of campaigning militarily to defend Yathrib (Medina). This group is often spoken of as yielding to powerful emotions such as anger, concupiscence and cowardice. I have suggested a comparison, admittedly inexact, between this conception of those with a sickness in their hearts and that of Gregory of Nyssa in Christianity, who, influenced by Stoicism, diagnosed the soul that yields to passions such as hypocrisy as spiritually ill.

The diction of the Qur'ān about those with a sickness in their hearts leaves open the possibility that they constituted a pre-existing local band of pagan monotheists who acknowledged Muhammad as a prophet but who did not interpret that acknowledgment as requiring them to obey him implicitly or to change their theological beliefs. The cryptic and allusive comments about those with a sickness in their hearts do not allow for a positive identification of this group. It does not, however, sound like a merely tribal grouping of Khazraj clansmen, as the early exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān suggested, or like a sect of Jews, as he also suggested in the same breath.

The Qur'ān also speaks of a related or identical group it calls the *munāfiqūn* as a bounded sociological reality. *Al-Nisā'* 4:88 asks the Prophet's devotees, "What is the matter with you, that you have divided into two factions in your views of the hypocrites?" It is clearly speaking of a separate group of people about which Muhammad's followers differed. This group is accused of saying they believe in Muhammad but in reality declining to obey him. They pray ritually with the believers, but not steadfastly, and just for show, recalling Jesus' condemnation of the

Pharisees in Matt. 6:5. This behavior epitomizes the Matthean definition of hypocrisy, as an undeserved claim on holiness (Kieran) and a disjuncture between the inner reality and outward behavior to which Garland and Pollman pointed. They are accused of being debauched, rather as Matt. 23:28 equated hypocrisy with lawlessness.

On balance, the hypocrites as they appear in the Qur'ān appear to be a sectarian group rather than a clan. I read it to say that the hypocrites are abject and fear reprisals from pagan grandees if they return to Mecca, suggesting that they were Emigrants. They thus do not sound at all like an established Medinan clan such as a faction of the Khazraj, and this identification in the Abbasid sources is suspect. This apparently lower-class urban group refused to fight at Uhud and made implausible excuses. They supported the paganizers from among the people of the Book, Jews or Christians who sided with pagan Mecca. They are characterized as resisting the acknowledgment of a state of war with the more militant pagans by refusing to cut their ties of clientelage with them and declining to enter into battle. They proved reluctant to pay into the common defense fund because of their opposition to the Prophet's military campaigns. It is not clear whether their opposition to fighting derived solely from oaths of loyalty they had sworn to pagan clans or whether they had utopian pacifist beliefs. A gradual change can be perceived in the Medinan suras. At first, the Qur'ān exhibits annoyance and denounces them, while proffering forgiveness if the hypocrites will repent. Later it condemns them in harsher and harsher tones, so that by the late sura *al-Tawba* (9) they appear to be classed with militant pagans as objects of the divine wrath whose sins had become unforgivable.

The polarization that increasingly sets in between Muhammad's firm believers and the hypocrites is common in religious history. I suggested that some of the contours of Muhammad's polemics against them resemble Augustine's controversies with the Christian Manichaeans of his time. In her discussion of religious deviance and hypocrisy, DeConick argues that disguising oneself becomes desirable from the point of view of the deviant because the group making claims on normativity deploys techniques such as shaming and punishment to stigmatize those being branded outsiders.[50] Such techniques are in part an appeal to a common audience to choose sides and to accept a definition of normalcy. To become the established order an aspirant

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[50] DeConick, "Gnostic Spirituality," 173-174, 179-180.

orthodoxy must, in Bourdieu's phrase, "produce the naturalization of its own arbitrariness."[51] The association that grew up in late antique Christian polemics between heresy and hypocrisy often had a sociological basis, but an ironic one inasmuch as the polemics helped create both the heresy and the hypocrisy. These techniques of social control are also intended to prevent free riding, whereby individuals go back and forth between the orthodox congregation and the heretical conventicle. From the point of view of the Qur'ān, free riding consisted of enjoying the security provided by the military defense of Medina by Muhammad and the believers against the attacking Meccan pagans while declining to join them or pay their fair share, and while continuing to seek clientelage relations with the pagan enemy.

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[51] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 164, quoted in DeConick, "Gnostic Spirituality," 182.