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**See also:** ANIMALS; BASMALA; BELIEVERS; BODY; DISBELIEVERS; HUNTING AND GAME; IBRĀHĪM, UPON HIM PEACE; IDOLS AND IDOLATRY; ISMĀ‘ĪL, UPON HIM PEACE; JĀHILIYYA.

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

## CONJECTURE

### ZANN

This entry comprises the following sections: i. Definitions and Usage; ii. *Zann* as Certainty and Doubt; iii. Creedal Connections; iv. Spectrum of Meanings; vi. *zann* as Suspicion; v. the Jāhiliyyan Conjecture (*zann al-jāhiliyya*); vi. Bibliography.

### Definitions and Usage

Conjecture in this article is used as an approximate rendering of the polysemous Qur’ānic term *zann* (pl. *zunūn* and *azānīn*, from the root *z-n-n*), which is defined by Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (d. 502/1108) as “an inference derived from an indication (*amāra*); if [the indication is] strong, it leads to certain knowledge (*‘ilm*), but when it is weak, then *zann* is no more than a fancy (*tawahhum*)” (Rāghib). As such, ascertaining its actual meaning in the verses is contingent upon the context, which the exegetes examine from both the philological and creedal perspectives. Based on their reflections, scholars have gathered four aspects of its usage in *al-wujūh wa-l-nazā’ir* works: (i) doubt (*al-shakk*); (ii) its diametric opposite, certitude (*al-yaqīn*, also called *al-īqān* and *al-‘ilm*; *q.v.*); (iii) accusation (*al-tuhma*); and (iv) conjecture (*al-ḥusbān*). Muqāṭil has only three (certitude, doubt, and accusation (*Wujūh*); Dāmghānī lists all four (*Wujūh*); Fayrūzābādī), although Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ismā‘īl b. Aḥmad al-Ḥirī al-Naysābūrī (361-430/971-1038) lists “hope” (*al-rijā’*) as the fourth aspect of *zann* based on Q 59:2, Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī (d. 395/1004) lists only two (“certitude and doubt”), and Abū-l-Faraj Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Jawzī (510-597/ca.1116-1200) adds a fifth, “lie” (*al-kidhb*) (*Nuzhat al-a‘yun*).

The spectrum of meaning associated with *zann* is discernable in pre-Islamic poetry (see JĀHILIYYA). Ṭarafa b. al-‘Abd (d. ca.564) says, *I know with certainty and not merely as speculation (bil-zannī) / when a man’s relation falls from grace, so does he* (Ṭarafa, *Dīwān* p. 67); in Aws b. Ḥajar’s couplet (ca.530-620), *zann* denotes a rational, well-formed thought that, although able to bring its agent closer to the truth, is yet short of certainty: *that sage who, even when conjecturing about you (yazunnu bika l-zann) / appears to be doing so as if seeing and hearing you* (al-Jāḥiz, *Rasā’il* p. 302); and in the couplet of Durayd b. al-Ṣimma (d. 8/ca.630), where *zann* denotes certain knowledge: *I told them, believe (zann) that two thousand armored riders— / being led by a rider dressed in a coat of mail—are coming!* (al-Marzūqī, *Sharḥ Dīwān al-ḥamāsa* p. 575).

Three derivatives of the root *z-n-n* are used in the Qurʾān 69 times: 47 times as the Form I verb *zanna*; 21 times as the infinitive noun *zann*, and once as the active participle *zānnīn* (Q 48:6).

### **Zann as Certainty and Doubt**

Examples of the use of *zann* in the sense of certainty include, among others: Q 2:46: Those who are certain (*yazunnūna*) that they shall meet their Lord and that unto Him they are returning). Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) says, “*zann* [here] means certainty (*yaqīn*), according to the overwhelming majority of scholars”; Q 2:249, *They knew for certain that they are going to meet their Lord*; Q 9:118, *And they were certain (zannū) that there was no refuge from Allāh except unto Him*; Q 38:24, *And Dāwūd knew (zanna Dāwūdu) that We had tried him*; Q 59:2, *and they thought (zannū) that their fortresses would defend them against Allah*; Q 69:20, *I knew I would (zanantu) meet my reckoning*; Q 72:12, *And we know that (zanannā) we cannot frustrate Allāh in the earth*; and Q 75:28, *When he knows (zanna) it is indeed the final parting* (Fayrūzābādī).

The range of epistemic value of the inference or opinion—from certainty to doubt—which the linguistic usage allows for *zann* requires careful parsing of the term in each instance of its use, especially when creedal issues are involved. For instance, since *zann* in Q 21:87, *And Dhūl-Nūn, when he went off in anger and deemed (zanna) that We have no power over him, but then he cried out in the darkness: There is no Allah save Thee. Be Thou Glorified! Lo! I have been of the wrongdoers, could not mean that the Prophet Yūnus, upon him peace, (q.v.)—who is called Dhūl-Nūn in this verse, had any doubt about Divine Power, given the creedal belief of all Prophets being infallible and granted Divine protection from sinning—then, required interpretation consistent with the creedal position. Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310/839-923) says it could be a rhetorical question, meaning, “Did he think We had no power over him?”. Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Rāzī (543-606/1148-1209) says to think that Allah Most High is incapable and has no power is outright disbelief (*kufṛ*), which can not possibly be attributed to any believer, nor to one of the Prophets, hence *zann* here needs to be interpreted.” He then offers several possibilities: *lan naqdīra* here is used in the sense of *lan nuḍayīqa*, meaning We will not straiten him, just like its meaning in Q 13:26, *Allah extends and**

straitens provisions for whomsoever He will; similar usage is in 65:7 and 89:16. Thus, the *zann* the Prophet Yūnus, peace upon him, had in this instance was to believe that Allah did not wish him to be constricted in his choice of either remaining with his people or to leave them, and of which he had no intention. Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (600-671/1204-1273) censures those who take *zann* as conjecture and then try to explain the verse as a Satanic deception that led the Prophet to believe that Allah is not capable of punishing him, calling it a rejected opinion (*qawḥun mardūdun*), a sheer unbelief (*kufṛ*), which is not even conceivable for a prophet, as Saʿīd b. Jubayr (45-95/665-713) and “an overwhelming majority of other scholars” have said: *lan-naqdīra* here means *lan-nuḍayīqa*, that is, “We would not constrain or straiten him,” just like its meaning in Q 13:26, *Allah extends and straitens provisions for whomsoever He will*.

The principles guiding interpretation of *zann*, as elucidated by Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī (745-794/ca.1344-1392), involve not only creedal beliefs, but also grammatical and rhetorical devices used in the Qurʾān. “When [*zann*] is used to mean certainty, it is accompanied by a promise [of reward] (*waʿd*); and where it is used to mean doubt, it is accompanied by a threat of punishment (*waʿid*)... furthermore, every instance of its use as doubt is followed by “*in*”, the lightened [preposition, *al-khafīfa*, as in Q 48:12, *No! You thought that (zanantum an) the Messenger and the believers would never return to their families*. Whenever *zann* is followed by *inna* (*al-mush-addada*, the assimilated preposition), it means certainty, as in Q 69:20: *I knew I would (zanantu annī) meet my reckoning* and *When he knows (zanna annahu) it is indeed the final parting*” (Q 75:28, *Burhān, sub zann*). This is supported by the variant reading of *zann* in Q 75:28, as *ayqana* (“ascertains”) (Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, Type 40).

Other examples of the use of *zann* with the meaning of certainty include, Q 2:46, *those who know (yazunnūna) that they shall meet their Lord and that unto Him they are returning*, as per the opinion of the “overwhelming majority of scholars” (Qurṭubī); Q 9:118, *And they knew (zannū) that there was no refuge from Allāh except unto Him*; Q 38:24, *And Dāwūd knew (zanna Dāwūdu) that We had tested him*; Q 59:2, *and they thought (zannū) that their fortresses would defend them against Allah*; Q 69:20, *I knew I would (zanantu) meet my reckoning*; Q 72:12, *And we know that (zanannā) we cannot incapacitate Allāh in the earth*; and Q 75:28, *When he knows (zanna) it is indeed the final parting*.