some issues that could be important for a more detailed study centered on Islamic material. Despite the important differences between Christian and Muslim notions of conversion itself, we will see that some *narrative* aspects of these Islamic accounts of conversion—the calling or prophetic dream vision, the turn away from one's teachers or parents, the intersection with historical events—seem to closely resemble elements in Christian sources. Such parallels in structure and imagery provide good reason to consider in greater detail what such fictions of conversion to Islam might share with Christian texts and, even more critically, how the *polemical* role of these elements measure up to each other. Although, as Linda Jones has argued, "Christian and Muslim autobiographical conversion narratives developed separately *as genres*," the function of such narratives within the context of interconfessional writing was, as we will see, in part similar.[15]

DREAMING ISLAMIC HISTORY IN SAMAW'AL AL-MAGHRIBĪ

Not long after Moses/Petrus Alfonsi converted from Judaism to Christianity and wrote his anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim *Dialogue against the Jews,* the son of a Jew from Fez was born in Baghdad and was named Samuel (Samaw'al) by his mother. As a boy he learned the Torah and its commentaries and then moved on to Indian mathematics under a learned Muslim as well as the study of medicine and philosophy under the famous Jewish philosopher (also converted to Islam) Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. after 1164–65). Under various teachers, he studied algebra, geometry, and history. During his studies he began to doubt his Jewish faith and, after a series of prophetic dreams, he adopted Islam in 1163. On the evening after his public declaration of his new faith, he began composing what would become his anti-Jewish *Silencing the Jews* (*Ifḥām al-Yahūd*). The work circulated for four years, provoking responses against Samaw'al by Jewish readers, one of whom (in a surviving letter) challenges his "proof and demonstration" and implies that his conversion may have rather been out of "caprice, acclaim, or folly."[16] Samaw'al responded by expanding his discussion and adding a new personal account narrating his life and conversion to Islam in detail. Both versions—the shorter text alone and the expanded version joined to his conversion account— seem to have circulated contemporaneously, possibly in different places. Apart from the history of the shorter version and its dissemination, the longer polemic containing the conversion narrative seems to have circulated in the eastern Mediterranean, where

various copies of it survive.[17] Various Muslim writers used Samaw'al's ideas in subsequent attacks on Jewish belief, and at least one criticism of Samaw'al, by the thirteenth-century Jewish writer Ibn Kammūna (d. 1284), is known. In addition, a letter from a "philosophizing heretic" criticizing Samaw'al's conversion account, along with a riposte by the latter, has also been found in various copies.[18]

Samaw'al's decision to expand his text to include his personal story casts into relief the meaning that his representation of conversion could have *vis-à-vis* his anti-Jewish discourse. His conversion story serves as an *ex post facto* justification for his arguments while also depending on the context of his theological and exegetical claims for its wider meaning. He begins, "I shall relate God's guidance granted to me, and how I was led since my birth from the faith of the Jews toward my conversion [*intiqālī*], that it may become an example and an exhortation to whomsoever this may reach."[19] The fruit of the journey he relates is the very work of *Silencing the Jews* that he wrote four years earlier. It was "in the evening of that day," that is, the day of his decision to convert to Islam, that, he claims, he began to write the book *Silencing the Jews.* These teachings "became well-known" and "its fame was widespread [*wa-ṭāra khabaruhu*]," such that various copies were made under Samaw'al's supervision in various cities. That fame brought also the provocation to expand and justify his project. "Later I added to it many sections of polemics against the Jews on the basis of the Torah, so that it became an excellent work on polemics against the Jews, the like of which had never been produced in Islam."[20] That "excellent work" is the book before the reader, and among the "many sections of polemics against the Jews" that he "later . . . added" is the very account of conversion that now frames, after the fact, his exegetical sortie. The new attack and the new presentation are presented as inextricably and mutually reinforcing components each of the other. I believe Samaw'al's entire account can be read with the help of this double lens: just as narrative and polemic both stand in a clear hierarchy but also are tightly linked to each other, so other conceptual pairs are similarly proposed and then inverted over the course of the book. Three that seem to carry the most significance are authoritative tradition versus reason, fictional stories versus true histories, and prophecy versus proof. By weaving these categories together, he represents his conversion as a product of action and submission, individual experience and communal identity.

The first clue to this game of conciliating incommensurate dichotomies comes in the order of the explanation itself. Samaw'al draws a

connection between his assault on Judaism and his conversion experience only at the end of his work, which itself comes years after the dissemination of his original ideas. By presenting the material in this order, he seems to subordinate his dream and conversion to the text and the claims they generate. This subordination is in keeping with the overall structure of the work, in which reason and argumentation are prized over authority and the force of tradition or prophecy. Samaw'al leads up to this conclusion by describing his education as a series of slow discoveries that followed a logical sequence. He begins by establishing his former expertise in Jewish learning. His father "was the most learned man of his time in Torah studies, and the most gifted and prolific stylist and exquisite extemporizer in Hebrew poetry and prose." He was well-known among the "distinguished people among the Jews" living in Baghdad, and married a "distinguished sister" from Basra who was herself "well-versed in Torah studies and Hebrew learning." She was a Levite, "a tribe of good lineage," and both her parents were learned and well-known.[21] Even though he leaves Judaism behind and rejects it as false, he still shows that his lineage was illustrious and his family was a pillar of learning and orthodoxy in Judaism. This depiction is the first step in his gradual rejection of authoritative tradition in favor of reason.

On his slow journey away from tradition toward reason, he exhibits his prodigious intellect and skill in mastering all subjects that were put before him, beginning with Hebrew, the Torah, and commentaries. "By the age of thirteen, I had mastered [*aḥkamtu*] this knowledge," he writes, implying that the foundation of all further thought and argument was a "mastery" of traditional Jewish knowledge. Throughout the initial section of *Silencing*, he presents, as Ramon Martí would later do in Latin, numerous verses from the Bible in Hebrew (and sometimes from the Targum in Aramaic) and then translates the texts into Arabic. He goes to great lengths to show his authoritative knowledge of his former religion through linguistic display, familiarity with rabbinical and medieval Jewish ideas, and imitation of specific methods of Jewish textual understanding, including gematria, or numerical interpretation of the Bible.[22] His recourse to Jewish language, *auctoritates*, and hermeneutics throughout *Silencing*, which things are the foundations of his own authority, is echoed by his claims to mastery of Jewish knowledge in his later conversion narrative.

From this solid basis he moved on to science and claims to have mastered "Indian reckoning" and astronomical tables by the age of fourteen. He continued to study medicine while he frequented various wise

teachers to learn algebra and geometry, "until I had solved the problems from Euclid that they used to solve," while also mastering by the age of eighteen all that his teachers offered in medical science: "My passion and love for these studies was so strong that I would forget food and drink when pondering on some of them. I secluded myself in a room for a time and analyzed all those books and expounded them; I refuted their authors wherever they committed mistakes; demonstrated the errors of their compilers; and undertook to verify or correct where other authors had failed. I found Euclid's arrangement of the figures in his book faulty. . . . God has revealed to me much that had been withheld from my predecessors among the eminent scholars."[23] In this cascade of braggadocio, Samaw'al follows the characteristic form of other Arabic *Bildung* narratives such as those of the eleventh-century philosopher Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), who, having mastered logic, geometry, and medicine by the age of sixteen, found that "the gates of knowledge began opening for me . . . to the point that distinguished physicians began to read the science of medicine under me," or Samaw'al's younger contemporary ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī, who brags that, after surpassing all of his various teachers, "large numbers of students flocked to me."[24]

In his journey from Judaism to Islam, Samaw'al's education moves through a series of stages in which he sequentially mastered each subject before moving on to the next. These studies led to the study of history, which proved to be the source of his doubts in his faith and his eventual conversion to Islam: "I was fascinated by records of the past and by stories, and was eager to learn what had happened in ancient times. . . . I therefore perused the various compilations of stories and anecdotes. Then I passed on from that stage to an infatuation with books of entertainment and long tales; later still—to the larger compilations. . . . I sought the real historical accounts and my interest shifted to the histories."[25] This move from logic to medicine to history curiously seems to be a move away from argument and proof toward "stories and anecdotes." But Samaw'al's ultimate interest was in the truth of the past. It was in this growing appreciation, brought through the appealing rhetoric of "books of entertainment and long tales," for "real historical accounts" that Samaw'al comes to question the claims of exclusive truth in Jewish belief. By placing his description of these stories and their effects after his long preparatory study, he insists that logic, science, and religious tradition formed the basis upon which he could interpret such stories correctly. This careful ordering, in which

logic is given preeminence over history but at the same time is made the product of its mastery, is repeated in the text in his presentation of his dreams.

Samaw'al thus connects his study of history to his need for a rational evaluation of all beliefs handed down by tradition. By reflecting on history and tradition, he judged that "reason is the supreme arbiter" in all thought, even religious belief: "For were it not that reason directs us to follow the prophets and apostles and to trust the elders and authorities of the past, we would not accept anything transmitted on their authority. . . . [R]eason [ʿ*aql*] does not oblige us to accept ancestral tradition [*naql*] without examining it as to its soundness . . . but obliges us to accept tradition only if it be a verity *per se*. . . . Mere reference to fathers and ancestry, however, is no proof."[26] The twelfth-century Christian conflict between *ratio* and *auctoritas* is paralleled by a corresponding conflict in Islamic sources between ʿ*aql* (reason) and *naql* (received tradition). Samaw'al openly deprecates the latter in favor of the former and claims that this total commitment to reason leads him to his faith in Islam. The path of his logic begins with the realization that all religions are equal in terms of the transmission of their ancestral traditions. As all prophets (especially Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad) are verified in each religion, respectively, only through the transmission of tradition and not through firsthand experience, "a reasonable person cannot believe one and disbelieve another of these prophets. . . . [R]ather, it is rationally incumbent either to believe all of them or to reject all of them."[27] This exact idea is one of Samaw'al's principal points in the first section of the text, which he explains along with other assertions about the abrogation of Jewish and Christian Scriptures.[28] He claims that he himself was convinced of the prophethood of Muhammad, and offers his own story as a model of action similar to what he calls for in his initial attack on Judaism.

His treatise, using a mixture of rational and Scriptural appeals, is based on familiar arguments of the equality of prophecy, the condemnation of Christian and Jewish falsification of the true prophetic message in their Scriptures, and the abrogation of these religions as corrupt and invalid. These points are reflected in the details of his conversion scene when he explains that, after arriving at his rational conclusions about prophecy, he still held off from a public conversion to Islam out of consideration for his father. These twin gestures of faith and hesitation, which he repeats after he tells of his prophetic dreams, allow him both to claim reason as the ground for his conversion and to show

his deference to tradition and respect for authority. While he alternates between rational and Scriptural proofs without difficulty, in his account he presents an experience of inner conflict between reason and authority and uncertainty about how to act on his own conclusions.

Samaw'al overcomes the paralyzing irresolution brought on by this double bind by appealing to "divine help," which comes to him in a dream. While some scholars have essayed to read conversionary dream narratives in medieval Arabic writing as accurate expressions of personal identity and inner experience, it is clear that those written and included in disputational contexts such as Samaw'al's function to express, in Dwight Reynolds's words, "the displaced authority of the authorial 'I': what the author cannot say on his own authority, he can support with testimony from an outside source through the narration of a dream or vision."[29] By presenting his conversion in logical order among a series of experiences (learning, interest in history, reason, and finally a prophetic dream), he avoids attributing his conversion to the "logic" of dreams alone. By the same token, he can claim he was brought to Islam by God and through his attention to prophecy, not through his own ratiocination. His dreams unite his interest in aligning himself with Islamic history and his logical conclusion that all prophecies are equally valid.

In his first dream, he speaks with "the prophet Samuel," whom he finds sitting under a large tree. After greeting him, the prophet has Samaw'al read a verse from Deuteronomy, which he understands to refer to Muhammad. The prophet asks him to interpret it but grows impatient with Samaw'al's answers and departs angrily. Samaw'al awoke "in terror" and suddenly understood the dream as "an act of grace from God . . . an exhortation that is to remove the doubt that has been preventing me from professing the true creed and openly embracing Islam."[30] This dream convinced him to convert, and he began to pray to God as a new Muslim, but eventually he fell asleep again, dreaming a second dream. In this second dream, a Sufi mystic finds him on a busy street and leads him to visit the prophet Muhammad in a nearby house, which Samaw'al describes in detail. As he approaches the prophet, he passes many armed men "dressed for travel." He then entered the courtyard where Muhammad, "smiling and benevolent," was standing. "I rushed toward him and stretched out my hand toward his. He stretched out his noble hand to me and put it in my hand. I said: 'I testify that there is but one God and that thou art the Messenger of God.' . . . I saw he was filled with joy."[31] This description serves to prove

that Samaw'al underwent an internal conversion to Islam and also officially adopted Islam by pronouncing the *Shahāda*, the Islamic Profession of Faith, even though he delayed in publicly announcing his conversion. It also authenticates his rational conversion not only through the proof provided by his own reason but also through prophecy about Muhammad given by God.

This appeal to prophecy alongside his rational proof is fused with an appeal to the power of storytelling alongside the unfolding of real history. After testifying in his second dream to the singularity of God before Muhammad himself, the prophet invites him on a voyage of conquest. At first seized with fear of a voyage at sea, Samaw'al quickly remembers his new faith and feels renewed confidence. In particular, upon observing a number of humble Sufis prepare for battle, he remembers his fascination with chronicles of Muslim conquests: "Ever since I was young and had read the stories of the rise of Muslim power it had been impressed upon my imagination how the companions of the Prophet were weak, poor . . . and yet were victorious over powerful and huge armies and numerous cavalry. So when I saw the three [Sufis] I said: These are the warriors and conquerors in the holy war, these are the companions of the Prophet; with these shall I travel and go forth to conquer. Tears rolled from my eyes in sleep, so great was my joy and happiness over them."[32] The critical importance of this moment, which is the dramatic peripety of his conversion, contrasts sharply with the commentary that immediately follows his narrative. In proffering this double explanation of conversion through both proof and prophecy, he first offers his dream and then immediately rejects it. In explaining why he did not tell anyone of his dreams for another four years—during which time the first version of his anti-Jewish work circulated and became popular—he claims he was "loath to mention" what he could not prove rationally lest the reader think it was unbelievable or his critics say "He left his religion on account of a dream he had seen; he was deceived by jumbled dreams."[33] In offering these explanations, he also denies that his dream had any decisive role in his conversion: "The reader of these pages should now understand that it was not the dream that had induced me to abandon my first faith. A sensible man will not be deceived about his affairs by dreams and visions, without proof or demonstration. But I had known for a long time the proofs and demonstrations and arguments for the prophethood of our master Muhammad. . . . [I]t was those proofs and demonstrations that were the cause for my conversion. . . . [A]s for the dream, it served merely to

alert and to prod me out of my procrastination and inertia."[34] This concluding disclaimer reinforces the logic of his earlier statements in favor of Islam, in which authoritative tradition, *naql*, could not be accepted alone and had to be confirmed with reason, *ʿaql*. For Samaw'al, *auctoritas* seems to have had, in Alain of Lille's words, a nose of wax. As he claims earlier in his story, "Reason is the supreme arbiter and . . . its rule should be established generally in the affairs of . . . our world."[35]

This total rejection of authoritative tradition not augmented by reason, however, is in constant tension with his ongoing deference to his father, who "loved [him] intensely." It was his father who insisted on his education in science and logic, the very disciplines that Samaw'al claims led to his later arguments against Judaism. Samaw'al deduces the truth of Islam through logic but still holds off converting out of respect for his father. He thus emerges as one who was faithful and loyal to his tradition but who was forced to convert by God's will. His conversion is the product of the providence of God, who "predestined" and "set in advance" everything that was to occur in Samaw'al's life. As we saw earlier, he claims, "[I was] led since my birth from the faith of the Jews toward my conversion."[36] Moreover, the fact that he dreams of Muhammad ensures, according to traditions of dream interpretation in Islam, the truth of his dream as prophecy by God and not delusion by the Devil.[37] Just as his filial piety explains his delay in acting, the sure presence of God's will exonerates Samaw'al from any insult that comes with his later conversion. As soon as his father learns of the reasons for his son's apostasy, reasons "he would not deny and could not refute," he suddenly dies, a victim of God's will rather than his son's infidelity. Samaw'al, once a pious Jew and now a faithful Muslim, simply followed his destiny, choosing what was rational but also heeding what was revealed. Although he claims his conversion was fully the product of reason, his representation of that conversion through narrative actually resembles the descriptions of his Christian contemporaries Moses/Petrus and Judah/Herman in its appeal to reason and authority together.

This double trajectory, combining an analeptic vision of the past and its authoritative prophecy with a proleptic vision of the unfolding future and the logical subsumption under it of all that came before, can be brought into focus by contrasting the imagery of the prophets in his two dreams. In his first dream, he sees the prophet Samuel as a symbol of the past, a "grave old man with very white hair." The old and venerable prophet is idle in the shade of a tree in a verdant

countryside and points back to the prophecy of the past and calls for its correct understanding.[38] In his second dream, by contrast, he sees Muhammad within a courtyard in an urban setting, "standing" and busily "occupied." He is depicted as "distinguished looking" with a skin color "between pale and ruddy," with black eyes and a beard and hair of medium length. Rather than being "grave," "old," and "angry" like the prophet Samuel, Muhammad is middle-aged, smiling, and "filled with joy." Rather than calling Samaw'al to read and interpret, Muhammad calls him to action and conquest. As Samaw'al leaves Muhammad's side after agreeing to join him in battle, he says, "I did not find . . . the darkness that had been there when I entered."[39] Through these pairs of opposed images, Samaw'al implies that Judaism—the religion of those who believe in Samuel but not in Muhammad—is a religion of memory and commemoration of the past, a rural past in the shadows of time and action. Islam, by contrast—the religion of those who accept both Samuel and Muhammad and all other prophets besides—is seen as a force on the cusp of history, a forward-driving and inclusive religion of action that spreads from darkness to light and from rural wilderness to urban empire.

Similarly, the method of interpreting sacred history is conspicuously different in the two dreams, and Samaw'al leaves behind a purely interpretive textual model for one based on action. In his first dream, the prophet Samuel commands him to read Deuteronomy 33:2 in Hebrew ("The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran"). The prophet then said that "the meaning of this is an allusion to a prophecy that will be revealed" and Samaw'al "realized he meant Muhammad . . . because he is the one sent from the mountains of Paran."[40] As we know from the first, expository section of *Silencing*, Sinai pertains to the revelation to the Jews and Seir to the revelation to the Christians. This interpretation presents a sort of prophetic prediction in which later events fulfill earlier prophecy through the unfolding of concrete history, all leading to the revelation to Muhammad on Paran, which is "the mountain of Mecca."[41] Although Samaw'al's text seems on the surface to resemble Christian conversion texts in its details, we can differentiate its historical interpretation from Saul/Paul's typological reading of Mount Sinai in Galatians 4:24–26, where he equates the mountain with Hagar and "the present Jerusalem" and then contrasts it to Sarah, who signifies "the Jerusalem above." Also we can juxtapose this exegetical content in Samaw'al's first dream with the call to arms in his second dream, which includes no textual

citation or interpretation. As he meets Muhammad and makes his profession of Islam, Samaw'al gives up meditation on prophecy to embrace the unfolding of history around him. In this conversion, Samaw'al moves from text to action, from reading to battle, and his trajectory is epitomized by the "companions of the Prophet" he sees after visiting Muhammad, dressed in "the raiment of ascetics" and carrying bows, javelins, and swords.

These double images in which Islam embraces prophecy and action, mysticism and war, also define Samaw'al's image of his conversion as the product of both fictional stories and concrete history. In this depiction, he again provides a paradoxical double reading of his experience and actions in adopting Islam. Just as his interest in making "reason the supreme judge" was coupled with a forbearance of action out of respect for traditional authority, and just as he claimed his conversion was both a product of rational proof and the unfolding of divine providence and predestination, so here he melds his love of past stories with a commitment to present and future history. In all of the histories he enjoys as a young man, it is the fictional story of Burzōē, the physician in the widely popular collection of frame tales *Kalīlah and Dimna*, that ultimately led Samaw'al to connect his interest in legends of the past with his sense of the truth of tradition. While Burzōē is a character in this narrative fiction, he is also the real-life translator of the Sanskrit *Panchtantra* into Persian, the version that would later form the basis of the Arabic *Kalīlah*. Following his illustrious upbringing, Burzōē begins to doubt the foundation of all religious truth and slowly, through reflection and medical study, comes to believe reason could be the sole arbiter between different traditions and finally accepts no single religion as exclusively true. Burzōē's story, along with the autobiographical *On My Books* of the ancient physician Galen, provided the template for a number of autobiographical works in the Arabic tradition, including Al-Ghazālī's *Deliverance from Error*. As critics have noted, Burzōē's story is presented as a "spiritual autobiography" whose structure and argument Samaw'al closely imitated in constructing his drama.[42] The story of Burzōē is fictionalized in the narrative frame of the Arabic *Kalīlah*, and this tale inspired Samaw'al to convert. His real conversion then acquired its form and meaning as the fictionalized story appended to his text *Silencing the Jews*. Nevertheless, Samaw'al draws a conclusion opposite that of Burzōē. Whereas the fictional doctor came to see limited equality of all religions and ultimately favored an ascetic ecumenism, Samaw'al concludes his rational comparison of all religious

traditions by seeing Islam as the final truth that encapsulates and surpasses all others.[43] Narrative and action, prophecy and polemic, form the chains of transmission within which spiritual conversion constitutes a central link.

This inversion of the message contained in the story of Burzōē is one of a series of inversions and paradoxes through which Samaw'al creates the drama of his conversion. The interpretive voice with which Samaw'al the author tries to define and explain the actions of Samaw'al the character—the same voice that speaks through the whole of the anti-Jewish attack—is subsumed into the text as yet another fictional discourse. This fictionalization of the voice of the author allows him to insist without contradiction on a double meaning to his conversion. On the one hand, he affirms the singular meaning and motivation of his conversion ("It was those proofs and demonstrations that were the cause for my conversion") and rejects the fiction of his dreams in favor of "real historical accounts" ("A sensible man will not be deceived . . . by dreams and visions"). Moreover, by placing his autobiographical account *after* his polemic and by leaving his dreams for the very end of his account, *after* he already provided his reasons for accepting Islam, Samaw'al sought to paint his conversion as a product of logic and reason. On the other hand, he attributes the rational proofs that led him to convert to the fiction of *Kalīlah and Dimna* and even dramatizes his initial, spiritual conversion not only as a private, interior experience but also as a dream that he kept secret for four years. Although he places the core conclusions of *Silencing the Jews* both temporally and textually before his conversion account, he claims that the events of the narrative preceded and inspired the attack that followed.

This constant alternation between narrative and argument, dream and reason, Samaw'al-the-author and Samaw'al-the-character transforms history, both real events and textual representations of them, into the key by which all meaning in the text is revealed.[44] By placing history at the apex of this dramatic pyramid, *Silencing* expresses the central theme of both the autobiographical and doctrinal sections, in both the initial and expanded versions: the abrogation of all past interpretations or misinterpretations of prophecy by the final revelation of Islam. This message, by which Jews are "silenc[ed] and muzzl[ed] . . . with their very own data," does not characterize the past as a necessary precondition of the future or see Judaism per se as a precondition for the message of Islam.[45] As Islamic history swallows up and abrogates all that came before it in the undeniable hegemony of the present, Judaism is

shown to be a corruption of the true prophecy, an unnecessary deviation from the single truth revealed to Jesus, Muhammad, and all the prophets. Judaism is thus exposed as false and rejected without being called as an exclusive witness to the truth of Islam.

FROM POSTSCRIPT TO PREFACE: THE SHORT NARRATIVES OF SAʿĪD ḤASAN OF ALEXANDRIA AND ʿABD AL-ḤAQQ AL-ISLĀMĪ

Samaw'al's work can be set within the wider context of numerous other well-known conversions of Jews to Islam, including those of the famous Fatimid Vizier Yaʿqūb ibn Killis (d. 991), the philosopher and physician Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, and his disciple Isaac ibn ʿEzraʾ (son of the poet Abraham ibn ʿEzraʾ, d. ca. 1164).[46] The letters and *responsa* discussing conversion to Islam written by Maimonides, about whose own possible feigned apostasy some still speculate, signal the centrality of the issue for Jews of the twelfth century living in Islamic lands.[47] Samaw'al's case is unique in its treatment of conversion and apostasy because of its elaborate form and its complex connection between this narrative development and Samaw'al's larger proposition.

Samaw'al's story distinguishes itself by conceding a more important symbolic role to conversion than can be found in many sources from the first centuries of Islam, and a number of texts in the subsequent two centuries follow his model. Like Samaw'al, whose representation of conversion dramatizes a historical process of abrogation in which Judaism and Christianity are swept aside to make way for the inclusive historical vision of Islam's final prophecy, the later authors that I examine next do not enlist their former Jewish selves in order to *authorize* their faith. Rather, they tell their stories principally to explain the natural process of how they came to convert. The theological history that these stories embody is one that unfolds toward Islam rather than connecting past and future through a figural, circular dialectic. As a result, the narrative elements become simplified and their emplotment is comparatively logical and schematic.

These patterns can be seen clearly when we compare Samaw'al's *Silencing* to two short accounts of conversion from Judaism to Islam in North Africa that are roughly contemporary with the writing of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid, those of Saʿīd Ḥasan of Alexandria (converted in 1298) and a Ceuta-born Jew, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī (fl. second half of the fourteenth century). In both of these works, as in

Samaw'al's, the primary goal of the text is argumentation against Judaism. Unlike the account in Samaw'al's *Silencing*, however, these very brief conversion narratives are integrated into the main body of the texts they accompany. Earlier critics have read these for clues about the biographies of the authors or insight into their alleged motives for conversion, connecting these motives to wider historical factors of Jewish experience under Islamic rule in North Africa.[48] Turning away from this psychological-biographical approach in order to pursue a textual-critical one, we can see that these stories, despite their brevity, play an important role within the scheme of their authors and work in tandem with contentions of the main body of texts that contain them.

The work of Saʿīd Ḥasan, entitled *Paths of Investigation about the Prophethood of the Lord of Mankind (Masālik al-naẓar fī nubūwati sayyid al-bashar)*, completed around the time of the conversion to Christianity of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid (1320), offers a litany of examples of Muhammad's prophethood drawn mostly from the Hebrew Bible and in a few cases from the Gospels and the Qur'ān. Saʿīd introduces each example with the formulaic phrases "Another indication of his prophetic office is . . . " and "Know also that . . . ," giving his text the form of a list of *auctoritates* more than a developed argument. Saʿīd's two principal themes are that Jewish and Christian Scriptures announced that Muhammad was to be prophet, and that both of these religions are guilty of idolatry and image worship. Saʿīd is so concerned with the pernicious effects of image worship that he believes even the Muslims are at risk of retribution by God if they do not forbid and destroy Christian and Jewish houses of worship where such things are found. In claiming that Jewish and Christian Scriptures point to the prophethood of Muhammad, Saʿīd thus connects his text directly to earlier works, like Samaw'al's *Silencing the Jews*, in arguing against the falsification (*taḥrīf*) of Scripture as the reason for Jewish and Christian error.

Like *Silencing*, *Paths of Investigation* includes the conversion story after the main body of doctrinal points, but instead of being presented as an appendix or afterword to the work and added only years later, it functions as an organic part of the original. In moving from the position of a postscript, as in Samaw'al's case, to that of a conclusion to the original work, Saʿīd's conversion narrative more closely resembles and reinforces the polemic in which it is embedded. The story begins with the same language as each of the examples presented earlier in the treatise: "Know . . . that I was one of the learned men of the Children of

Israel, but God bestowed Islam upon me."[49] This "bestowing" appears not as something extra added to the main text but as one of the principal arguments of it. Situating the account in this way, Saʿīd makes no attempt to downplay the importance of his personal experience, as Samaw'al does. Rather, he moves seamlessly from Scriptural proof to rational appeal to personal testimony, making no distinction between the levels of his rhetorical appeal.

Despite this important difference from Samaw'al's *Silencing the Jews*, Saʿīd's narrative also seems to imitate it in many ways. Like Samaw'al's experience as presented in his text, Saʿīd's conversion comes through a dream vision, but rather than occurring as the product of normal sleep, it is provoked by the sleep of sickness: "The occasion [of my conversion] was this: I became ill and a physician was attending me. The shroud of death was prepared for me, and then I saw in my sleep one speaking who said, 'Read the [Qur'anic] sura *al-Ḥamd;* then you will escape death.' So when I awoke from my sleep I immediately sought one of the trustworthy Muslims. He was my neighbor, and I grasped his hand, saying, 'I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, he alone, and he has no partner; and I bear witness that Muhammad is his servant and apostle, whom he has sent with guidance and the true religion, to make it triumph over every religion.'"[50] Saʿīd recovers from his illness, mentioning it no more. His illness and recovery operate within the text as symbolic markers of his passage from error to truth and his conversion through a death and rebirth. As in Samaw'al's first dream, in which the prophet Samuel tells him, "Read what you find before you," Saʿīd is told to read from the Qur'ān. He also awakens and proceeds directly to his conversion, just as Samaw'al awoke from his first dream and understood immediately that God was calling him to embrace Islam. But rather than falling back asleep and performing his decisive act of witnessing (the *Shahāda*) within his dream, as Samaw'al does, Saʿīd "immediately sought" his neighbor. Rather than speaking to a specter in a dream, he pronounces his faith before a real, living person close to him who could corroborate his act.

Even so, the reality of this concrete act is subtly blended with a renewed dream-like rhetoric, similar to the moment in Samaw'al's text when he writes, "Drowsiness overwhelmed me while I was pondering." While this drowsiness precedes and leads into his second dream and his profession of faith, Saʿīd's second vision follows after his profession of faith: "When I entered the mosque and saw the Muslims in rows like ranks of angels, a voice within me said, 'This is the nation concerning

whose appearance the prophets preached good tidings!'"[51] After he is moved by the admonitory sermon, the sight repeated itself, this time with a sharper edge: "When the prayers began, I was greatly moved, because I saw the rows of the Muslims like rows of angels. . . . [T]hen a voice within me said, 'If the revelation of God came to the Children of Israel twice in the course of time, then it comes to this people in every prayer.'" These semi-oneiric voices and visions of praying Muslims "like angels" provide a subtle confirmation of his first dream and convince him that he chose his new faith correctly. At that moment, he writes, "I was convinced that I was created to be a Muslim only; and my conversion [*Islāmī*] took place [shortly after]."[52] Like Samaw'al, who authenticates his vision by relating his dream about the prophet Muhammad himself—a sure sign of true communication from God—Saʿīd presents his conversion as the product of prophetic revelation. He underscores this interpretation by framing his narrative with a Qur'anic verse about prophecy (46:51), explaining that prophecy can come in many forms, including through revelation in one's sleep, implying that his experience was a direct prophetic message from God. To this end, he also prefaces his dream story by the description of a dream of Solomon, in which the prophet met a dead man. He concludes this parallel prophetic dream story with a well-known *ḥadīth* claiming that "the prophet said that the trustworthy vision is one of forty-six parts of prophecy" and suggesting that his dream was partly a revelation from God and that it commanded the authority of other prophecies.[53] Like Samaw'al, Saʿīd combines extensive arguments based on both logic and Scripture with the testimony of his private experience. He appeals to both reason and authority while at the same moment claiming that his conversion was predestined by God.

Rather than following his testimony of faith with plans for physical conquest, as Samaw'al did—a journey to the East to spread the faith of Islam—Saʿīd immediately connects his conversion with *textual* polemic. He does this first by affirming that Islam was revealed in order "to make it triumph over every religion." This is reinforced later when he claims he set out to organize a debate with Jews and Christians in order to refute them:

> I set out and went forth with a petition for the forming of a council to consider the belief in God Almighty, in which there should be ten of the learned men of the Jews and ten Christian priests, in the presence of the learned men of the Muslims and in the presence of the king; and in their hands should be the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms and the books of the prophets . . . and that I should make clear what they had changed and altered and substituted in the word of God Almighty; and also that I should explain and prove the prophecy of the Chosen (and he is Muhammad . . .) from the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms, and the books of the prophets; and that I should establish from their books the reasons, the proofs and the arguments for the abolition of pictures and likenesses from the synagogues/churches.[54]

Although the debate, as far as we know, never came to pass, Saʿīd explicitly links the composition of this text with the conversion story related in it. In *Paths of Investigation*, he presents the pro-Islamic ideas that were "establish[ed] from their books."

The arguments of his work, moreover, which include these barbs against Christianity within the larger attack on Judaism, form part of his basic declaration of faith. Just as Samaw'al began composing his book on the very day of his dreams, Saʿīd begins conceiving his case even as he performs the profession of faith that marks his conversion. In an uncanny parallel with the conversion of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid, Saʿīd not only gives the date of composition as 1320, some twenty-two years after his conversion, but also links his text and his conversion to the moment when he personally heard about the historical event of the conversion to Islam of the Mongol prince Ghāzān Khān in 1295—the very year of the failed messianic movements of Ávila and Ayllón and the year given by Abner/Alfonso in the *Teacher of Righteousness* as the beginning of the doubts that led to his conversion.[55] Just like Samaw'al and Abner/Alfonso, Saʿīd interweaves text, history, and personal confession in a way that portrays inner change as a historical process and reveals the explicitly *textual* nature of his transformation. Like these writers, Saʿīd constructs conversion as a form of polemical discourse that works in tandem with claims of reason and authority while being grounded in a shared history of communal conversion. This interweaving of discourses is reflected in the thematic order of the book. What is claimed to be first in time—the conversion and its declaration—is presented as last in the text. By invoking his conversion as one of the arguments and by presenting his treatise as its natural outcome, Saʿīd himself stands in for the council of ten Christians and ten Jews as well as the learned men of the Muslims. This very book laid before the reader is the fruit of the author's adoption of Islam, constructed in a way that leads backward through time to its source.

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The movement of the conversion narrative from being a postscript in Samaw'al's *Silencing* to being the concluding proof text in Sa'īd's *Paths* signifies an important shift in its role in the polemic. Unlike Samaw'al, who alternates between denying any importance to his dreams and invoking their prophetic veracity, Sa'īd makes no attempt to separate his religious arguments from his personal story. This same perspective is even more pronounced in a slightly later anti-Jewish tractate by another converted North African Jew, *The Outstretched Sword in Refutation of the Jewish Sages (Al-Sayf al-mamdūd fī l-radd 'alā aḥbār al-yahūd)*, by the fourteenth-century convert 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī. Virtually nothing is known of this author other than that he was born in Ceuta. His text, tentatively dated to the last decade of the fourteenth century, consists of five chapters on common themes of dispute: proof of Muhammad's prophethood, the importance of abrogation (*naskh*) in the unfolding of prophecy, the falsification (*taḥrīf*) of Scripture by Jews and Christians, the insults of Jews against the prophets, and others. In contrast to Sa'īd's treatise earlier in the century, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's opens with rather than concludes with the depiction of his conversion from Judaism. If we consider Samaw'al's text as a strategic postscript to his rational deductions, and Sa'īd's text as the concluding example in a string of proofs, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's is—similar to the style of the Christian sources considered earlier—the opening frame to his offensive. This organization brings the author's conversion to the forefront of his overall argument, both literally and hermeneutically.

By shifting the remarks about his conversion to the opening, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq gives his story a heightened importance in the overall structure of his text, an importance that is belied by the brevity and formulaic generality of those remarks. Unlike Samaw'al and Sa'īd, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq does not claim that he had a dream or revelation and does not elaborate on the process that led him to convert. He simply claims, "Sixteen years ago, [God] revealed to me [*kāna aṭla'anī*] the truth of which the rational person does not doubt and none but the absurd are suspicious."[56] He casts this hasty revelation in terms of the will of God to convert him and his destiny to be converted, and contrasts it with the necessary prior state of divinely willed ignorance. When God discloses his true fate to him, he realizes he will be saved only through his dissemination of theological doctrines such as the affirmation of God's unity (rather than trinity) and the denial that God possesses anthropomorphic characteristics: "It was part of the wisdom of God that [my destiny] remain concealed and secret within Him without his revelation or manifestation until He favored me and inspired me [to know] that this destiny was not sufficient for me nor was it going to save me but rather that it was my duty to spread [the teaching] of His unity and proclaim His non-human character and his glory, making known the faith in His prophet Muhammad."[57]

These elements of concealment or revelation and conversion through divine decree are the only sources of drama. They perfunctorily appear in the midst of what are otherwise formulaic arguments and doctrinal niceties. In fulfilling the promise of the "mercies bestowed from God" in calling him, his "true" conversion comes in the affirmation of monotheism in philosophical terminology. When he realized that being preordained by God to convert was not in itself enough to save him, he writes, "I hastened to do that which would save me from painful punishment and which would bring me close to tranquil paradises. In this way, I began to speak the words of [God's] unity and lack of human attributes, testifying that there is no God but the One God, who has no equal, and testifying that Muhammad is his servant and messenger."[58] With these few narrative events, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq emphasizes not his own agency but the central importance of God as the source and cause of his conversion. "We would not have found the path if God had not directed us. . . . He chooses whom he will and directs well whom he will. One does not ask him for reasons for his actions but one has to respond to them."[59] His faith is a matter of the fulfillment of destiny, a small part of the overall unfolding and achievement of God's universal plan.

Although 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's adoption of Islam is described as a simple profession of faith undertaken without reference to personal circumstance or individual will, the effects of his change are treated in more active, detailed terms. He explicitly connects his being chosen by God with the undertaking of a public mission. He claims he has a "duty" to "spread" teaching about God, to "proclaim" his nature and to "make known" his prophecy, and he realizes these goals by composing and publishing the anti-Jewish attack that follows.[60] His conversion, like that of Marius Victorinus in Augustine's *Confessions*, is thus a cause for other conversions. He boasts, "Through me, by the grace of Almighty God, my people [i.e., relatives] and children, and all of much good fortune among those who were attached to me converted to Islam."[61] 'Abd al-Ḥaqq stresses his missionary and confrontational identity in the preamble to the work, in which he extols himself as "he who makes the

law of Muhammad triumph [*nāṣir al-sharīʿah al-muhammadīyah*]." He describes how his turn to Islam quickly became the path to a new vocation as a polemical author, one that particularly suited him by virtue of his knowledge of his former religion:

> When God, praised be He, granted me this grace, one of the scholars of the city of Ceuta . . . made me see that I was familiar [enough] with exposition of that with which the Jews, may Almighty God damn them, occupy themselves—an aberration, an abominable infidelity, an idolatry against God . . . [so that] I could, God willing, erase their beliefs and diminish their influence. I asked God—there is no other but Him—for help in that which had been suggested to me . . . drawing conclusions against them [the Jews] with robust arguments and decisive proofs. . . . I have limited myself to that which appears in their falsified books, which they will not be able to deny or remove.[62]

While his conversion is characterized tersely and with spare explanation, the work that this conversion led him to compose receives a fuller description. Whereas his conversion is described with only a few phrases (God "revealed," "favored," "inspired," and "made me see," and "I took up," "began to pronounce," and "testif[ied]"), the lack of faith of the Jews receives a more colorful treatment (it is "an aberration," "an infidelity," "an idolatry," an "abomination," a "falsification"). ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq's ability to experience both of these is the basis of his ability to speak and write as an anti-Jewish author. Because of his insider knowledge, he attains a new agency as one able to "erase" and "diminish," to "draw conclusions" and "show" their error through "robust arguments and decisive proofs." His short narrative of conversion to Islam provides an opening frame that contains the anti-Jewish claims in the five chapters that follow, but after this brief introduction he does not mention his conversion again.

ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq's text provides an important counterpoint for comparison with other accounts of conversion from Judaism to Islam, like those of Samawʾal and Saʿīd Ḥasan. In comparison with both of these, the *Outstretched Sword* develops the dramatic components of its conversion account to a much lesser degree, including hardly any development of its scene or characters. It provides little preview of future events or reflection on past experience, its events and actions are few and only barely developed, its use of metaphor is minimal, and its employment of dramatic tension and climactic release is virtually nonexistent. This is markedly different from Samawʾal's account of his early education

and his two detailed dreams and Saʿīd's illness, dream, and waking vision of Muslims in prayer like angels. At the same time, this decline in narrative complexity accompanies an increase in the prominence of the narrative positioning within the whole text. As the function of the conversion account shifts from postscript to conclusion to introductory frame, it not only becomes more visible, but it also provides the opening context and defines what follows more obviously as direct results of the author's experience. Whereas Samawʾal denies that his dreams—the very locus of his profession of faith—were a reason for his conversion and focuses only on his rational arguments, and while Saʿīd positions his conversion only at the end of a long discussion about prophecy, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq emphasizes the centrality of his conversion for the composition of his work. As he explains, it was only because he was "familiar" with Jewish belief that he was able to argue against it. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq's notion of authority is far from Samawʾal's eschewal of any personal details and denial of the importance of his conversion story as "a matter that could not be proved."

The explanation for this apparent paradox—the more involved the narrative, the less prominent its polemical function—underscores the most salient aspect of these accounts of conversion from Judaism to Islam: their chronological linearity. As implicit representations not merely of the individual experiences of the converts but of Islamic history itself, their most aggressive forms are their most direct. Like revelation itself, as it is characterized in Islamic sources such as those references by Samawʾal in his account of his education, Islam is the culmination of a historical process of the clarification of truth. Muhammad's prophecy marks the final stage in a progressive sloughing off of perversion and falsification, an increasing purification of a single, unchanging message. In all three texts, the primary argument centers on a historical account of Islam's abrogation of earlier errors. Although Islamic belief, like that of Judaism and Christianity, contains a variety of time concepts (cyclical, linear, and, most predominantly, what Pierre Bourdieu terms "occasional" or "atomistic"), most claims against Christian and Jewish history are articulated in terms that are progressive and historically unidirectional.[63] Islam constitutes a final clarification of the falsifications of past recipients of God's single, eternal prophetic message. The very fact that Islam's later abrogation was prophesied in the Hebrew Bible and Gospels itself is tacit proof that Jews and Muslims perverted the true meaning of their texts in order to hide this fact from later believers. In ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq's words, this emphasizes the "certainty

of the abrogation [*bayān al-nāsikh*]" of Judaism by Islam. Just as Jewish and Christian conversion stories have been seen to reflect the distinct notion of salvation history particular to each faith, and these notions have been put to different uses in each case, so the Islamic conversion accounts examined here reflect a distinctly Islamic notion of supersessionism, one more historical than exegetical. As I argued in my reading of Samawʾal, this notion is focused on the unfolding of worldly history as proof of the truth of God's revelation to Muhammad.

Thus, this particular Islamic view of abrogation and salvation history takes a different form than that found in Christian and Jewish stories. The examples examined here most closely mirror this historical process when they present it as an ordered process of the clarification of truth and the destruction of infidelity, not as a circular narrative premised on prefiguration or on the dialectical alternation between blindness and insight. In other words, because their final message is to affirm the place of Islam as the end of prophecy and the final clarification of God's will, conversion to Islam, in the sources examined here, is linked most directly to pro-Muslim apology when it is presented in its most chronological form, forward- rather than backward-looking. Samawʾal's account, with the elaborateness of its plot and the circularity of its language, is provided only as an afterword added onto the core of a free-standing diatribe. By contrast, the appositeness of ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq's conversion as a window onto his reasoning—and its explicit prominence as the opening to the entire work—is the direct and logical result of its *lack* of any similar narrative deviations or embellishments. Their dramatic form corresponds to their textual function as either introducing or concluding the arguments.

TRADUTTORE TRADITORE: THE FRIAR'S TALE OF ANSELM TURMEDA/ʿABD ALLĀH AL-TURJUMĀN

The preceding comparison of the writings by Samawʾal al-Maghribī, Saʿīd Ḥasan, and ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī—texts from the twelfth century to the fourteenth—builds on their affinity as records of conversion from Judaism to Islam. These texts, as I have suggested, share not only a theological horizon, but also a wider historical context in which the norms and privileges of the majority culture effectuated a hegemonic pressure toward assimilation on minority populations. In order to bring out the importance of this two-faceted meaning, I now turn to a radically different example of the representation of conversion to Islam:

that of the fifteenth-century friar Anselm Turmeda (d. 1423), known to some after his conversion as ʿAbd Allāh al-Turjumān (i.e., "the dragoman" or "interpreter"). In contrast to the examples considered earlier, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh's Arabic work, *Gift of the Learned One for the Refutation of the People of the Cross (Tuḥfat al-adīb fī al-radd ʿalā ahl al-ṣalīb)*, written around 1420, includes an elaborate tale of conversion from Christianity to Islam along with an account of his relocation to Tunis. This is provided in part 1, followed by a panegyric of the Ḥafṣid rulers Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad and his son Abū Fāris ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz in part 2 and an attack on Christianity in part 3.[64] In the opening, the author presents his narrative persona as the *auctor* behind the arguments and places the story of his conversion as the opening frame of the entire anti-Christian treatise. In looking more closely at the connection between the polemic and the opening scene, we will see that, even more than in the case of Giuàn/Obadiah's account of his conversion to Judaism, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh's narrative closely resembles Christian models such as those of Augustine and Moses/Petrus Alfonsi.

Although critics have called into question Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh's authorship of the last of the work's three sections—charges I consider in more detail below—all have accepted as authentic part 1, which presents the author's conversion story, because it incorporates numerous local details particular to his life and experience. As in my reading of Juan Andrés in Chapter 1, my reading here does not depend on the reality of the person depicted in the text or the certainty of its authorship. In his characterization of his education and the manner of his conversion, the narrator, whom we can call Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh, includes abundant details about what he claims was his native home of Mallorca. "Know then," he begins, "that I am originally from the city of Mallorca (may God Almighty return her to Islam!), a large city on the coast that lies in a small valley between two mountains. . . . [T]he city is known by the name of the island."[65] The author proceeds to impart detailed information about Mallorca's commercial activity, its olives and other crops, its export of oil, and other physical and agricultural characteristics of the island. Such detailed description of his physical surroundings is oddly interspersed with an account of his education. After his early studies, he says he went to the mainland city of Lleida: "In this city there is an abundance of fruit, and I have seen the peasants there split peaches [to dry them] in quarters. . . . [T]he most common plant in its hinterlands is saffron. I studied natural sciences and astrology there for six years."[66] This alternation between geography and intellectual